

Thinking the Abyss of History: Heidegger's Critique of Hegelian Metaphysics

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Hegel's philosophy figures heavily in Heidegger's work. Indeed, when Heidegger becomes concerned with overcoming metaphysics, he will claim that Hegel's system is the highest point in the history of western philosophy, constituting the completion of metaphysics. Heidegger takes seriously Hegel's claim to have achieved absolute knowledge through subsuming the whole history of philosophy into his own system. Consequently, he argues, "any future, *still* higher standpoint over against it, which would be superordinate to Hegel's system...is once and for all impossible" (GA 68: 3-4/3-4). Heidegger's task of overturning metaphysics will require a "historical confrontation" with Hegel's system (GA 36/37: 13-14/10-11).

In his work entitled *Hegel*, Heidegger pursues this confrontation through a critical analysis of Hegel's concepts of negativity and nothingness. Heidegger claims that Hegel takes neither of these concepts "seriously," rather they are self-evidently presupposed and are only methodologically deployed in the quest for Absolute knowledge (GA 68: 47/37). Hegel never questions the meaning of nothingness and negativity as such. The importance of these concepts lies only in their dialectical sublimation, resulting in the becoming of what is absolutely determinable to thought. Negativity is this becoming, but since it is nothing, then nothing can be said of it. Negativity is always already engaged in the process of revealing the positivity of absolute thought (GA 68: 47/37). Thus, Hegel achieves certainty through the

deployment of negativity, but the truth of negativity as such is presupposed and “questionless” (GA 68: 14/11).

Against Hegel, Heidegger will argue that all representations, and truth claims about them, presuppose a “clearing” in which they can appear. Heidegger will argue that this clearing is itself nothing, though it is the condition for things to appear (GA 68: 46/37). What is important for Heidegger is that the self-concealment of the clearing, its nothingness, can never be “sublimated” (*aufgehoben*) or negated (GA 68: 46/37). Accordingly, Hegel’s absolute thought is impossible since it is always conditioned by the “a-byss” of the clearing. More succinctly, unconcealment can never abolish concealment.

Broadly put, the hypothesis of this essay will be that Heidegger’s account of the a-byss of the clearing is the point by which Heidegger wants to overcome metaphysics. If Hegel’s system is the historical culmination of the history of metaphysics, where nothing more could be added, then the self-concealment of the clearing allows for the occurrence of an inception of the truth of *beyng*. In regards to history, this inception will constitute a new historical beginning for philosophy, which Heidegger calls the “other beginning.” In short, Hegel’s philosophical history cannot be total, since it contains the possibility for historical rupture, made possible by the a-byss.

Our questioning will begin by examining the nature of Hegelian metaphysics. Then we will proceed to look at the role that both nothingness and negativity play in realizing this metaphysics. From here we will turn to Heidegger’s account of nothingness and truth, and how these concepts are employed in his critique of Hegel’s work. Lastly, we will examine Heidegger’s understanding of history, arguing that Heidegger’s account of nothingness allows for a rupture within Hegel’s teleological view of history.

HEGELIAN METAPHYSICS

For Hegel, logic “constitutes metaphysics proper.”¹ By this he means both that logic deals with the determination of concepts (like substance) that are found in thought alone and that these concepts are the actual

determinations of beings. Against Kant, who thought that the concepts of understanding are intelligible only when applied to sense intuition, Hegel thinks that “objective logic” is able to critique the concepts themselves without experience.² For Hegel, the result of this critique constitutes a “system of pure reason,” which reveals “truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature.”⁵

Hegel calls “objective thinking” the mode of thought that determines the pure concepts.⁴ This thinking is objective to the extent that the concepts determine what possible objects can be experienced or represented in thought. As Karin De Boer argues, the pure concepts “yield ontological perspectives that together determine the ways in which something can be objectified.”⁵ She points out that in the *Logic*, Hegel argues that something is actual only if it is determined by a concept, and thus, something without a concept is a “non-entity.”⁶ In other words, a being *is* only by being subsumed under a concept. Accordingly, Heidegger claims the determination of the concept reveals “what is conceived in the thing as such, its thinghood,” or “beings in their Being” (GA 36/37: 73/58).

In this regard, Hegel’s metaphysics fits into Heidegger’s understanding of metaphysics. For Heidegger, metaphysics “thinks being as a whole – the world, man, God – with respect to Being, with respect to the belonging together of beings in Being.” The Being of beings is the “ground” by which beings come to “presence,” that is, by which they can be said to be (GA 14: 69–70/56). In “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” Heidegger will argue that metaphysics is essentially “onto-theological,” because it attempts to think of this ground as *causa sui*, and thus the Being of beings becomes equated with the concept of God (GA 11: 67/60). This last point is crucial to understanding Heidegger’s critique of Hegel. As the culmination of metaphysics, Hegel’s thought is also the highest expression of onto-theology.

The total determination of the concepts culminates in absolute knowledge, or the “Absolute Idea.” While the concepts reveal beings in their Being, the Absolute Idea grasps the Being of beings, “the presence of what is present” (GA 14: 76/62). Hegel corroborates this claim

by identifying the Absolute Idea with being.⁷ Heidegger argues that Hegel's Absolute is onto-theological insofar as it equates the ground of beings with God (GA 36/37: 75–76/60). Indeed, Hegel claims that his system expresses the being of God: “It can therefore be said that his content is the *exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind*” (GA 36/37: 76/60). What is significant here is that Hegel reduces the concept of God to unconditioned thought; the Being of beings is rooted in thought itself. Consequently, knowing “as absolute equates itself with absolute Being; by creating absolute Being, it knows it and just simply is it” (GA 36/37: 76–77/61). Therefore, Hegel's thought is the highest instance of onto-theology because the knowledge of the Being of beings is immanent to thought; rather than being conditioned from without, Hegel can now determine the Being of beings unconditionally and, thus, with certainty.

Hegel's certainty is most manifest in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which describes the dialectical movement of consciousness as it becomes self-certain in the formation of Absolute Spirit, which is absolute knowledge. Spirit, in general, is a “noun for the activity of thinking.”⁸ However, Absolute Spirit refers to Spirit's recognizing itself, meaning that the thinking subject has become self-conscious.⁹ Thinking is now aware of itself as being determinative of the objects of thought; it recognizes that something is knowable only if it is made an object “for” consciousness (GA 68: 110/85). Hence, self-conscious thought is unconditionally certain of itself as the condition for knowledge. This constitutes the “absolute idea”: the “unconditioned representation, manifestation of its own self in the unconditioned truth of its own essence” (GA 68: 103/80). In light of what has preceded, then, the Absolute Idea can be understood as the certainty that the pure concepts of thought do indeed determine the actuality of objects, or beings.

However, it is important to note that Heidegger argues that Hegel does not simply realize the certainty of Absolute knowledge, but systematically presupposes it. This is supported by Hegel's claim that Absolute knowledge is a “certainty that has *become* truth.”¹⁰ Heidegger argues that the *Phenomenology* begins with the assumption that there

is Absolute knowledge, which explicitly unfolds itself through the mediation of consciousness. Thus, Heidegger notes that the first “shape of consciousness” at the beginning of *Phenomenology* is already the shape of Absolute Spirit (GA 68: 86/68).

How does Absolute knowledge unfold? The concepts of Hegel’s system are not static ideas, but contain an internal movement. For Hegel, concepts occur as connected opposites, like essence and accidents, which thought comprehends by resolving their oppositions. This is the dialectic: “the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative.”¹¹ But the dialectic is not simply an operation of a thinking subject. Rather, the dialectic belongs to the movement of the concepts as they determine themselves. This self-determination is the “Concept,” which is the “effort of something to determine itself by establishing the synthesis of its contrary determinations.”¹² Absolute knowledge is the result of the Concept once it has sublimated (*aufgehoben*) all oppositions within pure thought.

Ultimately, Heidegger contends that the *Phenomenology* reveals the “absolute self-knowing of spirit, i.e., absolute metaphysics” (GA 68: 122/94). The result of the *Phenomenology* is the self-certainty of thought as the condition for objective knowledge, including knowledge of the pure concepts, though these are more fleshed out in the *Logic*, which deals with the structure of pure thought independent of its appearance in consciousness.¹⁵ Thus, Hegel’s system is the completion of metaphysics because it reveals the necessary conditions by which beings are present to thought. Also, because this knowledge is certain, Hegel’s system reveals the truth of being, which no future philosophy could possibly supplant.

NOTHINGNESS AND NEGATIVITY IN HEGEL’S LOGIC

Having presented the structure of Hegel’s metaphysics, we turn to the role that nothingness and negativity play. The *Logic* begins with being and nothingness, which are the first oppositions to be dialectically sublimated. Hegel first posits the concept of pure being, which lacks any determinate content, and is therefore essentially nothing, claiming:

“Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same.”¹⁴ Yet this contradicts the understanding of being and nothingness as opposites. This contradiction is resolved, however, through affirming the difference between being and nothingness by means of the concept of “becoming,” when being is negated by nothingness, thereby revealing the truth of these concepts. “Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.”¹⁵ Out of becoming emerges the concept of “determinate being” (*Dasein*), which enables thought to determine something as a being and is the fundamental condition for knowledge.¹⁶

It is in this section of the *Logic* that we also see the appearance of negativity, which is the movement and determination of a concept through its negation. Hence, negativity is the negation of being by nothingness, identified as becoming, which results in determinate being. Thus, negativity results in a positive determination. Negativity will be the movement that determines all concepts.

However, Hegel distinguishes two forms of negativity: abstract and absolute. Abstract negation is the first negation of a being into nothingness, something into what it is not, while absolute negation is the negation of the abstract negation. Using De Boer’s example, abstract negation occurs when a tomato is declared not red, while absolute negation negates this claim, affirming that the tomato is red, although redness is not an essential aspect of being a tomato.¹⁷ As Hegel puts it, the determinate something “is equally the meditation of itself with itself.”¹⁸ That is to say, the tomato has determined itself as separate from its accidental property of being red.

The centrality of absolute negativity in Hegel’s system cannot be overstated. As the means by which all the concepts achieve self-determination, absolute negativity is the heart of the dialectical movement of the Concept. Hegel claims that absolute negativity is “the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true.”¹⁹ Absolute Spirit reveals its self through a process of

negation, for “it is its own restless process of superseding itself, or negativity.”²⁰ Thus, we can see that Hegel’s entire system is determined by negativity, which Heidegger calls “the energy” of unconditional thought (GA 68: 14/11).

HEIDEGGER’S CRITIQUE OF NOTHINGNESS AND NEGATIVITY

It should seem initially strange that Heidegger argues that Hegel takes neither negativity nor nothingness seriously. After all, nothingness begins the dialectical movement towards absolute knowledge, and negativity is the movement itself. Yet, both of these concepts are only conceived in relation to revealing the positivity of absolute knowledge. Moreover, negativity is grounded in the certitude of absolute knowledge: “Negativity as the negation of negation is grounded in the yes to unconditional self-consciousness – of absolute certainty as ‘truth’ (i.e., beingness as beings)” (GA 68: 14/11). Thus, negativity and nothingness are only methodically deployed, but are not examined as such.

Of course, as Heidegger interprets, Hegel would have good reason for not considering negativity, or nothingness, itself. It makes no sense to think of these things in themselves since, as nothing, they have no positive content (GA 68: 38/30). Yet Heidegger indicates that the truth of the claim presupposes that thought is only concerned with being, what is present. For Hegel, it is self-evident that thinking “maintains the determinative relation to the being of beings” (GA 68: 39/31). Thus, Heidegger concludes that Hegel’s assumption that thinking must always have determinate content makes negativity as such unquestionable.

In order to overcome this assumption, and thereby make nothingness questionable, Heidegger will turn to his notion of the “ontological difference”: being as such is not a being, and is therefore nothing. In a sense, the ontological difference is already found at the beginning of the *Logic*, where pure being and nothingness are undifferentiated. But it is ultimately sublimated into the affirmation of determinative being. Heidegger argues that the “renunciation” of the difference is an “essential presupposition of the possible absoluteness of unconditional thinking” (GA 68: 14/11). Hence, as Daniel Dahlstrom argues, Hegel

“must forsake any consideration of this ground [ontological difference] or relinquish its claim to be unconditioned.”²¹ It is going to be through the affirmation of the ontological difference that Heidegger is able to undermine Hegel’s metaphysical claim to absolute knowledge.

Dahlstrom also points out that during the time of this text (1938–1939) the meaning of the ontological difference has been altered. Heidegger has now “come to the conclusion that what it means to be, entailing the ontological difference, is a historical event, and this event, or more precisely, its unfolding or prevailing (*Wesung*), is the primordial sense of being (*Seyn*).”²² As early as *Being and Time*, Heidegger will express the ontological difference: “The being of beings ‘is’ itself not a being” (GA 2: 8/sz 6, tm). But he will come to see that it is not enough to think the difference between being and beings; we must reflect on its origin. This is primarily because the difference can be misunderstood as the difference between beings and beingness, the essential presence of being in beings. In this form, metaphysics is able to express the difference logically, reducing it to “harmlessness” (GA 65: 423–24/335).²³ Heidegger tries to salvage the radical nature of the difference by showing it to “originate in the essential occurrence of beyng,” which is to say, the “truth of beyng” (GA 65: 464–66/366).

In Hegel, Heidegger declares that to think nothingness is to “inquire into the truth of beyng” (GA 68: 15/12). Therefore, Heidegger’s task of confronting Hegel on the basis of questioning nothingness and, thereby, undermining his system becomes an engagement with the truth of beyng.

BEYNG, NOTHINGNESS AND TRUTH

What does Heidegger mean by the truth of beyng? How can this truth be disclosed if beyng is nothing? In order to ask these questions, it is necessary to examine what Heidegger means by truth. The question of the essence of truth figures into almost the entirety of his work. Critical of the traditional conception of truth as “correctness,” Heidegger tries to uncover and appropriate a more originary sense of truth, represented

by the Greek understanding of truth as *alētheia*, or “unconcealment” (*Unverborgenheit*).

In “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger gradually reveals unconcealment as the condition for the possibility of the traditional understanding of truth. This is done by way of a three-stage regression.²⁴ First, Heidegger defines the traditional conception of truth as the “correctness” of the statement with regard to the matter (*Sache*): “A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made” (GA 9: 179/138). For example, the statement “the truck is red” is true if the truck it refers to is indeed red.

At the second stage, Heidegger argues that this sense of truth is made possible by “comportment,” a way of relating to beings such that they are made present *as* they are. So, using our example, the statement is a way of comportment that explicitly presents the truck as red. More specifically, Heidegger will define this presenting as letting a being “stand opposed as object,” as something over and against us (GA 9: 184/141). Comportment, then, reveals beings as objects present before us.²⁵ Thus, insofar as it is the condition that makes possible truth as correctness, Heidegger concludes that the “openness of comportment” is the more originary essence of truth (GA 9: 185/142).

Third, Heidegger claims that comportment is grounded in freedom, which is the essence of truth (GA 9: 186/142). For Heidegger, comportment occurs within an “open region,” a space within which beings are revealed as such (GA 9: 184/141). In this context, Heidegger’s sense of freedom is to be understood as “letting beings be”: that is, letting beings be revealed as they are within the open region (GA 9: 188/144). For us, the truck occurs within an open region, which lets the statement declare it as red. In this sense, Heidegger claims that to let be is not to leave beings alone, but to relate oneself towards them in such a way that they are revealed, or unconcealed, *as* they are.

It is on this point that Heidegger introduces his notion of unconcealment. For Heidegger, unconcealment both signifies the revealing of beings *as* beings within the open region and is equated with the region itself (GA 9: 184/141). The unconcealment of beings means that

they are present to thought. It is apparent, then, that unconcealment is very different from what we would normally call truth. Heidegger stresses this difference in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”: “*alētheia*, unconcealment in the sense of the clearing, may not be equated with truth. Rather, *alētheia*, unconcealment thought as clearing, first grants the possibility of truth” (GA 14: 85-86/69). The identification of unconcealment with “the clearing” (*Lichtung*) further emphasizes this difference. For Heidegger, the clearing acts in just the same manner as a clearing in the forest. Just as a forest clearing is a space that is free and allows light to reach the forest floor, the clearing “is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent” (GA 14: 81/65). Within the clearing beings are unconcealed in their presence.

But clearing is not a physical space. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that Dasein “is itself the clearing.” Dasein, the being that we ourselves are, is a being that has a pre-ontological understanding of being as such. For this reason, Dasein is not only able to encounter and understand beings *as* beings, but also comports itself towards its own being. Dasein is a clearing insofar as it has already cleared itself as a being (GA 2: 177/SZ 133). Thus, the clearing is not a physical space, but the site in which beings are intelligibly present. Yet in “On The Essence of Truth,” Heidegger will use the word *Da-sein* to emphasize the distinction between the open region and the being of man. For *Da-sein* is the “essential ground, long ungrounded, on the basis of which man is able to ek-sist, [and which] is preserved for him” (GA 9: 189/145). Also, Heidegger claims that it is by “standing” in the clearing that “man is in the ground of *Da-sein*” (GA 68: 45/36). Thus, like other beings, the being of man is manifest within the clearing.

To think the clearing for unconcealment is pivotal for overcoming metaphysics. As the site that “first grants Being and thinking and their presencing to and for each other,” the clearing is the condition for the possibility of metaphysics (GA 14: 84/68). Because metaphysics attempts to think the Being of beings, it requires and presupposes the clearing, but does not think the clearing as such (GA 14: 82/66). Metaphysically,

the clearing is unthinkable, because it is not a being; the clearing itself is concealed and, as such, is nothing (GA 14: 88/71). In the 1930s, Heidegger will call the clearing an “a-byss,” to emphasize that it is the ground by which beings emerge and yet it is a ground that is never “present-at-hand” (GA 68: 45-46/37); it is a ground that “refuses” or conceals itself, and thus only appears groundless.²⁶

What does the a-byssal ground of the clearing have to do with the truth of beyng? What do our findings have to do with undermining Hegel’s system? In *Hegel*, Heidegger directly equates beyng with the a-byss of the clearing.²⁷ What this means is that beyng is the clearing that makes possible the unconcealment of beings *as* beings, and of making correct truth claims. Thus, the most primordial essence of truth (the grounding of truth) is the truth of beyng. More radically, though, Heidegger will contend that the truth of beyng is not different from beyng, “but rather is the most proper essence of beyng” (GA 65: 93-94/74). But, as we have mentioned, the truth of beyng is also the origin of the ontological difference. This means two things. First, as origin, beyng is not something eternal, but is something that happens: “Beyng essentially occurs as event” (GA 65: 344/272-73). Second, this event explicitly bestows the difference between being as such and beings.²⁸ However, this bestowal does not mean that beyng is unconcealed; it is pivotal for Heidegger that beyng is always concealed. “Beyng is a possibility, something that is never objectively present and yet is always bestowing and denying itself in refusal through appropriation” (GA 65: 475-76/374).

This leads us to Heidegger’s critique of Hegel. Because Hegel is concerned with representing the Being of beings, his system is also grounded on the abyssal clearing. It is through the clearing that the “I” is able to “represent something as something in the light of being” (GA 68: 45/36). Further, this representing includes the “unconditional representation” of self-consciousness, which constitutes the certitude of the Absolute Idea (GA 68: 80/103). Thinking the nothingness of the truth of beyng undermines Hegel’s claim to absolute knowledge, for knowledge cannot be unconditional if it is conditioned by the clearing. Moreover,

while Hegel unconsciously articulates the ontological difference and then proceeds to negate it, the truth of *beyng* is incapable of negation. “The clearing of concealment does not mean the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the concealed, i.e., its liberation and transformation into unconcealment. It instead means precisely the grounding of the abyssal ground for the *concealment* (the hesitant withholding)” (GA 65: 352/278).

Thus, Heidegger undermines Hegel by affirming nothingness and negativity, understood as the clearing of the truth of *beyng*.²⁹ Hegel’s supposed certitude rests on an abyss, which cannot be represented as if it were a being. Indeed, Heidegger’s appeal to the clearing makes any claim to certitude, concerning being, impossible. As Richard Polt argues, the event of *beyng* withdraws (conceals) “in the sense that it cannot be guaranteed, mastered, or founded metaphysically on some absolute entity or certainty.”⁵⁰ He notes that Heidegger corroborates this in the *Contributions*: “non-definitive knowledge adheres precisely to the abyss and thus to the essence of *beyng*” (GA 65: 459–60/362). Also, for this reason, *beyng* is not eternal, but contingent, finite and, as we will see, historical.⁵¹

HISTORY IN HEIDEGGER AND HEGEL

Hegel’s thought is the completion of philosophy not only because it makes the certitude of thought the Being of beings, but also because he philosophically realized the whole history of philosophy in his system. Heidegger claims, “Hegel gathered the entire earlier (even pre-platonic) history of philosophy into an affiliation,” arguing that there was a “necessity arising out of the essence of beingness (idea), a necessity according to which the phases of the history of the ideas had to form themselves into those phases” (GA 65: 213–14/167). While it is tempting to cast aside Hegel’s philosophical history as presumptuous, Heidegger takes this claim seriously, calling it the first and last “appropriate” philosophical interrogation of history.

For Hegel, world history follows a rational and necessary development. Absolute Spirit enacts history in the effort to realize itself. “In history [Spirit’s] act is to gain consciousness of itself as Mind [Spirit],

to apprehend itself in its interpretation of itself to itself.”⁵² This same teleology is reflected in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, the “goal” of Absolute Spirit is partially realized through the dialectical meditation of “comprehended history.”⁵³ Hegel argues that all instances of life, from the individual person to the life of nations, are necessary as the “unconscious tools and organs” of Absolute Spirit.⁵⁴ Accordingly, this includes philosophy as well. For Hegel, the history of philosophy is a “revelation” of the telos of Spirit.⁵⁵

De Boer argues that the dialectical development of the Concept, by means of negation, is reflected not only in the *Logic*, but also in the history of philosophy itself.⁵⁶ This is evident by the fact that the beginning of the *Logic* parallels the beginning of philosophy. Parmenides determines pure being as the “absolute and self truth,” which is summarily negated by Heraclitus, who presents the “higher, total concept of becoming.”⁵⁷ The history of philosophy is a positive development of thought, where each critique leads to closer instances of absolute knowledge. However, De Boer notes that the thoughts of actual philosophers are the “merely subjective side of the absolute reflection achieved by the concept as such.”⁵⁸ The necessary process of history is the activity of the Concept itself.

Hegel’s system is exemplary in the history of philosophy, insofar as it takes into account the necessary shape of philosophy. The absolute knowledge posited at the beginning of philosophy is realized in the certitude of Hegel’s thought. Thus, Hegel’s history is not linear; rather “Hegel can understand the history of thinking as a closed circle of which his own philosophy constitutes the final link.”⁵⁹

In some respects, Heidegger’s view of history is not totally dissimilar. Michel Haar speaks of Heidegger’s account of the history of philosophy as an “inversion of Hegelianism.”⁴⁰ While Hegel claims that history progressively moves towards absolute knowledge, for Heidegger this progression is actually the “increasing oblivion of the commencement, of the inaugural essence of truth as *alētheia*.”⁴¹ Negatively, the end of philosophy, or metaphysics, is the culmination of nihilism and the technological domination of the earth. What is this oblivion? It

is the forgetting of the ontological difference (GA 11: 59/50). Or, more specifically, its origin: the truth of being.

The similarity between Hegel and Heidegger can be found in the fact that Heidegger seems to posit some form of historical necessity. Heidegger speaks of the history of Being, that is to say the history of the forgetting of the ontological difference, as a “destiny” (*Geschick*), “the sending of being.”⁴² However, this is not destiny in the sense that a certain event had to happen, but that certain past events produce a narrower frame for what future possibilities are available. So too has the interpretation of “Being” been framed by history.⁴³ Radically, Heidegger argues that the most basic structure of language, the articulation of being through the word “is,” has influenced the assumption that being concerns only what *is*, in terms of presence: “The little word ‘is’... contains the whole destiny of Being – from the ἔστιν γὰρ εἶναι of Parmenides to the ‘is’ of Hegel’s speculative sentence, and to the dissolution of the ‘is’ in the positing of the Will to Power with Nietzsche” (GA 11: 79/73). Hegel’s historical necessity, for Heidegger, is built on an assumption, grounded in language, that being refers to presence. But if Heidegger’s sense of the truth of being, as concealing, grounds and potentially overturns the metaphysical desire to determine the presence of being in beings, then does this concealing also contain the potential for a rupture in the historical destiny of being as reflected in Hegel’s system?

While the destiny of philosophy has been dictated by the metaphysical determination of Being, there belongs to this history a more “essential past” (*Wesensherkunft*, GA 11: 48/72) which made metaphysics possible: the ontological difference. But this is not to say that at some historical point being was thought; it is rather the un-thought origin of philosophy. In fact, for Heidegger, the retrieval of this difference (the truth of being) will constitute a new path for thought, unthinkable within the history of being, which Heidegger calls “the other beginning.”⁴⁴ This “inceptual thinking” will take place as a “confrontation” (GA 65: 58–59/47) between the first and the other beginning, and will include a critical appropriation of the whole metaphysical tradition,

with the aim of accessing the truth of beyng (GA 65: 171–72/135). This necessarily includes Hegel’s system as well.

The historical thinking of beyng (*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*) constitutes both a new path in philosophy and the appropriation of the history of metaphysics.⁴⁵ Turning back to our earlier concern with negativity and negation, the historical thinking of beyng is a meditation on nothingness that cannot be subsumed in the history of metaphysics. It is an ever-present possibility within the history of philosophy. Hence, Hegel’s historical account of his certitude is nullified by the possible historical emergence of the truth of beyng. This is evident in section 90 of the *Contributions*. Here Heidegger claims that “negation” needs to be recognized as the “leap” away from the first beginning, and “does so out of a knowledge and recognition of the uniqueness of what, at its end, demands the other beginning” (GA 65: 178–79/140). The negativity of the truth of beyng calls us to realize that history is not complete, but requires a rebirth. Heidegger claims that negativity not only makes “otherness,” like the other beginning, possible, but also “compels” it (GA 65: 266–68/210).

We conclude, then, that Heidegger’s affirmation of the nothingness of the truth of beyng undermines Hegel’s system not only in regards to his claim of realizing absolute, unconditional knowledge, but also in regards to his claim that this knowledge developed out of historical necessity. Hegel’s thought cannot be the completion of history insofar as the truth of beyng enables and, in fact compels, the historical emergence of a new path for thinking, founded on the truth of beyng. However, we cannot say what this emergence will look like. At this point it is only a possibility. Heidegger posits that being-historical thinking is thinking that is still to come, reserved for the “future ones” who will ground the abyss of the truth of beyng (GA 65: 395–401/313–18).⁴⁶

Notes

- 1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 27.
- 2 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 64.
- 3 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.
- 4 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 51.
- 5 Karin De Boer, *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 41.
- 6 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 50.
- 7 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 824.
- 8 Allegra de Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth R. Westphal (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 248.
- 9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 485.
- 10 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 47.
- 11 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 56.
- 12 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 43.
- 13 de Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," 260.
- 14 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 82.
- 15 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 83.
- 16 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 88.
- 17 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 70.
- 18 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 116.
- 19 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 835.
- 20 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 491.
- 21 Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Thinking of Nothing: Heidegger's Criticism of Hegel's Conception of Negativity," in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 529.
- 22 Dahlstrom, "Thinking of Nothing," 530.
- 23 Cf. Karin De Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000), 146–147.

- 24 This reading of “On The Essence of Truth” was discussed by John Sallis in a class on Heidegger.
- 25 Statements are only one mode of comportment. For Heidegger, all action is comportment: “All working and achieving, all action and calculation, keep within an open region within which beings . . . take their stand and become capable of being said” (GA 9: 184/141).
- 26 “The opening of the abyssal ground is not groundless. The abyss is not a ‘no’ to every ground in the manner of groundlessness; it is rather a ‘yes’ to the ground in the concealed breadth and remoteness of that ground” (GA 65: 387–88/306).
- 27 “The abyss: beyng” (GA 68: 37).
- 28 Heidegger also notes that the pre-ontological understanding of beings in *Being and Time* is shown now “as belonging to an appropriation by beyng itself” (GA 65: 252–53/199)
- 29 Heidegger claims that the negative belongs to truth, though not as a lack, “but as resistance, as the self-concealing which comes into the clearing as such” (GA 65: 355–56/181).
- 30 Richard Polt, “The Question of Nothing,” in *A Companion to Heidegger’s “Introduction to Metaphysics,”* ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 72.
- 31 The descriptions of beyng as contingent and finite are Polt’s words.
- 32 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), §343.
- 33 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 493.
- 34 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §344.
- 35 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 547.
- 36 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 55.
- 37 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 83.
- 38 De Boer, *On Hegel*, 58.
- 39 De Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time*, 305.

- 40 Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 72.
- 41 Haar, *Song of the Earth*, 72.
- 42 Haar, *Song of The Earth*, 69.
- 43 “‘Being’ ever always speaks as destiny, and thus permeated by tradition” (GA 11: 60/51).
- 44 Heidegger’s description of the other beginning: “The other beginning experiences the truth of beyng, and asks about the beyng of truth in order first to ground the essential occurrence of beyng and to let beings arise as the true of the original truth” (GA 65: 179–80/141).
- 45 John Sallis argues, “it is only in the crossing into another beginning that an originary appropriation of metaphysics and of its history becomes possible; that is, precisely at the point of its overcoming that metaphysics first becomes recognizable in its essence.” See “Grounders of the Abyss,” in *Companion to Heidegger’s “Contributions to Philosophy,”* eds. Charles Scott et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 184.
- 46 However, this does not mean canceling the abyss, but “apprehending” it as the abysmal ground: Sallis, “Grounders of the Abyss,” 189.