

# Introduction

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## Heidegger, the History of Being, the Presocratics

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This collection of essays is devoted to thinking through Heidegger's reading of and relation to the Presocratics. For the articles written specifically for this collection, there was no attempt in the solicitation of authors to restrict their readings to a set viewpoint; instead, each author was given a topic and plenty of latitude. In this way, what we have is a wide array of approaches to Heidegger and the Presocratics. This collection is meant for those philosophically involved either in Presocratic scholarship, the works of Heidegger, or both. What I propose to do here in this introduction is to lay out Heidegger's approach to the history of philosophy so that an understanding of the Presocratics can be developed from this. Thus, for many who already have sufficient knowledge of Heidegger's relation with other philosophical thinkers this introduction will be unnecessary, and they can proceed directly to the articles. However, for those with philosophical training who lack an intimate knowledge of Heidegger's work, this introduction will prove to be useful, since the attempt is made to explicate Heidegger's engagement with our tradition.

Heidegger's innovation in his reading of the Presocratics stems from his awareness of the philological and philosophical debates surrounding how to interpret Presocratic thinkers *and* from his willingness to carry interpretation beyond the limits of these debates. Employing his often cited statement about the activity of phenomenology, Heidegger's reading and interpretation of the Presocratics remains open to possibility and is not restrained by the actuality of the current generation's scholarly debate.<sup>1</sup> Much criticism of his reading comes from the assumption that Heidegger is ignorant of or merely rejects the previous and current discussions of Presocratic interpretation.

This criticism, however, misunderstands Heidegger's aims and lacks an awareness of the tradition from which he thinks. Heidegger's reading of any thinker or philosopher<sup>2</sup> in the history of philosophy is not for him a place to rehearse all available interpretations and then to criticize a given thinker along with the interpretations themselves. From his early engagement with other philosophical figures within our history to his last works, Heidegger's project is to think in relation to these thinkers and philosophers. In order to understand his project, we need to speak briefly of two of his predecessors who shed light on how Heidegger understands the history of philosophy. Both Hegel and Nietzsche approach the history of philosophers not in order to add to the current debate over interpreting the arguments of the philosophers; they have another plan in their readings of others—to think, to philosophize. They both engage in a relationship with the history of philosophy in order to have an impact upon that history, not merely to sit near by speaking *about* philosophy but, rather, to be engaged in it. We shall see with both of these thinkers, as we shall witness with Heidegger, that they are not primarily concerned with a "correct representation" of prior philosophers but are philosophically engaged in the matter at hand. For both Hegel and Nietzsche, we do not historically return to the beginning of the history of philosophy in Greece, but we do return to the "soil" from which all philosophy grows, by engaging with prior philosophers in order to enter into the philosophical matter at hand, that is, what needs to be thought. For both, the matter to be thought is precisely that which we are entangled in without our explicit awareness: for Hegel, the dialectical process of the absolute spirit coming to have self-consciousness; for Nietzsche, the eternal return of the will to power.

In the first section, we will briefly examine Hegel's view of the history of philosophy as it relates to his metaphysical system, presented in his *Science of Logic*, and we will elucidate Nietzsche's view of the role of history with regard to the will to power and the eternal return. In the second section, with these views laid out, we will explain Heidegger's view of thinking within the history of being in light of these two views and his reading of the Presocratics. Finally, in the third section, we will propose a few directives on how we can think about the Presocratics and the history of philosophy *after* we have engaged in Heidegger's thinking.

## Hegel and Nietzsche

Although the relationship between Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger is extremely complicated, for our purposes here what is significant for all three is a need to have their thinking involved in the matter of the history of philosophy itself, that is, they attempt to take part in the movement of history itself by philosophizing. Although the three differ on what the matter of this history is, there are striking similarities in their approach: all three do not wish to rehearse the current debates surrounding the interpretations of philosophers; all three are not concerned with correct representations of previous philosophers; all three attempt to expose the "ground" of the history of philosophizing itself and thereby further what is necessary in this ground.

Hegel's great ingenuity is to detail the philosophers' principles, explaining the context of each, illustrating how and why the history of philosophy unfolds the way it does, and defending how his own philosophical view fits into this history (i.e., he attempts to think his own philosophy as historical). Because of this, Heidegger states, "Hegel is the only Western thinker who has thoughtfully experienced the history of thought" (EGT, 14). Moreover, Hegel does not separate the history of philosophy and his philosophical and metaphysical views. For this reason, the dialectical process of beginning can negate the indeterminate idea of being and proceed to the absolute idea, whereby absolute spirit comes to know itself, as presented in his *Science of Logic*. The pure "scientific" and dialectical unfolding of his philosophical view occurs in the specific stages in the history of philosophy. Hegel writes, "I maintain that the succession of philosophical systems in history is the same as their succession in the logical derivation of the categories of the idea."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Hegel interprets the history of philosophy as the same unfolding as his own metaphysical system, that is, as absolute spirit coming to know itself. What is significant for Hegel is that his own philosophical age in the history of the West is the culminating stage where absolute spirit attains self-consciousness. Like all stages in this history except the first, his stage is essentially connected to all prior stages that have preceded it and have determined it (ILHP, 11). Hegel reads the history of philosophy to be a progressive development from the first beginning of the Presocratic Greeks to the apex of the Enlightenment. Driving the history of philosophy is what all philosophers have attempted to explicate in their philosophical

systems—the philosophical idea itself. Thus, Hegel does not hold that there are separate philosophical systems but one single, universal idea that is developing, or self-actualizing. He writes, “There is *one* idea, in the whole and in all its members, just as in a living individual *one* life, one pulse beats in all its limbs” (ILHP, 20). The one single idea that remains the center of philosophical systems is what develops in the history of philosophy because, Hegel says, it has the urge to develop; its nature is to develop itself (ILHP, 20, 67).

The dialectical process is the methodology that unfolds this development. This formal process of positing a thesis, contradicting with an antithesis, and uniting into a synthesis is at the root of all progressive development in Hegel’s philosophical view; it is, however, differently expressed in the various regions of philosophical activity. The dialectical development of the philosophical idea in the history of philosophy is similar to its development in the *Science of Logic*. The development of the idea *in* the history of philosophy is of course *historical* or *in time* (and, because of this, the idea itself appears as tainted by the opinions of individual humans). The main thought or philosophical view of an age permeates all aspects of the age, culturally, artistically, religiously, philosophically, and so on (ILHP, 26, 88). Although the idea at its beginning is indeterminate and immediate, it must withdraw from its immediacy and become external by permeating the human world. The idea or spirit “externalizes” itself in order to be other to itself so that it can come to grasp itself. Since it is eternal, it becomes temporal in a world historical moment in order to conceive of itself other than it is. Hegel writes, “the spirit has to advance in the consciousness of itself, and this advance is the development of its whole mass, its concrete totality, which is externalized and so *falls into time*” (ILHP, 88; emphasis added). This falling into time allows for the externalization and for the grasping of itself; the content of the idea itself is not essentially affected by time.<sup>4</sup> This grasping progresses because in the subsequent stage the idea or spirit will externalize and grasp itself again but only to come to know itself better in a more explicit way. In each specific age, it grasps itself *and* all prior stages that have led up to it—and it continues until full self-grasping occurs.<sup>5</sup>

The Greek inception receives a significant place in Hegel’s interpretation because it marks the emergence of self-consciousness, which in his account concerns the whole history of humanity. The Greeks free themselves from religious pictorial representations of the divine abso-

lute and think on the level of pure thinking. That is, through the Greeks, absolute spirit first “descends into itself” and grasps its inner content and recognizes itself in this content (ILHP, 140, 171). This great inception which frees thinking into a pure realm of thought allows the absolute spirit to begin the twenty-five hundred year journey to self-consciousness that unfolds dialectically as the history of the West. The Presocratic Greeks receive distinction because “the starting-point of the Logic is the same as the starting-point of the history of philosophy” (EL, §86). In the abstract grasping of being by Parmenides, philosophy proper begins because pure thinking was first “objective,” that is, it had the elements of universality and necessity (cf. EL, §41).

What remains significant in Hegel’s philosophical endeavors for both Nietzsche and Heidegger to follow is that one does philosophy only when one is engaged with the matter at hand; for Hegel, this occurs through the historical/dialectical development of the absolute idea. In viewing his own philosophy as part of the historical and dialectical movement from abstract awareness to the full self-consciousness of absolute spirit, Hegel philosophizes about the major figures in the history of philosophy not in order to depict their principles and arguments *accurately* but in order to further the dialectical movement itself.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Hegel philosophizes about the Western philosophical tradition as historical in order to *philosophize*, to engage with the philosophical matter at hand—the absolute idea. As we will see, for both Nietzsche and Heidegger following Hegel on this point, to think then is to be engaged *with* the history that precedes one’s own thinking and is the condition for one’s own thinking.

Nietzsche’s early view of history, expressed in “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” advance the position that humans need the activity of history not for the truth but for the sake of life and action.<sup>7</sup> In order to use history for the advancement of life, Nietzsche holds, one must both live historically (i.e., recall certain historical events) and unhistorically (i.e., forget certain historical events).<sup>8</sup> The historical and the unhistorical are necessary for the health of an individual, of a people, and of a culture (UM, II, §1). The health stated here is dependent upon the soil on which it thrives. This soil which allows the condition of health is life itself, which Nietzsche cryptically defines here as “that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself” (UM, II, §3). Each individual, community, and culture must determine how it is to be historical and unhistorical, how it is to do history, and how it

is to thrive. Although Nietzsche lays out different possibilities of how one can do history (i.e., monumental, antiquarian, and critical), when we think of how he approaches the history of philosophy later in his thinking, we see how his general conception of history becomes an enactment of critical history. In other words, Nietzsche's own view becomes a re-thinking of how history must be done in order to aid life itself, and he brings current ways of doing history, philosophy, and morality before a tribunal to examine them and finally condemn them (UM, II, §3). In this form of history and Nietzsche's philosophizing, one forgets all that might be beneficial to life but concentrates on the fact that life is somehow dying from its own past. Here, one "takes the knife to one's roots" severing oneself from the past in order to live in the future (UM, II, §3), that is, in order to let life thrive once again. One must kill that "nature" in us that is destroying us and replace it with a "nature" that benefits life. Nietzsche writes,

The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away (UM, II, §3).

Nietzsche's own approach to history is not to have "a consuming fever of history" (i.e., to excavate every minute detail of history and express it), but to remember only what aids life itself. Although this can be done in a variety of ways, Nietzsche's re-thinking of the historical practice is itself critical, severing itself away from the historical fever.

In the first, quite significant turn in his thinking, Nietzsche lays out not a new understanding of history but a fuller one in relation to life itself. In *Human, All Too Human*, he proclaims, "what is needed from now on is *historical philosophizing*."<sup>9</sup> This new type of philosophy is concerned with the history of the genesis of thought by tracing terms and concepts back to their *historical* origin and their *physiological* origin without an attempt to find a pure metaphysical starting place (see HATH, §§ 10, 18). Thus, Nietzsche, like Hegel, attempts to think and philosophize about philosophy in its historical contexts and dimensions; however, he differs from Hegel in that he wants to relate philosophy more intimately to its historical contexts.

This turn that takes place in Nietzsche's thought in the late 1870s does not form a philosophy that is distinct from his later genealogy, but it does express a view that flourishes in his later work. After the ideas of the will to power and the eternal return have been thought and added to his thinking, his genealogical philosophy becomes more complete. In his later thinking, Nietzsche's experiences his own ideas as "intertwined and interlaced;"<sup>10</sup> each performs its task or tasks in the battle against the Platonic and idealistic tradition. Nietzsche still maintains that our "nature" must be replaced with a second "nature." He enacts this replacement with his genealogical thinking which does not attempt to find a pure origin by maintaining a faith in opposite values—that is, in pure/impure, good/evil, eternal/temporal, etc.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Nietzsche continually attempts to disrupt the construction and continuance of these metaphysical dichotomies by tracing the "eternal" ideas and values back to very "temporal" conditions. Thus, he shows that philosophies, ideas, and moralities do not have a pure origin and what is maintained within them are not pure, good, and eternal, but rather mixed with their opposites (see BGE, §2).

At the heart of his genealogical thinking is the dual role of interpretation and evaluation. Each living entity interprets according to force that it is in relation to other forces. Thus, his perspectivism surely falls into a relativism if one still maintains the standard of an absolute, objective viewpoint. However, Nietzsche continually disrupts our tendency to accept such a viewpoint by asking—from where does the need for this viewpoint come? He writes in his notes, "not 'to know' but to schematize—to impose upon chaos as much regularity and form as our practical needs require."<sup>12</sup> This imposition of regularity and form takes place and must take place in order for the living entity, the human being, to live. Humans schematize by subsuming the particulars of experience according to general ideas and concepts. Nietzsche maintains that the heart of human experience is given over to an artistic enterprise; his sword, however, is double-edged—all of humanity has this creative ability to invent by schematizing, but its views are not and cannot be eternally true, because they are necessary fictions that are life-enhancing. By re-orienting us toward the conditions of our ideas, philosophical thinking and thus all generalizing becomes interpretation that is carried out for one's own life or for the rationalization of a way of life. What in life is driving one to do this? For Nietzsche, it is not merely self-preservation, but the will to power—which includes the venting

of one's strength (BGE, §13). This venting involves "appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker, suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation. . . ." (BGE, §259). By introducing the will to power as the driving force of all living things, including human beings, Nietzsche can reevaluate the philosophical tradition which attempts to remain pure, good, and eternal. Instead, he thinks the philosophical tradition in its historical conditions—that is, how each philosopher comes to think from out of a historical context.<sup>13</sup> One's theories, ideas, and moralities were attempts to schematize the chaos in order to vent its strength, and this tradition cannot own up to its deeds. Thus, Nietzsche holds that even though philosophers do attempt to vent their strength and the strength of their way of life upon the world and others, they are also slandering of life itself because they cannot view the mixture of their pure philosophical actions with the drives that compel them to philosophize.

Instead of the pure origin of all things from a godhead, Nietzsche strategically places the will to power and the eternal return at the center of this thinking. The world as we know it, our values as we revere them, and our souls as we attempt to maintain an ideal state—all are not from a pure, metaphysical source. They are part of the world of the will to power. Nietzsche writes:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself [ . . . ] *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are this will to power—and nothing else! (WTP, §1067)

Although the eternal return receives psychological interpretations from what is said in *The Gay Science* (§341) and physical interpretations from his comments in *The Will to Power* (§§ 1053–67, *et passim*), Nietzsche's use of the idea, like all of his ideas, attempts to battle the traditional drive of philosophy toward another world which thereby devalues this world and life. This world, the only world we know, is for Nietzsche the will to power transforming itself continually, and it will eventually transform itself back into its previous shape. This idea, however, is not expressed to characterize a general law about nature, but to challenge the idea of a metaphysical origin of all things that has become our "nature"—since, it has become innate to believe that there



must be a pure origin. Nietzsche employs the will to power and the eternal return as strategies to impede what he calls the "orbit" of philosophical thinking. These ideas are presented to "break open" (WTP, §1057) the possibilities in our thinking, or, better stated, allows us to re-acquaint ourselves with the conditions for the possibility of thinking at all—forces, drives, creativity, invention, etc. Thus, Nietzsche's re-thinking of philosophy is an attempt to transform philosophy itself by returning to its historical context. He re-thinks how philosophy takes place by finding a hidden ground for thinking, but this ground is not a pure, metaphysical origin; it is only the place from which one person thinks which remains connected to other people, places, forces, and so on.

Nietzsche's re-thinking of our tradition does not demand that he correctly represent the thinkers before his own time. He lays out another's ideas merely to prompt his own thinking so that he can put forth the strategies needed to battle the tradition. This does not mean that he attempts an easy way out, because he takes on the whole tradition, battling the chief metaphysical ideas. In thinking this way, then, Nietzsche is not simply escaping the tradition but transforming it by re-thinking what is necessary for the tradition to live.<sup>14</sup> In other words, he is attempting to replace the first "nature" with a "second" that affirms the conditions of its possibilities, and thereby upholds the historicity of philosophy and thinking.

Both Hegel and Nietzsche surely impose their own philosophical viewpoints upon the historical figures they interpret. However, they do this in order to be engaged with the philosophical matter at hand—for Hegel, in order to advance the development of absolute spirit; for Nietzsche, in order to return thinking *affirmatively* to the historical context by invoking the eternal return of the will to power. Both have a philosophical and historical relation to the philosophical tradition; they both maintain that one cannot merely repeat what one has said prior to one's own thinking. Rather, one must philosophize in relation to others in order to do one's own philosophy. In this way, they do not attempt comprehensive and correct representations of the other philosophers' views, but they remain involved with what propels their own thinking.

This argument may appear to relieve both thinkers of any responsibility for philosophical scholarship, but the demand for correct representations is based on an a-historical conception of philosophy

which is assumed to be the true way of philosophizing. One assumes in this case that we can easily extract the philosophical arguments from a prior historical period without losing their historical meaning. The hermeneutical issue of traveling to another historical horizon with different values, linguistic meanings, and philosophical truths is left aside in the "correct representation" of another's thought. What one is doing, however, is interpreting from one's own historical position with the priority of *its* values, linguistic meanings, and philosophical truths. In other words, when one attempts a "correct representation" one is still imposing one's view upon another as Hegel and Nietzsche do; the philosopher is merely extricating philosophical bits and pieces from another's thought and then fits these parts into a contemporary schema. This view does not attempt to think the prior view and especially its own view as part of a history; one attempts to interpret the predecessor and keep one's own thinking *a-historical*. This presupposition of the "correct representation" of earlier thinkers warrants some deeper thought about historical philosophizing and about one's own philosophical and historical purpose in philosophy itself.

### Heidegger's History of Being and His Reading of the Presocratics

Heidegger draws essential aspects from both Hegel and Nietzsche's philosophical views of history and especially the history of philosophy, but transforms these aspects as he appropriates them for his own thinking. From Hegel, Heidegger reads the history of philosophy as falling into epochal periods, where all aspects of the culture are governed by an essential principle. For Heidegger, the question of history will be how the determination of epoch periods occurs and how human thinking is involved in this determination. From Nietzsche, Heidegger maintains that a transformation took place in classical Greece that changed the West and that the metaphysical thinking inaugurated there has resulted in nihilism. For Nietzsche and Heidegger, a thoughtful relation to history can transplant us out of this nihilism; thus, both offer a philosophy *for* the future. Nietzsche offers a destructive upheaval severing us from the life-denying past and returning us to an affirmation of the forces of life. Heidegger puts forth a preparatory thinking that returns us to metaphysics, that steps back into metaphysics so that

we “enter into a questioning that experiences” (BW, 246)—that is, the originary experience that prompts all thinking, what Plato and Aristotle call wonder (Θαυμάζειν).<sup>15</sup> By this stepping back, we are placed into a new relation with what should be thought—that is, we raise the question of being anew (see BT and SZ, §1). Just as the will to power is the ground of history but not independent of history, Heidegger’s understanding of being is also the ground of and grounded in history; it should not be thought of as outside of history. As is the case for both Hegel and Nietzsche, Heidegger’s connection to the history of philosophy is not about duplicating what has been said prior to his own thinking; his concern is to have a philosophical connection with prior philosophers in their thinking *in order to think* on his own. Thus, Heidegger heeds both Hegel and Nietzsche’s approaches on this point; philosophical activity should not remain at a safe distance from what is to be thought, by accurately depicting the principles and logical arguments, but instead should and must make a thoughtful connection to the matter of philosophy itself. What must be spelled out then is what the matter of philosophy is in the history of being, how Heidegger develops a relationship with the matter of philosophy, how Heidegger approaches philosophers and thinkers within the history of philosophy, and how he reads the Presocratics.

Heidegger reads the history of Western philosophy as the response on the part of the philosopher to heed the call of being, to respond to what calls thinking to think—being itself (PLT, 183). Being for Heidegger is not a particular being, the highest being, or the most general being, but, thought in a verbal sense, being is the event that dispenses, gives over, and allows for the unconcealment of beings to human thinking. Heidegger calls this the dispensation and giving of *presencing*, that is, beings come to show themselves in their presence to human thinking (OTB, 5).<sup>16</sup> Being for Heidegger is the event of this presencing, this giving over of beings to thinking. Why does Heidegger characterize being as *presencing*? In the 1962 lecture, “Time and Being,” Heidegger answers this question:

This question comes too late. For this character of being has long since been decided without our contribution, let alone our merit. Thus we are bound to the characterization of being as presencing. It derives its binding force from the beginning of the unconcealment of being as something that can be said, that is, can

be thought. Ever since the beginning of Western thinking with the Greeks, all saying of 'being' and 'is' held in remembrance of the determination of being as presencing which is binding for thinking (OTB, 6–7).

In other words, characterizing being as the presencing of beings is not Heidegger's interpretation, but has already occurred in our tradition; philosophers have thought of beings in their presence and their coming to presence (i.e., their presencing, their dispensation to human thought) according a basic principle of presence. What has allowed this basic principle to guide human thinking according to presence, for Heidegger, is being itself thought here as the historical event that determines the meaning of beings. Thus, for Heidegger, being lets or allows for presence. "To let presence means: to unconceal, to bring to openness" (OTB, 5). How beings appear to human awareness is governed by the historical event that delivers or unconceals beings over to thinking.

Philosophers respond to how being dispenses beings, i.e., how beings come to show themselves to the thinking of philosophers. Heidegger writes, "to think 'being' means to respond to the appeal of its presencing. The response stems from the appeal and releases itself toward that appeal" (OTB, 183). This appeal or call by being is not some mystical revelation that appears only to asocial thinkers, but is the appeal or call that occurs in the showing of all beings to thinking—what Aristotle calls *φαινόμενον*, what appears or shows itself. In explaining how Parmenides came to his statements about being and non-being, Aristotle states that Parmenides "was compelled to follow the phenomenon" (*ἀναγκαζόμενος δ' ἀκολουθεῖν τοῖς φαινομένοις*, *Metaphysics*, 986b31).<sup>17</sup> In a very basic way, humans in philosophical reflection come to think about what appears to them—beings. In philosophical reflection, Heidegger maintains that thinking can get caught up in beings or think about what allows for this showing of beings. Thus, Heidegger wants to exploit the dual sense of the Greek *φαινόμενον*—it is the appearing or showing of the things that appear. What we receive in the appearing of things to our awareness is on the one hand the things as they appear, but on the other hand the appearing, the showing of things to us. The dual aspect of showing has prompted philosophers to distinguish ordinary beings and the highest being (forms, substance, God), but for Heidegger the understanding of

the highest being is still ontic—that is, a thinking determined by a thinking of beings.<sup>18</sup> The showing of beings cannot be understood according to an understanding of beings. This showing must be understood as that which determines the meaning of beings presented. In Heidegger's thinking, one must think the ontological difference between beings and being (BW, 226), that is, the beings presented to thinking and the showing of these beings.

From a realist perspective, we might want to say that things just appear as they are and that there is no appearing or showing in itself. The realist, however, cannot account for the extreme diversity in fundamental interpretations of what it means *to be* in our history. Heidegger does not want to follow the arrogance of the realist who claims that the world is and appears (and has been and has appeared) exactly as it does to this human subject, nor in contrast does he want to follow the idealist who claims that the world is as it is due to this human subjectivity. Heidegger here falls outside the traditional dichotomy. In different historical periods, what it means *to be* has been thought differently because being has dispensed beings *to be* in a unique way for each epoch. Although thinkers have thought beings according to presence, how beings appeared or showed themselves to thinking occurred in their own unique way for different epochs of Western history. The realist merely responds and says that humans did not depict these things as accurately *as we do today*, and the Hegelian idealist would respond by saying that beings appeared differently because of the development of absolute spirit (which our consciousness aids in thinking). Heidegger sidesteps the arrogance of the realist who believes that we, in a contemporary setting, view the world correctly and can condemn the entire tradition for viewing it incorrectly. Also, he does not affirm the role of consciousness that is crucial to the idealist—that is, Heidegger dismisses the interpretation that our consciousness (aiding the absolute spirit) is *determining* what it means to be for beings. We will have to spell out below the role of human thinking, its relation to being, and how thinking and beings are connected.

Heidegger reads the history of the West as the history of being where different epochs have expressed a distinct thinking and living; what it means *to be* is unique for each epoch of history. The question then is how being is related to history by dispensing or showing beings to human thinking. Heidegger does not want to split up reality with the temporal and sensible on one side and the atemporal and

supersensible on the other. For Heidegger, there are not two different realms—on the contrary, since the unfolding of history and the thoughts about beings are inseparable from the being within history, both are *within history* (in this way, he is following Nietzsche and not Hegel; the latter still maintains a realm independent of historical movements, while the former affirms only the realm of history). Always attentive to the etymology of words, Heidegger understands history (*Geschichte*) and destiny (*Geschick*) in the verbal sense of sending (*schicken*). Thus, what is presented to human thinking within a historical epoch is sent or offered to it by the epochal event itself, what Heidegger calls being. Being for him is not a being outside of time and history determining what it means to be for beings and humans (for this would be being as the highest being), but being is the dispensing or sending of the event of history itself. Being dispenses beings to human thinking, but does not show itself separately from this showing or appearing of beings. Heidegger writes, “the history of being is the ‘*Geschick*’ of being that offers itself to us in withdrawing its essence” (PR, 61). Being offers itself to us in the showing or dispensing of beings, but it does not, over and above this showing of beings, show itself as separate from beings. Being in its showing of being withdraws, Heidegger says, in favor of giving or dispensing beings over to thinking (OTB, 8). How can we understand this withdrawing or holding back of being showing itself in the showing or dispensing of beings? Heidegger attempts to connect the withholding of being in its showing of beings and the history of being, for it is precisely the withholding that allows for the sending of beings and the sending of history. The sending or showing of beings that being enacts allows for the historical epoch, in the way that Heidegger re-orients our thinking to an historical period. This sending of beings by being itself holds back or withdraws; it does not have a self-manifestation, only the manifestation of beings. Heidegger writes:

To hold back is, in Greek, ἐποχή. Hence we speak of the epochs of the destiny of being. Epoch does not mean here a span of time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself in favor of the discernibility of the gift, that is, of being with regard to the grounding of beings (OTB, 9).

Thus, each historical epoch, in which beings appear to human thinking differently according to the sending or showing of being, has the

dispensation of beings because of the withholding of being. What else do different epochs have in common? In each, philosophers have been claimed in their thinking by the dispensation of being and have *expressed* the fundamental meaning and truth of beings in their writings; the history of being, for Heidegger, “comes to language in the words of essential thinkers” (BW, 238). Humans, therefore, have a significant role to play in the dispensation and showing of beings.

There is not a dialectical, progressive process occurring in the history of philosophy as Hegel thinks, and although Heidegger calls attention to an oblivion of being (i.e., being remains basically unthought in our contemporary epoch) there is not a regressive process as Nietzsche contends. For Heidegger, there is a free succession<sup>19</sup> between historical epochs, because the historical periods are not dependent upon their prior epochs to determine how thinking and living are to occur. How one comes to think is dependent upon how being dispenses beings to thinking—although within the context of how being dispenses beings to human thinking there is a fundamental decision humans can make: to think being in its dispensing and showing of beings *or* to think being according to beings, that is, to think metaphysically.

In Heidegger’s reading of previous philosophers and thinkers, his concern in following Hegel and Nietzsche is not to depict their arguments and main principles (for this would not be philosophizing), but his interest lies in determining how their thinking was claimed by being in the dispensation of beings. Why, however, *engage with* previous philosophers? We already witnessed that Hegel does this in order to advance the self-consciousness of absolute spirit, and Nietzsche does this to battle the tradition by affirming the historical contexts of philosophy and thinking. Why does Heidegger involve himself with other thinkers? He does this not in order to criticize previous philosophers nor to accurately present and argue about their positions, but in order to establish a dialogue with them. For Heidegger, to criticize or to accurately present earlier philosophical positions amounts to keeping a distance from the thinking that has occurred—or, more importantly, to remain distant from one’s own possibility of thinking. Heidegger writes:

Philosophy demands that we do not look *away* from it, but apprehend it from out of itself. Philosophy itself—what do we know of it, and what and how is it? It itself *is* only whenever we are philosophizing. *Philosophy is philosophizing* (FCM, 4).

Thus, Heidegger's approach to philosophy and to previous philosophers is to be involved with philosophy, i.e., to philosophize, to think the philosophical matter that demands to be thought. Heidegger enacts dialogues with philosophers in our tradition in order to make a connection with what they spoke, what they philosophized about; he does this in order to think, in order to philosophize himself. Heidegger writes in *What is Philosophy?*:

When do we philosophize? Obviously when we enter into a dialogue (*Gespräch*) with philosophers. This implies that we talk through (*durchsprechen*) with them that about which they speak (WP, 66–7).

If philosophers are responding to the dispensation of being, that is, how being presents beings to thinking, then Heidegger's concern in dialogues is to think how philosophers have been claimed in their thinking by being so that one's own philosophizing thinks how one is claimed in *this* historical epoch. The concern has to be then what happens to one's own thinking while partaking in such a dialogue. He continues:

If we assume that the being of beings addresses itself to philosophers to the extent that they state what beings are, insofar as they are, then our dialogue with philosophers must also be addressed by the being of beings (WP, 66–9).

Many critics have asserted that Heidegger does not portray the philosophers in our tradition with accuracy. His concern, however, is to read them as they respond to the claim of being, that is, how being dispenses beings to their thinking and how they respond by thinking and writing. Following Hegel and Nietzsche, he wants to be engaged with the matter of philosophy and history itself. Heidegger re-reads a philosopher's main principles in light of how they are a response to being's claim. Does this mean then, as critics claim, that Heidegger merely ends up doing his own philosophy when interpreting our tradition? Following Hegel and Nietzsche on this point, Heidegger always stays within the thinking that is first and foremost concerned with thinking what should be thought—that is, he responds to the claim that being itself makes upon his thinking. To answer the question, then, we might say



that he is doing his own thinking, the thinking that is called upon to think.

Heidegger understand this re-thinking of our tradition as *Destruktion*. In *Being and Time*, though he is not primarily concerned with a dialogue with other philosophers, the problem arises as to how we are to think the question of being regarding its own history in our tradition. Heidegger does not want to read philosophers according to the traditional answers to the question of being (i.e., to depict their systems accurately), but to raise the question of being itself. Similar to the dynamic of the dialogue mentioned above, Heidegger sees *Destruktion* as a “loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments” (BT, 20). A *Destruktion* is carried out not to reconnect with our past by returning to it, but “to come into full possession of the most proper possibilities of inquiry” (BT, 18; SZ, 21). Years later, in 1955, Heidegger still thinks of his approach to the tradition according to the idea of a *Destruktion* of the history of philosophy. He writes:

*Destruktion* does not mean destroying, but dismantling, excavating, putting to one side the merely historiographical assertions about the history of philosophy. *Destruktion* means to open our ears, to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in the tradition as the being of beings (WP, 70–3).

The *Destruktion* that occurs does not merely dismantle the tradition but alters our relationship to our tradition, enabling us to think *how* metaphysical thinkers come to think, that is, what calls them to think, to question, and to put forth metaphysical systems. What are these “most proper possibilities of inquiry” that can be awakened in our dialogue with previous philosophers and thinkers? Heidegger answers this question in “Moira (Parmenides VIII, 34–41)”:

Proper inquiry must be a dialogue in which the ways of hearing and points of view of ancient thinking are thought according to their essential origin, so that the claim (under which past, present, and future thinking—each in its own way—all stand) might begin to announce itself (EGT, 86).

Thus, in entering a dialogue with previous philosophers and thinkers, that is, in employing a *Destruktion* of the obscuring layers that cover

over our tradition, Heidegger attempts to be addressed and claimed by what addresses and claims all thinking—being in its dispensation and sending of beings and the sending of the contemporary epoch. In other words, Heidegger's interpretation of philosophy and thinking is done in order to think, in order to philosophize, because "*philosophy is philosophizing*" (FCM, 4). All the criticisms of Heidegger's questionable interpretations of previous philosophers come down to this question: What does it mean to philosophize and think in our contemporary epoch? This question Heidegger takes seriously and continually thinks through. To philosophize and think is to think the claim that being makes upon us in the dispensation of beings and the historical sending of our epoch.

If Heidegger is determined to bring about a dismantling of and hence re-connection with our tradition by having a dialogue with philosophers and thinkers in order to think and be claimed by being, why does he then have a preoccupation with the Presocratics? Granted that Plato and Aristotle represent the beginning of philosophy and the center of re-thinking for him during the stage of "fundamental ontology" (as manifested in the thematic of *Being and Time*), the Presocratics here still play a part, and they take on a significant role after this stage. In his middle and later thinking, the Presocratics are the continual touchstone for his re-thinking of the tradition. What must be kept in mind is that Heidegger does not read these thinkers in order to lay out their principles for inspection, but in order to re-connect with what they thought. The Presocratic thinkers remain crucial for Heidegger because they are *pre-metaphysical*—what they think gets covered over in later metaphysical thinking. Plato's and especially Aristotle's metaphysical interpretations of their predecessors get handed down in our tradition, and the predominate view of the Presocratics becomes that they are naive metaphysicians. This view takes hold because Plato and Aristotle become the benchmark for metaphysical philosophy, and any view not up to this standard is labeled inferior to their great systems. Heidegger's dialogue with the Presocratics is an attempt to think along with them without the Platonic and Aristotelian framework draped over their thinking, and it is here that Heidegger's *Destruktion* comes into full force. By not continuing the naive metaphysical labeling of the Presocratics and by not becoming caught up in the current interpretative debates (a continuance of the Platonic and Aristotelian heritage, for Heidegger), he can attempt to dismantle the interpretive layers that

obscure Presocratic thinking and “to open our ears, to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in the tradition as the being of beings” (WP, 72–73). To what do we open our ears? What is uncovered in the Presocratics? With this *Destruktion* or dialogue with the Presocratics, Heidegger underscores for us time and again—this is done “to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in the tradition”; this is done to affect us, to change how we think, and to think about our own historical context that brings about our own thinking. This is not done so that Presocratic scholarship will get to the *real* Presocratic philosophy. The attempt on Heidegger’s part is to construct a dialogical relationship with the Presocratics *so that* he (and we) can come to think that which called them to think and *so that* we can come to be called by this.

Although Heidegger does some exegesis of Pindar, Homer, and other ancient poets, his reading of the Presocratics generally centers around Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. Since extensive interpretations of Heidegger’s reading of these Presocratic thinkers have been published for decades now, what needs to be done here is to express why Heidegger goes to these thinkers for a thoughtful dialogue. In regards to these three thinkers, Heidegger writes:

Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus are the only inceptional thinkers. They are this, however not because they open up Western thought and initiate it. Already before them there were thinkers. They are inceptional thinkers (*anfängliche Denker*) because they think the inception (*den Anfang*). The inception is what is sought in their thinking. [ . . . ] The inception is that which begins (*anfängt*) something with these thinkers—by laying claim on them in such a way that from them is demanded an extreme retreating before being. These thinkers are the *in-cepted* by the *in-ception* (*die vom An-fang An-gefangenen*); they are taken up by it and are gathered into it (P, 7–8; GA 54, 10–11).

Heidegger examines Anaximander’s saying in order to see how he thought the coming to presence, lingering, and passing away of beings. From his reading of Parmenides, he can view how the Eleatic experienced but did not fully think the duality of τὸ ἔόν (i.e., the presencing of beings) and how thinking and saying are intimately connected in the meaning of being. For Heraclitus, he thinks not only the role of λόγος as the gathering and letting lie of the epochal event of being but also

how ἀλήθεια as unconcealment and concealment govern his thinking of nature (φύσις) as what reveals itself and hides along with this revelation (cf. Heraclitus, Fragment B16).

Heidegger reads the extant works of these Presocratic thinkers as they were drawn to think what called or laid claim upon them to think. Heidegger labels this the “first inception.” Heidegger performs these readings not to uncover the hidden history of our tradition (although something like this does occur); he does this to affect us in our thinking—that is, in order to “retrieve (*wieder-holen*) the inception of our historical-spiritual existence, in order to transform it into the other inception (*anderen Anfang*)” (IM, 39; EM, 29).<sup>20</sup> Although Heidegger maintains that these Presocratic thinkers experienced the inception and attempted to think it and bring it to language in their writings, they do not fully think the inception. Their thinking is still fundamentally caught up with beings (GA 65, 179). He constructs his dialogue with the Presocratic thinkers in their first inception so that we can come to be thoughtfully involved in the “other inception” that can occur in the present age. What Heidegger is preparing in his dialogue with the Presocratics then is a “transition from metaphysics to another thinking (*andere Denken*)” (WGM, 220) In other words, Heidegger attempts a dialogue with the Presocratics, not to add to the scholarship of authors who dispute the “arguments” of their fragments, but to think what prompted the Greeks to think in this way in the first place. What occurs in this other thinking, in this other inception? We experience and think explicitly the truth of how being calls us to think (GA 65, 179), how we come to think because of the dispensation and showing of beings, and how our thinking is historically bound to our epoch.

### Concluding Questions after Heidegger

Heidegger gives us no set methodology that we can follow in our thinking in order to be thinking correctly. He offers paths of thought that he has ventured in order to think, in a preliminary way, the truth of being and how we come to think within our historical context. However, these paths are not a meta-level narrative (a prolegomena) to direct our future endeavors in philosophical reflection. I think that he does present to us two main directives that can be followed up in our own thinking. After engaging one’s thinking within the Heideggerian corpus, one cannot dismiss the need and urgency when discussing