

Martin Heidegger. *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides.* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Indiana University Press 2015. 240 pp. \$50.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780253015532).

Heidegger's lectures on Anaximander and Parmenides, from the summer semester of 1932, attempt to grasp the beginning of philosophy. Heidegger seeks the conditions for re-staging the beginning as the act which grounds human existence. This is a journey which provides insight into Heidegger's philosophy at this period and challenges us to consider the aims and method of textual interpretation when faced with obscure and contested fragments of philosophy. The book is divided into three parts and an appendix. The first part deals with a dictum surviving in fragments from Anaximander and the third with the remaining parts of Parmenides' Didactic Poem. The second part seeks to show the persistence and contemporary relevance of the beginning despite the apparent distance in time and thought that exists between this past moment and the present situation. Finally, there is an appendix of drafts and plans for these lectures.

A key theme in the analysis of Anaximander's dictum is the history of the betrayal and forgetting of the beginning of philosophy. In opposition to the scientific understanding of things, Heidegger articulates a conception of the beginning as the question of Being. He seeks to unfold the nature of this question and of questioning in general (39). Against the casual sequences analyzed by science, he articulates a notion of 'appearance' (6) that is to fully individuate beings. Appearance does this by entering into 'contours' (20) rather than setting out general patterns and regularities. Insofar as beings stand in contours we can fully grasp their individual, concrete existence rather than their abstract, general features. Heidegger's strategy for interpreting Anaximander involves bringing unity to surviving fragments by seeking their 'central core' (18). Time brings this unity because it measures out or allocates beings in appearance as noncompliant or 'out of order' (20). Chapters 2 and 3 of part 1 develop the temporal dynamism of non-compliance (appearance) and its fetching back into compliance (disappearance) (24). Against abstract generalization and scientific reduction, Being and time are the source of the full individuation of beings, of the 'empowering power of appearance' (23). Time is 'the *essential power of Being*' (18).

In the second part Heidegger explores the idea of returning to the beginning. How is this return possible? We must face our detachment from the beginning (30). Heidegger offers an analogy with a wanderer who leaves a spring far behind as they wander (31). When the wanderer slowly perishes through lack of water it is the distance from the spring as source of life that is decisive. Insofar as the beginning is denied it is constantly there, as close as it can possibly be. Heidegger affirms the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche on his thought in relation to the inner preparation required to seek out the beginning and do something with it (33). The beginning is to be performative, an occurrence or act in the mode of questioning (38). Heralding Nietzsche's role, Heidegger refers to the task of being 'the predecessors of the future ones' (34). Nietzsche is taken as exemplifying this preparing of the ground for future thinkers. He pursued an inner preparation for the re-staging of the question of Being, and Heidegger sees '... Nietzsche's fate as the most basic happening of our most inward history' (35). This is related to the thinking of time Heidegger sought to uncover in part 1, because time is opposed to science and historicism as two forces in the forgetting of Being. The act of beginning, as the question of Being, is now developed as the questioning that discloses the Being of beings (38). In order to stage the question, certain pre-questions must be asked which reveal the unfamiliar and problematic (Being) in the familiar and unproblematic (beings) (45). The task is to prepare the ground by unsettling the familiar and making things problematic.

For Heidegger, an understanding of Being is *always already* at work as only this allows us to encounter beings at all (68). This is not yet made problematic and question-worthy. In questioning, humans gain from Being their ground, courage, power and the measure of things (72). This makes the disclosure of Being through questioning ‘the basic act of existence’ (ibid). This second part has sought to locate the forgotten beginning in the present and the future, as something always at work and potentially capable of transforming thought in the future if it is grasped as question-worthy and re-enacted. We are to ‘... ask this question *in such a way* that we thereby co-begin the initial beginning’ (76).

At the beginning of part 3 Heidegger defends his interpretation of other philosophers. He responds to the charge that he is reading his own thought into the work of others. He also sets out a positive articulation of the correct method of interpretation: ‘As much as possible, we must *release* ourselves into the whole, as alien as that might seem at first’ (80). Despite the unfamiliarity of what we encounter, we find the remainder of something to which we relate and from which we are descended. Heidegger argues that his interpretation should be judged according to the questioning and understanding it achieves. How necessary and original is the ‘guiding question’ of the interpretation (ibid)?

The images of the Didactic Poem illustrate the three ways which concern Parmenides. Heidegger emphasizes the decision of the thinker to set out on the first way, the journey to the home of the goddess, and opposes it to any ‘mystical-mysterious enchantment or rapture’ (84). It is the disposition and attunement of the thinker that makes this journey possible. This is the first way, one full of prospects (91) and opposed to the third way, which is the common path of the crowd caught up in change and alteration (98). This is directionless, erratic and entangled in transformations that do not reveal the essence of things. In contrast, the second way is no way at all because it is the way of nothingness or non-being and as such offers no prospects or outlooks at all (91). In the first way the thinker does not become divine (100) or ascend to the isolation or closure of an initiate who is carried off on a mystical journey. Instead the first way moves into the open realm where the opposition of truth and untruth is revealed (86). The thinker must be capable of opening up this space and keeping it open. Heidegger rejects interpretations of Parmenides as an idealist because thinking and Being must be related rather than thought subsuming Being (90). Being and understanding now belong together and are unified (89, 91). Rather than idealism drawing Being into thought, understanding externalizes thought in the open spaces revealed though a fuller understanding of Being. Rather than the closure we could read into Parmenides’ way of Being, we have an openness that again prepares the ground for the question of Being that for Heidegger is the act of beginning.

Parmenides’ concern with unity or oneness is now unpacked in §22. There is either the *all* of indivisible, unchanging, positive Being or there is *nothing* at all (105-6). Parmenides concludes that Being can have no origin, it is complete in itself and involves neither a lack (nothingness) nor change and alteration (becoming). Instead we must look to Being and understanding or apprehension. Heidegger identifies an axiomatic statement: ‘where Being, there apprehension, and where no apprehension, no Being’ (121). This is the task of the first way, the journey to the home of the goddess. It involves the conceptualization of Being because we can only rely upon what is unconcealed, only this will ground our way to the truth (122). Heidegger returns to the role of time, as he did in parts 1 and 2, in order to complete our grasp of the beginning.

Being has no relation to the past and future (127). It only has a relation to the present in this understanding of time. Parmenides' temporal statement about Being is said to be: 'Being stands in relation to the present and only to it' (128). Being is identified with the present and presence (134) because this provides the unity of Being in time. This reflects Parmenides' concern with the unity of Being that allows no lack or absence. It is a 'oneness of presence' (137). We can now envision travelling the third way based on the first way. This is to question the third way while keeping the 'clarified outlook' of the first way in sight (142).

In his conclusion, Heidegger claims to have cleared the ground—'We have co-asked, re-asked, the question of Being. Being is starting to become question-worthy' (152). Heidegger now looks to 'the shocking greatness of this labor' (ibid), one that stands against the background of contemporary scientific and common human misunderstandings. He has certainly articulated unitary philosophies from the fragments of Anaximander and Parmenides while seeking to respond to critical questions about his method of interpretation. There is a genuine self-awareness in these lectures, one that defends a common lineage that links these ancient thinkers to Heidegger's own work. Rather than reading his own thought into these fragments, he claims to have uncovered something shared. From this follows his claim to be preparing the ground for future thinkers, a Nietzschean gesture, in a wider project that is marked by his name but also by many others at different stages in the unfolding of the same beginning through its re-enactment.

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