

CHAPTER ONE

Heidegger and the Other Commencement

HEIDEGGER'S GREEK CONNECTION

. . . that every reflection upon that which now is can take its rise and thrive only if, through a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language, it strikes root into the ground of our historical existence. That dialogue still awaits its beginning. It is scarcely prepared for at all, and yet it itself remains for us the precondition of the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world.¹

Martin Heidegger himself started or at least prepared both of the above-mentioned dialogues. The first one, the dialogue with Greek thinking, was one of Heidegger's main concerns from early on to late in his career, especially as a means to help the overcoming of Western metaphysics. I use the term "metaphysics" and related terms with the following fundamental characteristics: the distinction between the sensuous and the non-sensuous since the time of Plato. The outcome of this distinction can be seen throughout the history of Western philosophy, as the abstracting and theorizing influences of the later Greeks, the theologizing influences of medieval times, and scientification in more modern times of the originary thinking of Being. In general this distinction has led to further distinctions such as between form and matter, essence and attributes, substance and properties, mind and body, truth and appearance, and so on. Related to these general distinctions there arose the hierarchical view that one side of the distinction was worthy, good, and true, while the other was at best a hindrance with which one had to live, or at worst something evil that was to be eradicated if we were ever to find the Truth.

The transformation that thus took place throughout the history of thinking brought about and was brought about by a change of the functioning of language, in a reciprocal way, and the dominant theory has since become our standard way of seeing and experiencing the world, with little or no tolerance toward views which differ profoundly. The ancient Greeks were precisely different from this dominant metaphysical tradition in that they were *before* metaphysics, so what Heidegger saw in them was an opportunity for finding a different way of thinking which could challenge the dominating philosophy of his own time.

It would be hard to overestimate the influence of early Greek thinking on Heidegger's work. In nearly all his writings there is usually at least a mention or reference to an ancient Greek word or saying. As Heidegger obviously felt that the language of certain Presocratics was worth thinking over against the usual interpretations that are normally given, it is only logical that I too should venture into this. Because Heidegger thought that by looking more closely at the way in which the Greeks actually thought, or rather in how Heidegger reinterpreted them, we could find what is really worthy of thought. This *Wiederholung* of Greek thinking is very important for the project of comparative philosophy in two ways. First of all, Heidegger thought the *Auseinandersetzung*² with the Greeks a necessary precondition for the possibility of an encounter with the East Asian world. His argument for this was that he thought that modern philosophy had become corrupted by the narrowness of the metaphysical and purely rational way of thinking, making it unsuitable for an encounter with very different thinking. This different thinking was exactly what Heidegger expected to find in East Asian thought. The narrow metaphysical outlook and the insistence on its rightness in certain places that prevailed in the West would prevent any encounter that would not try to explain things according to Western ideas and values. Heidegger also thought that in East Asian thinking he would find, along with a way of thinking that was not influenced by metaphysics as we know it in the Western world, languages or at least views on language that were equally unspoiled.

The second reason why the dialogue or *Auseinandersetzung* or confrontation with the Greeks is important is that Heidegger's translations and readings of the (ancient) Greeks is exemplary of the way he wishes us to approach that which is "foreign" or "other," in a thoughtful confrontation that leaves what is con-fronted as it reveals itself, from itself, and to give this "other" the space to do so. In other, slightly less Heideggerian words, the way to approach what is other is to let it speak for itself. The real difficulty is how to achieve this. Of course, ancient Greek civilization has long vanished, and the same goes for the world of the Daoist classics,

so, even if given the chance, how could they be speaking for themselves? In spite of this obvious discrepancy, Heidegger thinks there are opportunities to think these ways of thinking in a more originary way, to make them speak again or rather to make them speak to us. In what follows, I focus largely on Heidegger's rethinking of the Presocratics, whom he saw as the representatives of thinking before it was overtaken by metaphysics. Insofar as philosophy has become metaphysical, he considered the Presocratics not philosophers but "greater thinkers,"³ who thought before *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgetfulness of Being, made its entry into thinking, turning it into philosophy as metaphysics.

It should however be made clear that Heidegger was not some sort of nostalgic thinker who longed for the good old days of philosophical astonishment. Superficial reading of his work could lead one to take this position. After all, did he not on many occasions lash out at modern technology, the modern subject and its rational approach to all objects? He did indeed, but not because he was principally opposed to these things, but because he saw their increasing dominance and exclusive claim to truthfulness, and wanted to counterbalance this by putting them in their proper place. To this extent he argued for example for a reinterpretation of *τέχνη* (techne) and *λόγος* (logos), the Greek etymological grounds for the notion of technology.

Basically a lot of Heidegger's work is based on reinterpretations of the ancient Greeks and their language in order to come to a new understanding of what is going on today. It is in this light that we must see his ongoing efforts at reading "what the Greeks have thought in an even more Greek manner"⁴ than the Greeks did themselves. This *Wiederholung* does not mean reading in the sense of a nostalgic return to what was, but it is rather a task that lies ahead of us, for the better understanding of what is now through what has been, by thinking it through *ursprünglicher* or more originary⁵ than the Greeks could themselves, means thinking through what remained unthought by them. This means that the ancient Greeks inhabited this originary world, but they did not think it as such. It is this thinking through that would then be Heidegger's contribution to thinking as it lies before us. In a way we should read the sentence "thinking through" in a double sense—first, that we are returning to the Greeks and what they thought and left unthought in this way of thinking, and second, that we get to think because of something else, which somehow shows itself to us and calls for our thinking. The German *von* in much of Heidegger's work has the same connotations, in that it can mean both "from" and "of," and even "on," so that we get to think "from" the Greeks, by our renewed thinking "of" them.⁶

Heidegger uses the very same strategy in his con-frontation with Asia, so it is crucial to understand his *Wiederholung* of Greek thinking first. Heidegger's efforts at rethinking and rereading the Presocratics were often in direct opposition to those of classical philology. It should be noted however that Heidegger was himself very well versed in ancient Greek and that the point of his enterprise was precisely to upset and uproot the tradition both of philosophy and philology by offering different ways of reading these Presocratic works. Heidegger argued that traditional philology "is always already situated within a linguistic and conceptual structure which it does not question."⁷ This linguistic and conceptual structure Heidegger thought of as ontotheological philosophy or metaphysics, which has been mentioned already. In order to fight this single-minded domination of metaphysics, Heidegger therefore needed to challenge the philosophical foundations of philology, as it remained closed to different interpretations because of its liaisons with philosophy as metaphysics. This is of considerable importance for the encounter with East Asia, as traditional philological translations and interpretations have influenced the efforts of Western philosophers seeking to understand Asian ways of thinking for ages.

There are three of these challenges to normal philological and philosophical interpretation which come readily to mind to anyone familiar with Heidegger's work. These are his interpretations of Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. I now look into all three of them to see where their importance for comparative philosophy lies, starting with the earliest one, Anaximander. All three interpretations or readings by Heidegger involve similar thinking and ultimately make roughly the same point, but it is still useful to treat them separately in order to understand the full impact Heidegger's interpretations of the Greeks had on his encounters⁸ with East Asia, and mainly with Daoism.

Anaximander

In *Der Spruch des Anaximander*⁹ Heidegger inquires into what is being said in one of the oldest known pieces of Western philosophy:

ἔξῳν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστι τοῖς οὐσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰ εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν. Διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίχην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοισ τῆς ἀδιχίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν.¹⁰

Looking at a number of different translations Heidegger comes to the conclusion that they are all influenced by later thinking, and that they thus do injustice to the *Spruch* or fragment itself, in that they impose concepts and ideas of a later time on an earlier thinking. This happens seemingly

automatically when we translate, because we use terms which are familiar to us, but which need not at all have the same familiarity or usage for the Greeks. Heidegger says that even in calling the early Greek thinkers *Pre-socratics* later philosophers have made this mistake: “The unexpressed standard for considering and judging the early thinkers is the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. These are taken as the Greek philosophers who set the standard both before and after themselves.”¹¹ The idea is that it was right to measure the Presocratics by standards of Plato because these earlier thinkers were supposedly thinking the same as the later ones, but not yet correct, or still fragmented.¹² This sort of reading from one’s own point of view¹³ has happened throughout the history of metaphysics, as Heidegger argues, from the early medieval Christian interpretations of what we should rather now call the early Greeks, to Hegel and even Nietzsche.

Against these sorts of interpretations Heidegger exhorts his readers to look more closely at the text itself and what it could be saying from itself. However, this does not mean that Heidegger is arguing for a more literal translation, since we must not understand “literal” in the normal sense. As he says: “But when a translation is only literal it is not necessarily faithful. It is faithful only when its terms are words which speak from the language of the matter itself.”¹⁴ Translating the original German sentence of this quote alone could lead us into trouble. The difference between *Wörter* and *Worte* is subtle, and it goes together with the difference between *wörtlich* and *wortgetreu*. Both these latter terms are usually translated by “literal,” although Krell and Capuzzi translate *wortgetreu* with “faithful.” A problem with this translation is that “faithful” is first of all closely associated with religion, which is something Heidegger would not approve of, and then a more “literal” translation would rather be “word-loyal.” “Faithful” also does not hint at the difference between *Wörter* and *Worte*, which makes for the subtle wordplay of the quotation in question. But even from the translation of the aforementioned fragment it is clear that Heidegger makes a distinction between “literal” and “true to the word.” “True to the word” would be a translation that would speak *aus der Sprache der Sache*, that is, pertaining to the true “matter” of thinking. Heeding this “matter” of thinking would first of all require readers to relinquish the practice of looking at older thinking through the lenses of more recent ideas and concepts. The *Wirrnis*¹⁵ (confusion) that has arisen through this practice, which has dominated Western philosophy, has first of all to be addressed. This is not done by just giving better or truer translations of the original Greek, but by rethinking our relation to the Greeks in a more originary way, which means by coming to a real dialogue with them.

What has to be done then is to think through Anaximander from a different perspective, or maybe even to give up the idea of perspective if that is at all possible, looking for what is yet unthought in these words. To do this, it is necessary to jump over (or maybe, as we shall see later, into) a trench or abyss¹⁶ to another way of thinking. In doing this Heidegger offers his own version of the *Spruch*, but before I give that, it is better to first give the usual, standard translation of Anaximander's fragment:

And from what source things arise, to that they return of necessity when they are destroyed; for they suffer punishment and make reparation to one another for their injustice according to the order of time.¹⁷

Heidegger's translation runs very different, having reinterpreted most of the words and even questioned the validity of attributing part of the *Spruch* to Anaximander, so that only the part . . . *κατὰ τὸ χρεών. Διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίχην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας* remains certain. Although the rest of the fragment might not be from Anaximander himself, Heidegger still considers the whole fragment as Anaximandrian, considering the other parts as "secondary testimony"¹⁸ to Anaximander's thinking. He comes to the following German translation:

Von woheraus aber der Hervorgang ist dem jeweilig Anwesenden auch die Entgänglichnis in dieses (als in das Selbe) geht hervor entlang dem Brauch; gehören nämlich lassen sie Fug somit auch Ruch eines dem anderen (im Verwinden) des Un-Fugs entsprechend der Zuweisung des Zeitigen durch die Zeit.¹⁹

The differences between this and the usual translation are obvious and very significant. In English the translation of Heidegger's version would be:

The place from out of which emergence comes is, for everything that emerges, also the place of disappearance into this (as into the same)—in accordance with exigence (brook); for they let enjoining and thereby also reck belong to each other (in the getting over) of disjoining, responding to the directive of time's coming into its own.²⁰

Another translation in English, only of the part which was thought to be originally from Anaximander and on which Heidegger focuses, runs as follows:

. . . along the lines of usage; for they let order and thereby also reck belong to one another (in the surmounting) of disorder.²¹

If only one thing, these heroic efforts at translation in English from Heidegger's difficult German and the discrepancies between them show how radically different his interpretations really are. Heidegger's readings think from a very different perspective, trying to undo what he thinks is a false sense of security and complacency with what we consider "normal." In the passage that Heidegger is concerned with the most, he translates *Tò Χρεών* with *Brauch* and translates *δίχην* and *τίσις* with *Fug* and *Ruch*. It is interesting to see what he says right after that, and I will have to quote at some length:

We cannot demonstrate the adequacy of the translation by scholarly means; nor should we simply accept it through faith in some authority or other. Scholarly proof will not carry us far enough, and faith has no place in thinking. We can only reflect on the translation by thinking through the saying. But thinking is the poetizing of the truth of Being in the historic dialogue between thinkers. For this reason the fragment will never engage us so long we only explain it historiologically and philologically. Curious enough, the saying first resonates when we set aside the claims of our own familiar ways of representing things. . . .²²

Only when we set aside our claims to rightness can we engage what is "other." For Heidegger this means that we discard the dominance of metaphysics in favor of a different thinking. This is also exactly what comparative philosophy has to do. The notion of *Brauch* and its relation to language tell us another important thing. Although the most common translation of *Brauch* is "custom," it also means "use," "usage," and "need" (exigence), and by employing this notion *Brauch* Heidegger aims to show us how language as Saying (*Sage*) is both something we use and need for our understanding of the world. There is no understanding without (the need for and use of) language. We need language, but we need to rethink the way we see and use it.

To come back to the English translations, the two versions offer some significant differences. *Brauch* is, as we have just seen, translated as "exigence/brook" and "usage," for *Fug* "enjoining" and "order" and for *Ruch* there is consensus on "reck," not very easily used or understood words. But maybe Heidegger would not object to these different translations, as his own German was especially meant to retain the broad meaning of the original Greek. It is by retaining the openness and broadness of these words that Heidegger can pursue the interconnectedness or "belonging together in difference" of all things, something that he is always eager to show.²³ It is therefore probably not a question of whether Heidegger's

translations are better than others, because there is really no consensus on standards by which to judge them in that respect. The meaning of these words is so broad that Heidegger says that words like these “cannot be enclosed within the boundaries of particular disciplines. “Broad” does not mean here extensive, in the sense of something flattened or thinned out, but rather far-reaching, rich containing much thought.”²⁴ Heidegger’s translations do not bring us nearer to the original meaning; they are however supposed to bring us nearer to thinking, and they do so largely by challenging preconceptions of how Being has been understood. Heidegger shows that when we follow his readings, this will at least alert us to how the *Seinsvergessenheit* has come to be. He can then use his translations to show that Anaximander already intimated with τὸ χρεῶν what Parmenides and Heraclitus were trying to say with Μοῖρα and Λόγος, respectively, which is to think Being as presencing (*Anwesen*), in the sense of coming into presence, lingering a while, and returning into absence.

Each presence is present, as long as it dwells, dwelling it arises and passes away, dwelling it exists as the enjoining of the transition from origin to departure. This ever dwelling existence of transition is the proper continuity of presence. This however does not consist of mere persistence.²⁵

So we now see that Heidegger tries to read the fragment of Anaximander as a fragment on Being, not really a fragment about humanity. He does not read the fragment from a human perspective; he lets it speak from something else. In this reading he seeks to upset the metaphysical opposition between Subject and Object, of representational or propositional thinking, and come to an understanding which would make the saying “resonate” in the sense of giving us a different thinking relation to our world. By doing so, his interpretation differs, and this also allows him to undo the false pretension that Parmenides and Heraclitus were opponents. In fact, Parmenides (Being) and Heraclitus (transformation, transition) belong together.²⁶ By reading Being in the nearness of “*weilen*,” which can be understood both as “sojourn” and “abiding,” but which I have translated here as “dwelling,” Heidegger sees presencing as a coming from and returning to absence, and thus the continuity (*Beständigkeit*) of Being and Nothing is thought to reside exactly in transformation, transition, change (*Übergang*), and I argue later that this way of thinking has strong similarities with a different-from-traditional reading of Daoism.

The three most important things that can be summarized from Heidegger’s efforts on Anaximander are first to be very cautious with language and translations, second to see the idea of Being as transformation, and third to

heed the matter of thinking in a thoughtful dialogue with what is different to us, which largely means not to extrapolate familiar terms to explain unfamiliar things, in this case *ancient Greek philosophy*, and we can see now that these three words themselves still stand in need of rethinking, thus opening them up to comparative philosophy, where it is crucial not to impose conceptual structures that are foreign to a different language or culture.

Parmenides

Heidegger's second engagement with early Greek thinking is his interpretation of Parmenides. In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*²⁷ he takes the fragment known as τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι or "the same is thinking and being" as his guide. Far from the normal interpretation which says that thinking is also a being, that is, thinking cannot be nothing, Heidegger again offers his own version, not so much in a translation this time, but more in an inquiry into the key words that make up this sentence of the fragment. Again he warns against imposing later concepts and thought structures on earlier thinking, and he says that an authentic inquiry should be a dialogue that asks not about things that seem familiar, but rather looks into "the obscure passages" in a "thoughtful translation of early Greek speech."²⁸ With the help of fragment 8, which is lengthier but deals with the same problematic, Heidegger reconsiders the text to say something of the belonging together in difference (being the "same") of what he calls *In-die-Acht-nehmen* and *Anwesen* (presencing, emerging, or even unfolding). Especially the idea of "belonging-together-in-difference" with which Heidegger translates τὸ αὐτὸ, or "the same," *das Selbe*, which we have already encountered, cannot be stressed enough in relation to comparative philosophy. This is exactly what I understand Heidegger's strategy in comparative philosophy to be about: to treat different cultures as belonging together through difference and diversity.

The fragment in its translation by Heidegger is important for another reason. This is because νοεῖν is not translated as "thinking," which is the normal translation but which has led to the metaphysical readings of much early philosophy. Instead he translates it with *In-die-Acht-nehmen*, which in English could be rendered as "taking in, facing up to, respectful perceiving" and this is an effort to demolish the metaphysical reading of thinking as *Vorstellen*, as representational thinking, and to turn to a different kind of thinking like *Andenken* and poetic thinking, of which I speak later. It is this approach which runs through Heidegger's encounters with the early Greeks. If thinking is thus transformed from being merely metaphysical, representational, and conceptual thinking to something different or at least wider and more encompassing, this bodes well for an eventual

encounter with thinking in non-Western cultures, where these specific features get less attention.

Heraclitus

Heidegger's reading of Heraclitus is much more thorough. He gave two lecture courses on Heraclitus,²⁹ and transposed some of this material in several writings. He also frequently made references to Heraclitus in other works, so there is a wealth of source material available. In it we can find fundamental reinterpretations of *logos*, *physis*, *aletheia*, *polemos*, and language. Heidegger wants to upset the traditional view that Heraclitus was the foremost proponent of a philosophy of becoming or change, as opposed to Parmenides, who is seen as the philosopher of a permanent Being. Heidegger reinterprets Λόγος (*logos*) here from the verb λέγειν (to gather, to say) as "the Laying that gathers" (*die lesende Lege*),³⁰ thinking with this term that which consists of gathering together and letting things be in letting them lie before us. We should be mindful here of other words like *Auseinandersetzung* and *das Selbe*, "con-frontation" and "the same," respectively, to realize how this gathering together and letting be of differences can go together. In other places Heidegger also translates *logos* as "gathering."³¹ He thereby tries to release *logos* from its metaphysical translations, such as reason, ratio, God, and so forth. He retains the idea that *logos* means "saying" or "speaking," "discourse," but gives his other interpretation as something even more or equally originary. The connection between language and *logos* is thus brought to a deeper understanding. This *logos* was what the ancient Greeks lived in, their language was alive in this way, but they never thought through this situation themselves. As Heidegger says:

Ὁ Λόγος, thought as the Laying that gathers, would be the essence of saying [*die Sage*] as thought by the Greeks. Language would be saying. Language would be the gathering letting-lie-before of what is present in its presencing. In fact, the Greeks *dwelt* in this essential determination of language. But they never *thought* it—Heraclitus included.³²

Thus thought, the ancient Greeks lived language as saying from Being, as *logos* is the name for the Being of beings, but they did not think it thus. Heidegger thinks this *logos* as "gathering in letting be," but we should guard against seeing this as a metaphysical principle guiding all things. "Gathering" is not to be read as a noun, it should much more be read in a verbal sense, as it hints at a temporal phenomenon, a process more than a principle. Seen in this way *logos* would then rather mean the "temporary gathering of things in their difference through language."

In another essay on Heraclitus Heidegger goes over the notion of *aletheia*, usually translated as “truth.” Heidegger rejects this translation, giving his rendering of “unconcealment” instead. Heraclitus thought concealing and unconcealing together, as Heidegger shows from fragment 123, φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ. Usually translated as “nature loves to hide itself,” Heidegger retranslates: “Rising (out of self-concealing) bestows favour upon self-concealing,”³³ and explains how *physis* as rising or coming to unconcealment and concealment are mutually related, belong together, again *das Selbe*, the “same.”³⁴ Heidegger had already established in his work on Nietzsche that for “the Greeks, *physis* is the first and the essential name for beings themselves and as a whole. For them the being is what flourishes on its own, in no way compelled, what rises and comes forward, and what goes back into itself and passes away. It is the rule that rises and resides in itself.”³⁵ In another part of the same volume Heidegger seems to suggest that *physis* thought in a Greek way was the “original configuration”³⁶ or unity of Being and becoming. *Aletheia*, *physis*, and *logos* then show a closeness in belonging together in this unconcealing and concealing.

Related to this interplay of unconcealing and concealing the notions of *Auseinandersetzung*, or con-frontation, or πόλεμος (*polemos*), plays an important part in my arguments, especially when we read these notions in their intercultural sense. Heraclitus is well known for having allegedly said in fragment 53 that “war is the father of all things.” Heidegger thinks again that this interpretation is mistaken or at least one-sided. There is again a more originary way of looking at the fragment, which starts with πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι. Heidegger translates “Con-frontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) is indeed the begetter of all (that comes to presence). . . .”³⁷ This is already a huge difference from normal translations, but even more important is the continuing sentence which is usually left out: . . . πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, which Heidegger translates as “. . . but (also) the dominant preserver of all.”³⁸ So far from trying to say that war is the father of all things, Heidegger says that con-frontation, as *Auseinandersetzung*, is the begetter and keeper of all things. Difference and the interaction of differences thus become extremely important. But we should also think of con-frontation as *our* con-frontation with the world. Our *Auseinandersetzung* through language gives meaning to us, and in that sense we should be aware of how we con-front the world. Heidegger’s answer of course has to do with letting be and letting things show from themselves. Heidegger even explicitly names *polemos* as “*die Lichtung*”³⁹ (the clearing), making it resonate with another of his key terms in explaining his later thinking.

From this it can safely be assumed that *Auseinandersetzung* is one of the most important terms Heidegger uses, together with *logos*, *aletheia*, *physis*, and other such key words from the ancient Greek language. There are numerous places where he speaks of these ancient terms in their relatedness, going so far as to say they are the same. *Logos* is *polemos*, is *aletheia*, is *physis*, is *moira*. These are all interrelated and eventually point to that which cannot be spoken of, Being. As Heidegger says:

. . . the Λόγος which Heraclitus thinks as the fundamental character of presencing, the Μοῖρα which Parmenides thinks as the fundamental character of presencing, the Χρῆον which Anaximander thinks is essential in presencing—all these name the Same. In the concealed richness of the Same the unity of the unifying One, the Ἔν, is thought by each thinker in his own way.⁴⁰

The Ἔν stands for Being, which is always the “matter” of thinking. Heidegger is convinced however that certain ways of thinking hear, resonate, or respond to Being better than others, and I have tried to show here that he was also of the opinion that the early Greeks thought more originary than later thinkers. Starting with Plato, things got confused: one side of the coin, thinking, took over at the expense of Being, effectively destroying the “belonging together.” This was exacerbated significantly by the translations of Greek into Latin in later times, which according to Heidegger were so foreign to the Greek ideas that they destroyed the Greek meaning, as the Romans brought to philosophy a fundamentally different attitude, not sharing the same ideas and background that had made the Greek world what it was.⁴¹ Yet Heidegger is not pessimistic about translation per se, for as he says again in *Holzwege*:

Could a mere translation have precipitated all this? We may yet learn what can come to pass in translation. The truly fateful encounter with historic language is a silent event. But in it the destiny of Being speaks. Into what language is the land of evening translated?⁴²

First I want to look at the English translation, which is inadequate since it fails to capture the wordplay of the German, which has *geschichtlich*, *geschicklich*, and *Geschick*. It also fails to notice that the final question is not in the passive, but in the active tense, so it would be more appropriate to translate it “Into what language does the Evening-land translate?” This would better capture the fact that it is *our* translations which are wrong or one-sided and need to be looked at afresh. The encounter with other

languages then needs to be a silent one, in which there is a thoughtful adherence to the sameness thought in a Heideggerian way, as well as to the differences of different cultures. In this encounter, translation (*Übersetzung* as setting across of a different way of thinking) plays a crucial role. It is vital to the project of comparative philosophy that this is acknowledged and that people who translate works from other cultures keep an open mind toward different possibilities and different forms that such encounters can take. Heidegger's work on the early Greek thinkers and his translations or reinterpretations of some of their fragments have shown that such different meetings are possible, but have to remain vigilant against being overrun by metaphysical speculations, which are not wrong in themselves, but are only one option amongst many others yet unexplored. One of the other options Heidegger chose to look into is the relation of poetics or poetry with thinking.

HEIDEGGER AND THE POETS

What is difficult to grasp about this work [Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*] is not only its "content," if it has such, but also its very character as a work. Of course, we are quick to propose a ready-made explanation: here philosophical thoughts are presented poetically. Yet what we are now to call *thinking* and *poetizing* dare not consist of the usual notions, inasmuch as the work defines both of these anew, or rather, simply announces them.⁴³

Heidegger has extensively dealt with poetry in his search for a different thinking that would overcome to a certain extent the "forgetfulness" of metaphysics. It is no secret that Heidegger saw the present metaphysical-technological configuration of the West in terms of a decline. This is not to say however that Heidegger wished to return to some purer state of thinking which supposedly existed before this decline. It is to say that he used different approaches to establish a certain resistance toward the dominating forces of philosophy, which exclude any form of thinking which cannot be incorporated into its rigid frameworks. These forms of different thinking Heidegger found in the early Greek thinkers, in poetry or poetic thinkers and thinking, and in some forms of East Asian thinking, where Heidegger looked especially toward Daoism. Apparently he found important similarities between Daoism and early Greek and poetic thinking, or at least his approaches toward these show similarities. Therefore the second most important feature in understanding Heidegger's efforts at establishing an intercultural dialogue, after his engagement with the Greeks and related to it, involves his thinking about the poets, and his

reinterpretation of philosophy as “poetic thinking.” This is of importance to comparative philosophy for two reasons. First is to show how Heidegger wished to engage the poets he dealt with, and from that derive a similar approach that he takes in encountering other cultures. Second, the way in which Heidegger identifies, locates, and uses the ways of thinking which he finds in poetic works is interesting because it goes to show that not all thinking has to be along the lines of Western philosophy as it has evolved into ontotheology and thus into what Heidegger calls the technological way of thinking with its reductive totalization that brings to a forced unity all that is different. There are more forms that thinking can take, or rather, thinking can happen in different forms. But it should be remembered that Heidegger did not first engage the early Greeks and the poets in order to then extract from that an intercultural thinking. It is more to the point to say that the three different approaches were equal avenues to explore the possibility of an “other commencement”⁴⁴ of thinking, which would be different from metaphysics.

To expose the extent to which Heidegger engaged poetry, I look at his work on Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Trakl, Stefan George, and Rainer Maria Rilke. It is especially in the way that language comes to speak through these poets that Heidegger finds them worthy of being called “the thinking poets.” Heidegger’s focus on poetry however does not mean that all poetry is automatically related to thinking, or has some fundamental insights to show us. Only certain poets have achieved this “height,” and it is in their work and more specifically in Heidegger’s interpretations of them that we can find hints on how Heidegger wants to engage other cultures. Especially Heidegger’s work on Hölderlin reveals a lot about the approach to what is *das Fremde*, or what is “other” or “foreign.”

Poetry and Thinking

So what exactly does Heidegger see in these poets, and what is the relationship of this poetry to thinking or philosophy? First of all, it is important not to understand poetry as mere poesy, or the poetic use of words or language to create some idea. Poetry (*Dichten*) has a much deeper and broader meaning for Heidegger. All language and thinking has its essence (*Wesen*) in poetry. This is not to confuse poetry and philosophy, and not to think that some more poetic form of philosophy or a more philosophical form of poetry is needed as a kind of fusion between the two. As Heidegger says:

All philosophical thinking—and precisely the most rigorous and prosaic—is in itself poetic. It nonetheless never springs from the art of poetry.

A work of poetry, a work like Hölderlin's hymns, can for its part be thoughtful in the highest degree. It is nonetheless never philosophy.⁴⁵

Poetry and thinking are very close, yet they are not to be confused, and one is not the logical ancestor or descendant of the other. Heidegger is very strict in this separation, and we will see why. For his idea is that only things that are different can have such a close relationship:

We must discard the view that the neighbourhood of poetry and thinking is nothing more than a garrulous cloudy mixture of two kinds of saying in which each makes clumsy borrowings from the other. Here and there it may seem that way. But in truth, poetry and thinking are in virtue of their nature held apart by a delicate yet luminous difference.⁴⁶

It is this difference that somehow speaks from an indefinable common ground that is the focus of Heidegger's engagements with the various poets. Again and again he stresses this, maintaining that any similarity, equality, unity, or common ground is to be read *only* through or from this difference. In fact, we could say that this difference or diversity is the only form the common ground can have, as it is this difference that is constitutive for a dialogue between thinking and poetry to succeed, for only as long as this difference is firmly held in place can there be a real exchange of ideas, in which both talk about the same thing. Or, to put it in Heidegger's words:

The poetical Said and the thinking Said are never identical (*das gleiche*).
Yet both one and the other can say the same (*dasselbe*) in different ways.
This however, only succeeds when the abyss between them is kept clear
and resolute.⁴⁷

Again it is important to understand clearly the difference between *das Selbe* and *das Gleiche*, or the "same" and the "identical." The "same" is not some metaphysical construct; it is not an overarching concept, but only functions because of difference. Heidegger says:

The same never coincides with the equal, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say "the same" if we think difference.⁴⁸

The “identical” then is part of a typical metaphysical striving for identity, generalization, and unity. Heidegger employs Hölderlin to explain the difference between “same” and “identical”: “Being at one is godlike and good; whence, then, this craze among men that there should exist only One, why should all be one?”⁴⁹ Hölderlin named this short fragment the “Root of All Evil,”⁵⁰ and Heidegger certainly shared this concern. Things that are “the same” should not be forced to become identical. And sameness only exists as a function of difference. Differences, or the play of differences, must be understood as the more originary. This naturally brings me back to one of the key terms of this book, *Auseinandersetzung*, or con-frontation. It is only in the sense of *Auseinandersetzung* that has been discussed previously that we can understand Heidegger’s engagement with the poets he so carefully chose. It is a keeping apart in togetherness, or a thoughtful appropriation that leaves the other as it is itself, that is again his aim, as it was with his *Auseinandersetzung* with the Greeks. This gathering in difference can be understood as promoting the idea of the interconnectedness, the relationality of all things, which nevertheless should not be reduced to an ultimate guiding principle. We shall see later how a similar thinking is espoused in Daoism if we read it through different lenses.

Poetry and Language

Throughout his career Heidegger has valued the importance of language. Already in *Sein und Zeit*, the important paragraph 32 which discusses the fact that we always encounter things *as* something, and that we thus always have some preconceived notions in our perceptions, shows the importance and necessity of language in our experience of the world.⁵¹ The hermeneutics that Heidegger thinks of acknowledges the fact that language is “how we think.” Later on, language is called “the house of Being”⁵² and both *Weg* (way) and *Ereignis* (event of appropriation), two key terms in Heidegger’s later work, are closely intertwined with language. We can safely say that language was, together with Being, one of Heidegger’s most important focuses, since he understood that language is inevitable in our understanding, and in our experiencing and thinking of the world. Experience and thinking can only gain meaning through language, understood in the sense of signification structures.

Thus the second important aspect in Heidegger’s engagement with poetry and his efforts at establishing or at least preparing the “other thinking” through poetic thinking is found in his reinterpretation of language, as it is used in poetry. Heidegger finds that the normal functions of language, such as information exchange, everyday social language functions, and even the more “spiritual” sides of language, which are often used by

poets, cannot explain what happens in poetry, or rather in certain poetry and certain poets. He therefore again tries to introduce new readings of these works, readings that are not at all obvious to “normal” interpretations. When Heidegger says that it is language that speaks through humans, and not humans who speak, this still resembles normal interpretations of being inspired by and influenced by language. Yet Heidegger goes much further by saying that what happens in some poetry is really much more originary and fundamental than a reinterpretation of language by poets. Saying that poetry is derivative of normal language is therefore at fault, or as Heidegger puts it: “Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer.”⁵³ Language has become something it was not before; it has flattened and emptied through its history of metaphysics. The *Verfallen* (Falling) of everyday language, everyday man, and everyday opinions are all (negative) derivations of a more originary and fundamental region in which language spoke (or speaks, as it is not only in the past that we can still find this) from itself, as it did with the Greeks. Heidegger finds this more originary region in poetry. As he says: “Language itself is poetry in the essential sense.”⁵⁴ Poetry is of course here taken “in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave open whether art, in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry.”⁵⁵

Heidegger’s interpretation sees the work of (some) poets as the “deployment of certain key words which call for the thinker’s reflective analysis.”⁵⁶ Heidegger’s analysis brings out the “other” meaning of these works through giving other meanings to their key words.⁵⁷ These other meanings are not necessarily better or more truthful, but at least also possible and call for a rethinking of language, which is Heidegger’s main concern. With regard to Heidegger’s intercultural steps it is important to notice that he took the same approach in his encounters with the East, for example when he, together with his Japanese guest, reinterpreted the word for “language” in Japanese,⁵⁸ or when he used the notion of *dao* as pointing to something roughly equivalent to his own version of “*Weg*” or “way.”⁵⁹ In the next section of this chapter these similarities are dealt with more thoroughly.

Language then has some other meaning; it is not as rigid as our everyday definitions seem to suggest. There is a certain “unsaid” in language which to Heidegger is more important than the obvious definite meaning which we usually ascribe to words. This multiplicity of meanings of important words is hinted at in Heidegger’s readings of the poets he deals with, for as he says in an essay on a work by Georg Trakl:

This language is essentially ambiguous (*mehrdeutig*), in its own fashion. We shall hear nothing of what the poem says so long as we bring to it only this or that dull sense of unambiguous (*eindeutigen*) meaning. [. . .] Yet this multiple ambiguousness of the poetic saying does not scatter in vague equivocations (*ins unbestimmte Vieldeutige*). The ambiguous tone of Trakl's poetry arises out of a gathering, that is, out of a unison which, meant for itself alone, always remains unsayable. The ambiguity of this poetic saying is not lax imprecision, but rather the rigor of him who leaves what is as it is. . . .⁶⁰

In German *mehrdeutig* has not only the negative meaning of ambiguity, but also means “open to more than one interpretation,” or could be said to argue for some kind of “polysemy” inherent in language. The translation of *mehrdeutig* with “ambiguous” leaves this point in the air, the more as “ambiguity” is usually referred to as negative, especially in the stricter regions of philosophy where identity and unity are the most important features. The translation also fails to capture the sense of *mehr-deutig* that relates to more than one meaning without becoming vague (*viel-deutig*). If we leave aside translation problems for the moment, the point is that Heidegger wishes to retain a sense of openness and unfinishedness that to him is evident in thoughtful poetry. Because where there is really no final and definite meaning, we should not impose one artificially, as is often done with poems where we are supposed to find “the” meaning in them. It is much better to leave what is as it is, and Heidegger thinks there is a way to do this without sinking into a passive relativism of the “anything goes” kind. That Heidegger was aware of this we can clearly see in the passage cited previously, where he sharply distinguishes between *mehrdeutig* and *vieldeutig*. We must now take a closer look at Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hölderlin and explore the polysemy and issues of translation which Heidegger's readings of Hölderlin bring about.

Hölderlin, the Foreign, and Translation

Heidegger's engagement with Hölderlin can bring us very useful clues to understanding his ideas about comparative philosophy and what it should stand for. It also gives us access to the thinking about a different perspective on language which Heidegger derived from Hölderlin's poetry. These ideas have to do with polysemy (*Mehrdeutigkeit*),⁶¹ which, as we saw, Heidegger does not equate with vagueness. We must also bear in mind that Heidegger did not concern himself with literary scholarship on Hölderlin, and that his reading of Hölderlin is not necessarily what the latter thought of his own work himself, but first of all Heidegger's effort to wrestle Hölderlin from the

narrow bonds of philology, so as to open his words to a wider understanding, of which the intercultural aspect is an important part.

I first look at the ideas of the approach to the “other” or the “foreign” (*Das Fremde*) which Heidegger extracted from Hölderlin, and after that explore the ideas on language. Florian Vetsch has compiled three steps in the intercultural encounter which Heidegger took to be crucial and which he himself deduced from Hölderlin:

- 1) Before his departure to the foreign, the future wanderer is still caught in his own surroundings.
- 2) The journey begins, and the wanderer encounters the foreign.
- 3) The wanderer returns, but remains thoughtful of the foreign; in this something new shows itself.⁶²

This goes to show that for Heidegger, the *Auseinandersetzung* with the foreign has two aims; the first is a learning of what the foreign has to offer. To establish this, the “self” has to (temporarily) forget its own, not in the sense of losing oneself in a taking over of “other” habits and ideas, but in opening up a space for different ideas to be allowed access. If we remain closed, any “wandering” will be futile. As Heidegger puts it:

. . . where it remains only a matter of refuting, or even of annihilating the foreign, what necessarily gets lost is the possibility of a passage through the foreign, and thereby the possibility of a return home into one’s own, and thereby that which is one’s own itself.⁶³

This is the second aim of the *Auseinandersetzung*. The passage through the foreign is crucial for an understanding of what is one’s own. But again the “wandering” has to be of a very specific character, and we come back to the *Auseinandersetzung* and the Same, because “. . . only where the foreign is known and acknowledged in its essential oppositional character (*Gegensätzlichkeit*) does there exist the possibility of a genuine relationship (*Beziehung*), that is, of a uniting that is not a confused mixing but a conjoining in distinction (*Unterscheidung*).”⁶⁴ It is thus not a matter of learning another culture as a “sum of learnable data,”⁶⁵ which you can then take home, but to learn to see another culture as a living, historically moving, open-ended totality, which is not readily at one’s disposal, but always open to renewed conversation.⁶⁶ This is also a part of the *Auseinandersetzung*. In this way the relation between different cultures is then literally a never-ending story.

It is also vital to fully understand the complexity of the relation between the “own” or “homely” and the “other,” “foreign” or “unhomely,” as it

unfolds in Heidegger's *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* It has already been noted that it is not a mere appropriation or incorporation of the other that is meant here. The other *as* other is not to be overcome in this way; it is the encounter that matters, so that ". . . the law of the encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) between the foreign and one's own is the fundamental truth of history."⁶⁷ The coming home is not then a return to a kind of safe haven, but it is precisely *in* the encounter itself that the wanderer finds himself. We could also say that the third step of the intercultural encounter is not so much then a return to one's own, but a lingering in the encounter, a taking home of the encounter, to remain in the *Auseinandersetzung*. This is where, in the third step, "something new" happens. And this is exactly what the poets' works show us, especially Hölderlin's. As Heidegger says in a section on the *Antigone* in *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*: "What is worthy of poetizing in this poetic work is nothing other than becoming homely in being unhomely."⁶⁸ And elsewhere in the same volume on Hölderlin he says that "The appropriation of one's own *is* only as the encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) and guest-like dialogue with the foreign."⁶⁹ Note that encounter in these passages is always the *Auseinandersetzung* that has been discussed.

We know Hölderlin himself worked extensively at an *Auseinandersetzung* with the ancient Greek tragedies through his poetry and other writings, and it is from there that Heidegger takes his clues as to his own intercultural ideas. The understanding that "[w]e have still scarcely begun to think the mysterious relations to the East that have come to word in Hölderlin's poetry"⁷⁰ and the realization that the greatness of the ancient Greek world arose only through the encounter with the East (albeit Asia Minor) committed Heidegger to look for different ways of thinking, not just in a *Wiederholung* or de(con)struction of the Western tradition, but more and more in a turning toward the ways of thinking in East Asia. It is then Hölderlin who in this way encouraged Heidegger further on the trail to the "East" and on the ways of engaging what is other.

The second feature of Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretation concerns language. In his later writings, Heidegger no longer sees poetry "in terms of the poet's originary power of disclosure, of maintaining things in being, of the grounding, lighting, or opening up of a world; *Dichten* now has to be understood as the way of entering into the mode of being of *Gelassenheit*, the letting-go of things."⁷¹ So poetry, according to this account of Gerald Bruns, opens not so much Being, but a particular way of Being, which is *Gelassenheit* or "releasement" toward the unsaid. It is in poetry that we can find hints of this unsaid, and therefore Heidegger considers the language of poetry so important. Yet we must take care not to see this unsaid as a last (or first) principle, toward which poetry would then point us. The unsaid