

MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Heraclitus. The Inception of Occidental Thinking; Logic: Heraclitus's Doctrine of the Logos*, translated by Julia Goesser Assaiante and S. Montgomery Ewegen, London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, xviii+309 pp., ISBN 978-0-8264-6241-1.

Heidegger, from the 1930s onwards, meditated on Heraclitus from two perspectives: the first is the reading, from the early 1930s, of Hölderlin, in which contradiction and struggle play a crucial role; the second is the thought of the history of being, in which Heraclitus is a central figure of the “first beginning”, which precedes the inauguration of philosophy as the thought of logos as rational and the thought of being from the beings. Two courses, here translated (“*Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens*”, summer semester of 1943, and “*Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*”, summer semester of 1944), and first published as volume 55 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, testify to the crucial role played by Heraclitus in the Heideggerian thought of the history of being, even if Heidegger, in his lectures, does not speak the same language as the major treaties of the 1930s only published from the late 1980s (in particular the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 1936/38, in which Heraclitus is already present, for example GA 65, p. 264–265; Heraclitus is, from the perspective of the history of metaphysics, first really commented on in 1931, in a course on Aristotle, GA 33, pp. 6–7). In this review, I will focus on specific passages from these two courses while discussing the translators’ choices.

It is first of all quite striking that in the first of these two courses, the anecdote of the oven (DK 22 A 9) and that of the game of “knucklebones” (DK22 A1) are interpreted from the perspective of the phenomenological proximity between humans and gods. The German text says: “*Das Wesen der Götter, die den Griechen erschienen, ist eben dieses Erscheinen im Sinne des Hereinblickens in das Geheuer, so zwar, daß das in das Geheuer herein und so aus ihm heraus Blickende das Ungeheuer ist, das sich in dem Umkreis des Geheueren dargibt*” (GA 55, p. 8). The translation says: “The essence of the gods who appeared to the Greeks is precisely this appearing, in the sense of a peering into the ordinary in such a way that what peers both into, and out of, the ordinary is the extraordinary that presences in the region of the ordinary” (p. 9). The translators’ entire bias is exposed here: a desire to clarify the translation, by means of an easily identifiable vocabulary (that of the ordinary), against the attempts of certain translations to render the complexity of the Heideggerian use of German (for example, the disputed translation by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly

(Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1999) of the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*). Indeed, “peering” translates as “*Hereinblicken*”, a substantive form that underlines the activity of looking “inside” or even “through”, i. e. the look that pierces the ordinary reality to detect the divine. In addition, the German word “*Geheuer*”, which Heidegger may borrow from Rudolf Otto (*Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Trewendt & Granier, Breslau, 1917), and which translators translate as “ordinary”, also refers to the familiar, the close, the homely (cf. GA 53, p. 86-87). The same type of translation is found in the proximity “*Nähe*”/ “*Ferne*”, translated very simply as “nearness”/ “farness” (for example p. 15), while “*Nähe*” also implies emotional and historical closeness: the proximity of the divine (in this case, the goddess Artemis) is also, at the same time, its distance, as a mode of appearance of the divine at the heart of man’s ordinary existence, for example in a temple where children play, complexity of reality as Christianity – according to Heidegger, from a Nietzschean perspective – abolished by rigidly distinguishing between nature and Heaven (this statement is repeatedly found in the 1930s treatises – for example GA 65, 66, 70, 71 – but also in the recently published “*Schwarze Hefte*” – GA 94-97). The complexity of these words, their polysemy, are the expression of the difficult phenomenon that Heidegger has wanted to designate since at least the first half of the 1930s: the divine is not something that belongs to an invisible, supra-sensuous, super-natural reality, but it is constitutive of the *phusis*, it is the visible beyond the visible, a visible reality within the very heart of the ordinarily visible reality. Translators make the choice, quite effectively, to express this complexity in the sentence itself rather than in the words, for the sake of clarity.

It is indeed the “*phusis*” that is at the heart of Heidegger’s reflections in this course, because it is the eventful process of the “*phusis*”, the coming to the appearance of beings, which constitutes the fundamental content of Heraclitus’ reality according to Heidegger. In addition to the well-known philological developments on “*φύσις/φύειν/φύον*”, which the lectures *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935, GA 40) have made famous, this course on Heraclitus exposes with a great pedagogy what Heidegger means by the concept of “*phusis*”. The simplicity of the translation corresponds to this didactic simplicity: “The fact that we, however, when considering a seed, still see how something closed emerges and, as emerging, comes forth, may seem insubstantial, outdated, and half-poetic compared to the perspective of the *objective* determination and explanation belonging to the modern understanding of the germination process (*daß wir aber noch bei der Betrachtung eines Keimlings sehen, wie Ver- schlossenes aufgeht und aufgehend hervorkommt, mag als veraltete und halbpoetische Vorstellung beiheerspielen, für die gegenständliche Bestimmung und Erklärung des modern ge- faßten Keimungsvorgangs sind dergleichen*

Vorstellungen ohne Gehalt). (...) Now, the Greek essence of *phusis* is in no way a generalization of what those today would consider the naïve experience of the emerging of seeds and flowers and the emergence of the sun. Rather, to the contrary, the original experience of the emerging and of coming-forth from out of the concealed and veiled is the relation to the ‘light’ in whose luminance the seed and the flower are first grasped in their emerging, and in which is seen the manner by which the seed ‘is’ in the sprouting, and the flower ‘is’ in the blooming (*das griechische Wesen der ‘phusis’ ist nun freilich keineswegs die passende Verallgemeinerung der, von heute aus gesehen, naiven Erfahrung des Aufgehens von Keimen und Blüten und des Aufgangs der Sonne, vielmehr ist umgekehrt die ursprüngliche Erfahrung des Aufgehens und des Hervorkommens aus dem Verborgenen und Verhüllten der Bezug zu dem ‘Licht’, in dessen Helle erst das sogenannte. Keimding und das Blütending in seinem Aufgehen festgehalten und darin die Weise gesehen wird, in der der Keim im Keimen, die Blüte im Blühen ‘ist’*)” (GA 55, p. 89-90; transl. p. 68). “Aufgehen” translated as “emerging”, “hervorkommen” as “coming forth”: in this course on Heraclitus, we are witnessing an original experimentation, through the work of translation, of these concepts well known since at least the publication of “*Einführung in die Metaphysik*”. This is the originality of this course, sophisticated in that it experiments with concepts through long efforts of translation, and at the same time didactic as an explanatory university course. Thus, we understand why Heidegger moves away from Nietzsche in his understanding of the Heraclitean “*phusis*”: it is indeed the manifestation, the coming into the presence (*Hervorkommen*) of being, the “is” of the seed, the “is” of the flower, but as far as this “is” is understood as a process, as a verb in the active sense, and not as a state or a substance (as Nietzsche understands it). “Is” is “being”, the participle that is the process of coming into presence.

Translating Heidegger also means translating a translator. These two courses are full of attempts to approach the Greek edited by DK. For example: τὸ μὴ δύνόν ποτε πῶς ἂν τις λάθοι; (DK22 B16). Heidegger translates by clarifying that: “*Dem ja nicht Untergehen(den) je, wie möchte irgendwer (dem) verborgen sein?*” (GA 55, p. 44), after DK who translated: “*Wie könnte einer dem nie Untergehenden je verborgen bleiben?*”. (For a later interpretation by Heidegger of the same fragment, see GA 15, p. 120.) Heidegger’s commentary of Heraclitus (and DK!) is difficult to translate; Heidegger, after DK, insists on the idea that something must be the subject of “δύνόν”, and at the same time on the complete indeterminacy of this subject. Similarly, the “τις” is left by Heidegger, more so than by DK, in the dark. However, here, the translator may not pay enough attention to these difficulties in translating (p. 37): “From the not ever submerging (thing), how may anyone be concealed (from it)?” “Submerging” (*Untergehen*) is

obviously more natural than “going-under”, for example, but “anyone” can mislead by referring to the German “*Man*”, generally translated as “One”, in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), which designates the *Dasein* governed by everyday life. However, Heidegger wants to relate the darkness of the subject of “*δύνόν*” to “*der Mensch als Mensch*”, to his “*Wesen*”, or to “*Mensch aus der Wesensmitte seines Menschseins*” (GA 55, p. 49), thus to a fundamental core of human being that has little to do with an undetermined *Dasein*, with an “anyone”. In other words, where Heidegger’s German is deliberately extremely condensed, just like the fragment, English translation is perhaps too rich, too connoted. Similarly, “thing” can mislead by referring to the German “*Ding*”, over-connoted in Heidegger, and obviously absent from his translation. And yet, Heidegger cannot use the word “*Ding*”, even in a sense not philosophically connoted, because he insists shortly afterwards on the fact that “*τὸ δύνόν*” should not be understood as a substantive noun, but as the “*das Untergehende* [very well translated by “the activity of submerging”, p. 43], nämlich in seinem Untergehen, also das Untergehen selbst und als solches” (GA 55, p. 53). However, translators are not so unjustified in using “Thing”, since Heidegger, after these remarks, again translates the fragment in these different terms: “*dem ja nicht Untergehen je, wie möchte irgendwer (dem) verborgen sein?*” (p. 58). He removes the “-den” gloss to mean the verblatity of “*τὸ δύνόν*”, the action it implies - and that translators render by judiciously erasing the “thing” they had first used: “From the not ever submerging, how may anyone be concealed?” (p. 46). We see the translators’ strategy: “Thing”, although absent from the first attempt to translate the fragment by Heidegger, allows translators to clearly indicate that Heidegger will assign enormous significance, as he goes along, to the fact that “*τὸ δύνόν*” must be interpreted as a participle, as a verbal, active form: “thing” disappears, and we have “the submerging”. Here again, translators consistently favour clarity over literality.

Translators’ desire for clarity and even simplicity has its advantages and costs. The advantages are, of course, the possibility for a wide variety of academics to have access to this difficult text, and to follow its thought-development and fundamental positions. The cost is sometimes a simplification, even an impoverishment, of the Heideggerian semantics. Let us take a particularly important example: “*Dies jedoch ist die Frage, ob das anfängliche Denken Metaphysik oder auch nur die Vorform dazu sei, oder ob im anfänglichen Denken sich anderes ereignet*” (GA 55, p. 100). The translation of the last part of the sentence is: “...or does something entirely different occur (*ereignet*) within inceptual thinking” (p. 75). Translators indicate in brackets that the verb they translate as “occur” is “*ereignet*”. Only a German-speaking person, and a connoisseur of Heidegger, can restore the complexity of the verb, which refers to a concept that is never thematized as such in Heidegger’s published courses or texts during his

lifetime (except perhaps in “*Zeit und Sein*” – 1962, GA 14), but which is at the heart of the unpublished treatises of the 1930s: *Ereignis* (cf. GA 65, 66, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73). And as Heidegger keeps repeating, “*Ereignis*” does not in any way mean an “occurrence”, a contingent event. The “*Ereignis*” does not “occur”, but opens a dimension in the history of being, refers to a process that links being to such a history – hence Heidegger’s use of such a verb here to question the place of Heraclitus’ thought in the history of metaphysics.

In addition, translators cannot maintain this requirement for simplicity in all cases, for example in the translation of absolutely crucial terms in the course: “*fügen/Fuge/Fügung/Fügen/Fügung/Gefüge*” (this conceptuality comes from the treatises of the 1930s). Indeed, the translation says: “join/joint/jointure/obedient jointure/structure”: we notice that translators are obliged to complexify their translation of “*Fügen*” (“obedient jointure”), that they translate “*Fügung*” and “*Gefüge*” by the same “structure”; also, they can translate “*Gefüge*” either by “combination” or by “configuration” or by “conjoining”, depending on the context. For the sake of clarity, refusing to use the English language as Heidegger uses the German language, translators are sometimes forced to distance themselves from what is the essence of the “*fug-*” radical, the joint. As a result, this radical is not always apparent where it should be in the translation. However, and it must be stressed, the translators are very consistent, and make the radical heard when Heidegger makes it particularly heard – for example: “*Das Aufgehen, die phusis, läßt sich als die genannte Fügung nur denken, wenn das Denken selbst fügsam ist und in der Fuge der Fügung den Fug denkt und dabei und so allein auch schon den anfänglichen Un-fug weiß*” (GA 55, p. 146), which is translated as: “Emerging (i.e. *phusis*) can only be thought as the above-mentioned jointure if thinking itself is compliantly joined to it and thinks the joining in the joint of the jointure, and thereby and exclusively knows already the inceptual disrupting dis-jointure” (p. 111). In other words, when contextually required, translators adapt their translations, without overly fixing their choices. When Heidegger writes: “...*meint cosmos nicht erst das Seiende im Ganzen, sondern die Fügung des Gefüges des Seienden*” (GA 55, p. 164), the translation reads: “*cosmos* does not mean only the entirety of beings, but rather the jointure of the conjoining of beings” (p. 124). “*Gefüge*” is not translated by “combination” or “configuration”, but by “conjoining”, in order to express the active meaning of the “*Ge-*” (gathering activity, insofar as “*Ge-*” assembles parts that are originally disjointed), and to express the how Heidegger uses the radical “*fug-*” here. This flexibility of translators, and their way of adapting their choices to the demands of the context in order to express Heidegger’s German as well as possible, is quite remarkable. It is evident that this translation is a high-quality tool for approaching a text whose primary interest is to show how Heidegger uses the conceptuality of

the “history of being” to interpret Heraclitus, but also the way Heraclitus enriches such conceptuality through Heidegger’s translation attempts.

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