
Heidegger's Greeks

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MARTIN HEIDEGGER FREQUENTLY refers in his writings to the Greeks, more so perhaps than any other major philosopher since Nietzsche. These references take one or the other of two forms. On the one hand, Heidegger often names specific ancient Greek individuals whom the informed reader can identify without difficulty as more or less well-known, attested ancient Greek authors, to whose transmitted works, or at least certain parts thereof, he is alluding. This fact raises a first set of questions: which Greeks does Heidegger name by preference, and why these ones, and why not others? On the other hand, he also tends to refer to a group of nameless and non-individualized people whom he calls, simply, "the Greeks." In some of his texts, and especially in certain parts of these, such references cease to be merely scattered and punctual, and assume instead a peculiar density and consistency. For example, within a few pages in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes, "*Im Zeitalter der ersten und maßgebenden Entfaltung der abendländischen Philosophie bei den Griechen, durch die das Fragen nach dem Seienden als solchem im Ganzen seinen wahrhaften Anfang nahm, nannte man das Seiende φύσις*" ("In the age of the first and authoritative development of Western philosophy among the Greeks, through which the question of what is as such as a whole had its true beginning, what is was named φύσις," GA 40.15),¹ or again, "*Die Griechen haben nicht erst an den Naturvorgängen erfahren, was φύσις ist . . .*" ("It was not first of all on the basis of natural processes that the Greeks experienced what

φύσις is . . . ,” 17), or again, “*Das Seiende als solches im Ganzen nennen die Griechen φύσις*” (“The Greeks name what is as such as a whole φύσις,” 18), or finally, “*Wir setzen dem Physischen das »Psychische«, das Seelische, Beseelte, Lebendige entgegen. All dieses aber gehört für die Griechen auch später noch zur φύσις. Als Gegenerscheinung tritt heraus, was die Griechen θέσις, Setzung, Satzung nennen oder νόμος, Gesetz, Regel im Sinne des Sittlichen*” (“We set in opposition to the physical the ‘psychical,’ the spiritual, animate, living. But all of this belongs for the Greeks even later to φύσις. As the opposite phenomenon appears what the Greeks call θέσις, positioning, statute, or νόμος, law, rule, in the sense of the ethical,” 18). Another example is supplied by a few pages of his essay “*Vom Wesen und Begriff der φύσις: Aristoteles, Physik B, 1*”: “*Für die Griechen aber bedeutet »das Sein« die Anwesenung in das Unverborgene*” (“But for the Greeks ‘Being’ means *presentification into the unconcealed*,” GA 9.270), or “*Aristoteles . . . bewahrt nur das, was die Griechen von jeher als das Wesen des λέγειν erkannten*” (“Aristotle . . . preserves only what the Greeks had long recognized as the essence of λέγειν,” 279), or again, “*An sich hat λέγειν mit Sagen und Sprache nichts zu tun; wenn jedoch die Griechen das Sagen als λέγειν begreifen, dann liegt darin eine einzigartige Auslegung des Wesens von Wort und Sage, deren noch unbetretene Abgründe keine spätere »Sprachphilosophie« je wieder ahnen konnte*” (“In itself λέγειν has nothing to do with speaking and language; however, if the Greeks conceive speaking as λέγειν, then there lies therein a unique interpretation of the essence of word and language, of whose abysses, still untrodden, no later ‘philosophy of language’ was ever capable of having even an inkling,” 280), or finally, “*das Entscheidende . . . besteht darin, daß die Griechen die Bewegtheit aus der Ruhe begreifen*” (“What is decisive . . . consists in the fact that the Greeks conceive motion on the basis of rest,” 283–84). This striking and characteristic linguistic usage of Heidegger’s raises a second question: just who are these anonymous

Greeks to whom he is referring? Both sets of questions can be summarized in a single one: who are Heidegger's Greeks?

I shall try to approach an answer to this question by proposing six theses, and I apologize in advance for their inevitable crudeness to Heidegger, to the Greeks, and to my readers. They are intended to elicit discussion rather than to terminate discussion, and to contribute if possible to a somewhat clearer understanding both of what Heidegger was actually doing and of one role at least that ancient Greek thought was able to play in modern German thought. I write here as a professional classicist and student of the classical tradition, and I write not only for professional philosophers but also for non-professional readers more widely interested in the interrelations between philosophy, literature, and culture. Heidegger himself sometimes took care to distinguish his own philosophical project from a historical reconstruction of the realities of ancient Greece that would satisfy the criteria of professional classical scholarship (e.g., H 309–10); this fact, so far from rendering superfluous the question of just who Heidegger's Greeks were, makes it all the more interesting. No doubt Heidegger's adherents—and not only they—will find in my remarks further proof for his thesis that *Wissenschaft* (science, scholarship) and (Heidegger's) *Denken* (thought) are incapable of understanding one another. “*Inmitten der Wissenschaften denken, heißt: an ihnen vorbeigehen, ohne sie zu verachten*” (“To think amidst the sciences means: to go past them without despising them,” H 195); maybe so, but the task of scholarship must remain that of questioning thought, respectfully, as it goes by.

1. Heidegger's Greeks are a pagan Gospel.

Whatever uncertainty there might be concerning the identity of the persons whom Heidegger's references to the Greeks denote, there can be little doubt about the function these references play within the rhetorical strategy of his texts.

To understand this function, imagine that it is Sunday morning in a small town in southwestern Germany. We find

ourselves, of course, in a church—it does not matter for present purposes whether it is a Catholic or a Lutheran one. Before the seated congregation, a priest or a minister is standing. He addresses the worshippers. He accuses them in tones which are partly peremptory, partly compassionate, of having fallen away from their highest capabilities and of having forgotten the supreme Being; they have been living thoughtlessly and carelessly, he says, and have been dedicating themselves to the merely transient pleasures of today's world. Not only does he argue and accuse: he supports his claims by reference to an authoritative text. He undertakes to prove his point by citing a short passage from the Bible, preferably from the New Testament, and by interpreting it in as much detail as his inventiveness and his audience's patience will permit. The worshippers listen in abashed silence. When he has finished, they all say, "Amen," go home, and have a big lunch.

My first thesis is that Heidegger's writings tend very often to adopt the tone and rhetorical strategies of the Christian sermons I have invited you just now to imagine, but that when they do it is never the Greek New Testament, let alone the Septuagint (or a German translation of either), to which he devotes his spiritual exegesis, but other Greek texts, prose and poetry, which provide him with what can most precisely be described as a pagan Gospel. They give him a lever with which he can try to dislodge modernity by reminding us of what we may be made to believe that we knew once but have since forgotten. He seems to believe that, by exploiting what can be taken to be their originality and priority, their unquestionable authenticity, he can convince us to share his view of everything that is wrong with the facticity of our lives in this modern, technological world. Freiburg must be saved from New York and Moscow—but by Athens, not by Jerusalem or Rome.

Some version of this idea has been a commonplace of every European Renaissance at least since the Second Sophistic of Roman Imperial times, including especially the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, the German Romantic Humanism of the 1790s, and finally the Third Hu-

manism that Werner Jaeger propagated in the 1930s. Such Renaissances have been typically non-Christian or anti-Christian in their fundamental orientation (which is not to say that there were not some individuals of profound Christian faith among their proponents), yet they have tried to achieve some of the very same ends that Christianity has often sought—the moral improvement of the individual, the foundation of a spiritual community, the rejection of the blandishments of the material world surrounding us in favor of spiritual values manifested in great works of the past—and they have used some of the very same techniques. This is one reason, and perhaps the most basic one, for some of the oddities of Heidegger's 1947 "Letter on Humanism": for there can be no doubt that Heidegger—who in that essay explicitly rejects the traditions of European Humanism (GA 9.320) and opposes his own philosophy to what is usually understood as Humanism (330, 334) but nonetheless claims firmly to oppose "*das Inhumane*" ("the inhumane," 340, 345–46, 348) and takes considerable pains to define his own philosophical project as a new and higher Humanism, the only one that truly reflects the dignity of man (342, 352)—is in fact *malgré lui* a Humanist himself.

The relation between Heidegger and Christianity is of course a highly complex and problematic one (see e.g., H 202–3). But what is certain is that the stark contrast between philosophy and religious belief with which such texts as his *Introduction to Metaphysics* opens (GA 40.8–9), as well as his frequent denigration of the Latin language and of Roman culture—which he contests for being not only a Roman mediation (and hence betrayal) of Greek philosophy, but also a Christian and medieval Scholastic mediation of Greek paganism—programmatically exclude the Christian Gospels from a philosophical discourse which has evidently been shaped by Christian traditions. Thereby is opened up a textual space, which the pagan Greeks can come to fill.

So too, Heidegger's method of presentation of Greek texts is reminiscent of the use of the Gospels in Christian sermons:

quotation of short passages in translation; explanatory translation, or more precisely paraphrase, which works out the implications seen in the text by packing them tendentiously into the translation itself; and a lengthy exegesis which aims to work out everything implied or concealed within the text. And yet, viewed within this light, Heidegger's mode of exegesis is very odd: for he is almost always at considerable pains to work against the text, to struggle against its apparent meaning in support of some other level of signification which is far from obvious. Thus even if Heidegger's own variety of pneumatic exegesis is ultimately derived from a theological tradition, in him it takes on an extreme and problematic form. To understand this, let us turn to the second thesis.

2. Heidegger's Greeks are the speakers of a lexicon of primal philosophical terms.

It is a striking fact about Heidegger's use of the Greeks that he never interprets at length a whole text of Greek poetry or philosophy from beginning to end, but instead focuses restrictively upon short sections, chapters, indeed often only sentences. In dealing with longer texts that have been transmitted *in extenso*, he evidently prefers to fragment them into smaller ones. What is more, he seems strongly to prefer to deal with texts that are transmitted in a fragmentary form rather than with ones still extant in their entirety, and in interpreting the surviving testimony of ancient Greek philosophy he devotes most of his attention to especially brief fragments. One extreme, but not uncharacteristic, example is provided by *What Does Thinking Mean?*: here he expends about one quarter of the whole book upon a single line of Parmenides (WHD 105-49). But what he apparently most prefers to interpret is not even Greek texts, not even fragmentary Greek ones, but above all single words of the Greek language. Heidegger's interpretation of single Greek words tends to take one or the other of two forms: either he interprets a transmitted text, which is composed of one or more syntactical units, by explaining one by one all or most

or at least some of the individual words it contains; or else he simply discusses a small number of individual key words—for example, φύσις, ἀληθεία, λόγος, νοεῖν—in isolation from any particular text containing them.

So Heidegger, as an interpreter of Greek thought, consistently prefers parts to wholes, fragments to parts, sentences to fragments, and single words to sentences. In fact, he often goes even further, preferring the purported etymological roots of words to the attested meanings of the words themselves. Thus Heidegger may be said to lexicalize Greek thought. He seems to see the Greek language as a collection of individual substantives in the nominative case and ignores almost completely any other parts of speech than nouns or infinitives as well as the whole structure of syntax which permits Greek sentences to yield a meaning.

Heidegger's Greeks do not actually write, and if they do write, the less they write the better. The best Greeks, for Heidegger, seem to be ones who merely speak, and who speak single, heavily charged substantives with which they tacitly connect highly sophisticated and profoundly meditated but unspoken associations. Heidegger's Greeks do not so much compose literary or philosophical texts as rather simply enounce to one another these primal philosophical terms. They look at one another, say φύσις, and nod slowly. That is why Heidegger must interpret the surviving Greek texts so often against their apparent meaning, for he is trying to restore them from the condition of factitious actual utterances, to which they have fallen, back to their originary, fully authentic status as a primal archive of philosophy.

3. Heidegger's Greeks are only some Greeks.

Heidegger speaks often about "the Greeks." But most of the real Greeks of the ancient world seem to be a matter of complete indifference, or even ignorance, to him.

First of all, he turns the Greeks into the Greek language: it is only insofar as the Greeks are producers of written texts or speakers of the Greek language that they interest him. Hei-

degger displays no interest in, or even awareness of, Greek history, Greek warfare, Greek economics, Greek politics, Greek cuisine, Greek sports, Greek slavery, Greek families, Greek women, or Greek children. He hardly mentions Greek religion, and—with apparently only one exception—does so only so as to explain certain aspects of Greek philosophy, for example referring to Artemis as a context for Heraclitus (GA 55.14–19); that exception is his discussion of the Greek temple in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where however it is difficult to imagine what if anything the reflections Heidegger associates with that building have to do with Greek religion as understood by ancient or modern scholarship (H 30–44). So the Greeks, whom Heidegger celebrates as the last representatives of a nature still untainted by the defects of Western civilization, in fact seem to interest him only as the producers of the traditional monuments of high culture. But even here, Heidegger ignores such other forms of Greek high culture as art and sculpture and focuses exclusively upon Greek words. Characteristically, he tends to neglect the biographies of ancient thinkers, except in his lecture on Heraclitus, where however he radically reinterprets a few anecdotes of doubtful authenticity in order to provide them with a deep philosophical meaning (GA 55.5–13).

But second, within this technique of turning the Greeks into Greek, Heidegger performs a severe generic and historical restriction of the field of relevant evidence. Generically, only philosophy and the loftiest forms of poetry, Homer's epics and Pindar's odes and Sophocles' tragedies, enter his field of vision. Heidegger's Greeks do not write comedies, epigrams, invectives, oratory, histories, romances, love poetry, letters, laws, scientific or medical texts; in fact, even within lyric poetry and tragedy they do not write Sapphic odes or Euripidean tragedies. And historically, Heidegger is interested only in the very earliest period of Greek philosophy and poetry. Among Greek poets, Heidegger apparently cites none later than Sophocles. Hellenistic and Imperial Greek poetry and prose—to say nothing of Byzantine litera-

ture—seem to be entirely absent from his reading. As for Greek philosophy, for Heidegger it seems to die out at the very latest with Plato and Aristotle—“*So ist es mit der Philosophie der Griechen. Sie ging mit Aristoteles groß zu Ende*” (“So it is with the philosophy of the Greeks. It came to an end grandly with Aristotle,” GA 40.18). The great schools of Hellenistic and Imperial Greek philosophy—the Academy and the Lyceum, Scepticism and Cynicism, Epicureanism and Stoicism and Neoplatonism—have left almost no trace in his writings. When he mentions Simplicius, it is only because Simplicius transmits—and distorts—fragments of Presocratic philosophy. Only the Presocratics earn his full admiration—and among them, only Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.

Thus Heidegger’s Greeks, insofar as they are authors (and not just speakers of Greek), are the authors of a very small selection of celebrated texts, from Homer through Aristotle, with the emphasis on the fifth century (Heraclitus, Parmenides, Sophocles) rather than on earlier or later periods. This list corresponds to a selection from the canon of school authors taught in German humanistic Gymnasien since the nineteenth century—but here freighted with a portentous metaphysical weight.

4. Heidegger’s Greeks are Nietzsche’s Greeks.

Heidegger’s restrictively narrow selection among the extant texts of Greek literature and philosophy is strikingly reminiscent of the canonizations performed by Friedrich Nietzsche within the same domains. In all areas of Greek culture, Nietzsche’s general preference for the archaic in all its manifestations led him to privilege earlier over later periods, the Classical over the Hellenistic and Imperial, the Preclassical over the Classical. To be sure, within the field of Greek poetry, on the one hand, Nietzsche much preferred tragedy to all other earlier and later Greek poetic genres, and within tragedy he much preferred Sophocles to Aeschylus and Euripides. Of course, in these choices Nietzsche was merely following, or,

better, providing a new rationale for, preferences which can be traced back to antiquity itself but which became newly current in the nineteenth century, especially in the wake of August Wilhelm Schlegel's highly influential lectures on dramatic poetry. But in his marked preference within Greek philosophy for the Presocratics over Plato and all later Greek philosophy, on the other hand, Nietzsche was innovative and directly influential. It was above all Nietzsche who bequeathed to contemporary and subsequent German thought the view of the earliest Greek thinkers as an ideal community of isolated, heroic, polemical and misunderstood individuals whose fragmentary philosophical insights were nobler and more profound than the optimistic, banal, systematic schools that followed the caesura marked by Socrates or Plato. Indeed, to a certain extent, one may even speak of Nietzsche's "invention" of the concept of Presocratic philosophy.

Heidegger emphasizes the same Greeks as Nietzsche did, with the exception of Socrates, who plays a crucial negative role in Nietzsche's understanding of Greek philosophy but who is apparently entirely absent from Heidegger's writings—presumably he is too dialogical, or too hard to separate from Plato, for the monological and anti-Platonic Heidegger. Among the Presocratics, Heidegger seems to prefer above all Heraclitus, who was closely linked with Nietzsche in the eyes of many Germans. Nietzsche himself had assigned to Heraclitus a particular prominence and pathos among those he called "the tyrants of the spirit" as the most tragically philosophical and philosophically tragic representative of "philosophy in the tragic age," and even Nietzsche's opponent Hermann Diels, in the preface to his critical edition of the fragments of Heraclitus, had pointed out the affinities between the ancient Greek philosopher and the contemporary German one. Did they not both compose philosophy in the form of striking, memorable, and highly metaphoric aphorisms, did they not both assume a violently polemical stance with regard to the dominant ideologies of their time, did they not both address a spiritual elite, were

they not both notoriously melancholy?

Of course there are unmistakable differences between Heidegger's interpretation of the Presocratics, not least of Heraclitus, and Nietzsche's. Heidegger himself is often at pains to emphasize these differences, and thereby creates an impression of greater independence on his part from Nietzsche's view of Greek philosophy than is really the case. In fact, Heidegger seems to make use of Nietzsche as a tactical device to help him position himself over and against other contemporary ways of reading Greek philosophy.

In particular, Heidegger had to negotiate between two very different approaches to this subject matter which were dominant in contemporary German intellectual culture. On the one hand, the classical philologists claimed Greek philosophy as their own because it was *Greek* philosophy. Scholars like Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (*Aristoteles und Athen*, 1893; *Platon: Sein Leben und seine Werke*, 1918) devoted a resolutely historicizing and positivistic interpretation to these texts, emphasizing the biographical, historical, and political contexts of their situation of origination and explicitly denying to them any permanent philosophical validity. On the other hand, contemporary German philosophers, above all the Marburg Neokantians, claimed Greek philosophy as their own because it was Greek *philosophy*. Philosophers like Hermann Cohen (*Platons Ideenlehre*, 1878) and Paul Natorp (*Platons Ideenlehre, eine Einführung in den Idealismus*, 1903, 1921) justified what they considered the continuing philosophical relevance of the Greek philosophers, above all (though not exclusively) Plato, by seeing in their writings an attempt to come to grips with precisely the same central issues they identified in the works of Immanuel Kant. Anyone who wished neither to reduce Greek philosophy to the unique and unrepeatable personal or social circumstances under which it was produced nor to justify a claim for the perennial validity of Greek philosophy by identifying it with a particular stage in German Idealistic philosophy was obliged to try to mediate somehow between these two hostile

camp. For example, Julius Stenzel (*Studien zur Entwicklung der platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates bis Aristoteles*, 1917; *Zahl und Gestalt bei Platon und Aristoteles*, 1924; *Platon der Erzieher*, 1928) took great pains to reject explicitly both extreme positions, yet he himself found it difficult, if not impossible, to present a philosophically coherent picture of Plato which diverged radically from the general outlines of the Marburg school.

To focus on Plato in Germany in the 1920s without coming to terms once and for all with the Marburg Neokantians on the one hand and with Wilamowitz and his followers on the other would have been extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible. By adopting Nietzsche's canon, Heidegger was enabled to outflank this dilemma by concentrating instead on the Presocratics, whom both the Neokantians and Wilamowitz had largely neglected, but to whom many German classicists had been turning since the First World War. Thereby Heidegger could seem simultaneously nonconformist and fashionable. At the same time he could give the appearance of participating in a wider, not merely disciplinary intellectual culture: he could rescue the Greeks from the professors of Greek and the Greek philosophers from the professors of Philosophy.

5. Heidegger's Greeks are Germans in togas.

Much of what is typically Greek Heidegger ignores or suppresses or explains away: there is no slavery in Heidegger's ancient Greece, no homosexuality, no heterosexuality, no athletics, no war, no wine, no song, no anger, no laughter, no fear, no superstition. Instead, Heidegger focuses on those elements of the ancient Greeks that anticipate the values he would like the Germans to adopt: reflectiveness, receptivity, love of nature, admiration for their great poets and thinkers, sensitivity to their language, sometimes—depending upon the political circumstances—*Kampf* (social and political struggle), at other times *Gelassenheit* (calm and resignation). Insofar as Heidegger's Germans are encouraged to model themselves upon the

Greeks, Heidegger's Germans are Greeks in *Lederhosen*; but since Heidegger's Greeks are in fact an idealized projection of specifically German virtues and since all idealizations of the Greeks are ultimately Roman in inspiration, Heidegger's Greeks may be described as being Germans in togas.

Heidegger's Greeks are the first Europeans, not only by reason of their having laid a foundation for everything good that came after them, but also by reason of the bad traditions that they founded. What makes Heidegger's Greeks ultimately so German is that they already enact fully the falling away from φύσις to technology which all of European history will go on to repeat on an ever larger scale. Already Plato and Aristotle betray Greek philosophy and put it in the service of optimism, reification, and *Wissenschaft*. By the time of the very earliest surviving documents of Greek thought, it is already almost too late. This had been one of the central points of Nietzsche's early philosophy, already clearly adumbrated in his *Birth of Tragedy*. For Nietzsche, as for Heidegger, European history—and that means, for both thinkers, essentially German history—merely repeats, amplifies, and fulfills the Greek model.

If Heidegger may be taken, therefore, to propose the Greeks as Germans, he may be understood at the same time to propose himself as Greek. He is keen to point out what he takes to be affinities between Alemannian or Swabian practices and language on the one hand, and Greek ones on the other. And his own peculiar style of writing—with its word-play, its exploration of etymological possibilities, its invention of new words, especially by taking up ordinary words from every-day language and substantivizing them as philosophical concepts—has something of the same effect upon the reader of his works in German as Aristotle's writings do upon their reader in Greek (except for the obvious contrast between Aristotle's extreme brachylogy and Heidegger's no less extreme prolixity). Whether or not Aristotle served Heidegger consciously as a model for his own style—it will be recalled that the works of Aristotle were among the Greek

texts the young Heidegger studied most intensely—my intuitive sense is that the experience of reading Heidegger in German is sometimes strikingly similar to that of reading Aristotle in Greek. It might be worth trying to provide the serious linguistic documentation which would be required to confirm or refute this intuition.

6. Heidegger's Greeks are not the Greeks—that is precisely why they interest us.

For the professional classicist, there is almost nothing at all of interest in Heidegger's work on Greek philosophy and poetry—which no doubt says as much about professional classicists as it does about Heidegger. Heidegger's work remains entirely marginal to the classics profession, except for a very few classicists who are themselves largely marginal. The professional study of ancient philosophy in England and America largely ignores him; there are a few exceptions in France and Italy. There is much more interest in his work on ancient philosophy among German professors of philosophy, but this has been due to Heidegger's own influence upon the profession of philosophy in Germany and seems now to be dying out. That is, the reception of Heidegger's work on Greek philosophy among German philosophers forms part of German philosophy, not part of German classics; the antagonism between Heidegger and the classics profession which he fostered has continued after his death. Matters are rather different in the professional study of German literature. For example, Heidegger's work on Hölderlin has strongly influenced Hölderlin studies, at least in reaction against Heidegger, and not only in Germany. This may be due in part to differences between the institutional and professional relation, in Germany and elsewhere, between classics and philosophy on the one hand, and between German studies and philosophy on the other.

What is interesting about Heidegger's Greeks is not that they are Greeks, but that they are Germans and that they are Heidegger's. As Germans, they provide a particularly strik-

ing example of the traditional (but now rapidly vanishing) German need for self-legitimation by appeal to the Greeks. This is a complex phenomenon, of which at least three aspects are particularly striking: a deep discomfort with modernity; a need for differentiation from the French model, which was based largely upon Rome; and the plurality of confessions, which meant that Christianity could not provide a solution, but only a set of problems. Heidegger tacitly presupposes a largely German professional *Altertumswissenschaft* in his use of editions, commentaries, lexica, and etymological dictionaries; he tacitly presupposes German Philhellenism in his evident belief that he need only assert the world-historical privilege of the ancient Greeks over other cultures without having to explain or defend it in detail; he tacitly presupposes a typically German and specifically Nietzschean nostalgia for origins in his no less evident belief that he need only assert the superiority of the earlier Greeks over the later ones without having to explain or defend that in detail either. In all these regards, Heidegger is an absolutely typical German thinker, different from others if at all only in the extremity of some of his positions.

What distinguishes Heidegger most significantly from many of the other representatives of German Philhellenism since the end of the eighteenth century is the passionate intensity of his absorption in the ancient Greek texts and his ability to communicate this intensity to many readers, especially to those with little or no knowledge of ancient Greek themselves. Their extraordinary patience with his moralizing tone and with his lengthy and obscure interpretations is a remarkable testimony to the power of the ancient Greeks, however mediated, to fascinate readers even in our own century.

Most classicists ignore Heidegger; the few who do not, tend to deplore him. That is mistaken. The Greeks will probably survive Heidegger, as they have so much else. And if they do, that will be partly his merit.

NOTE

1. This article is a revised version of a lecture delivered on 20 April 2001 at Stanford University at a meeting of the Bay Area Heidegger Colloquium; my thanks to my hosts and audience, especially H.-U. Gumbrecht. It has benefited further from the criticisms and suggestions of A. Davidson, B. Full, R. Pippin, M. Vöhler, and I. Wienand; my thanks to them all. All references to Heidegger's writings are to the *Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M. 1975–), indicated as GA with the volume and page number, except for *Holzwege* (Frankfurt a.M. 1950), indicated as H with the page number, and *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen 1954), indicated as WHD with the page number. All translations are my own. I have chosen not to burden these six theses with a scholarly apparatus; but for documentation and further elaboration of parts of the fourth thesis, the reader is referred to my articles “Zur Archäologie der Archaik,” *Antike und Abendland* 35 (1989), 1–23, “Schlegel, Schlegel und die Geburt eines Tragödienparadigmas,” *Poetica* 25 (1993) 155–75, and “Πόλεμος πάντων πατήρ. Die Vorsokratiker in der Forschung der Zwanziger Jahre,” in *Altertumswissenschaft in den 20er Jahren*, ed. H. Flashar (Stuttgart 1995), 87–114, as well as to the following important studies: T. Borsche, “Nietzsches Erfindung der Vorsokratiker.” in J. Simon (Hrsg.), *Nietzsche und die philosophische Tradition*, Bd. I (Würzburg 1985), 62–87; E. Behler, “A. W. Schlegel and the Nineteenth-Century *Damnatio* of Euripides,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986), 335–67; A. Henrichs, “The Last of the Detractors: Friedrich Nietzsche's Condemnation of Euripides,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986), 369–97.