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〈原著論文〉

In the Clear Night of the Nothing of Anxiety: An Exposition of Heidegger's Concept of the Nothing

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Abstract

Martin Heidegger attempts to overcome traditional Western metaphysics, in which the objectified essence of things as they appear in the phenomenal world is sought to be understood. He claims that Western metaphysics must turn away from such a manner of thinking toward a philosophy that questions and elaborates “being itself”, that is, the source of both beings and the being of beings. He asserts that the source is without being grounded; the Ground itself remains thoroughly concealed. The aim of this study, which takes up an inquiry into being, is threefold. First, it aims to explicate Heidegger's concepts of being and Dasein in light of the nothing of anxiety. Second, it aims thus to illuminate the interdependent conceptual relations between the two. By meticulously expositing these concepts, the fact that Heidegger privileges being over the nothing can be grasped. This privilege remains yet open to be challenged by other traditions of thought that do not take it for granted. Finally, I critically assess Heidegger's view of the nothing. Dasein, *inter alia* the existence of human being, as being held into the nothing of anxiety, that is, as turning away from our preoccupations in beings, remains as a placeholder of the nothing. I conclude that being intercepted by the veil (i.e., the nothing), man seems to be at all unable of returning home, being itself (*das Sein selbst*), rather to fatefully shade it night and day.

Key words: the nothing, being, Dasein, anxiety, existence, ground

Whatever we make of it, we do know the nothing, if only as a word we rattle off every day. For this common nothing that glides so inconspicuously through our chatter, blanched with the anemic pallor of the obvious ...⁽¹⁾

Martin Heidegger
*What Is Metaphysics?*²

1. Introduction

In his short though profoundly recondite essay, *What Is Metaphysics?*, Martin Heidegger writes:

That to which the relation to the world refers are beings themselves—and nothing besides.
That from which every attitude takes its guidance are beings themselves—and nothing further.
That with which the scientific confrontation in the irruption occurs are beings themselves—and beyond that nothing (WM, 97).

And he goes on:

What should be examined are beings only, and besides that—nothing; beings alone, and further—nothing; solely beings, and beyond that—nothing (Ibid.).

Heidegger is concerned with the question of being as well as beings. But the question awakens expectations of a discussion about the question of the meaning of the nothing, *das Nichts*. This I shall forgo. With Heidegger, we ask Leibniz's question, "Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?" (NHB, 208) Why are we concerned with beings or, much more profoundly, not with being itself at all, and why not rather the nothing? In answering this question, first, I shall illuminate Heidegger's notion of the nothing; second, I shall attempt to clarify what he means by nihilism in terms of, and germane to, the illumination; finally, in this vein of thought, I shall attempt to critically assess Heidegger's view on the nothing, *das Nichts*.

2. The Nothing in *Angst*

For Heidegger, the word "nothing" means that the being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*), which are known to us as an outward appearance or as aspect (*eidōs*) in our experience, is not a being at hand. Being reveals itself in beings "because being is always the being of beings" (BT, 85). Being transcends every being and determines the being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*): "Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple" (BT, 86). Heidegger regards that this revelation of

being in beings comes to pass through the nothing. In the nothing, being assures beings of their existence. Without being, all beings as such stay within the oblivion of being. But being is not able to reveal itself outside beings, and beings are not able to be without being. The “to be” always and necessarily anticipates the being of beings. For being is the home of beings. Thus, unlike “there being nothing”, the nothing does not simply mean that something is not there. Rather, the nothing means that beings, in fact, are *not being itself (das Sein selbst)*⁽²⁾. Thus “beings’ not being being (*das Sein*)” is, in effect, the essence of the nothing.

For Heidegger, metaphysics is an interpretation of beings and a forgetfulness of being. He regards the oblivion of being as neglect of the essence the *Nihil*. The Latin word, “*Nihil*”, means “null and void”. However, the nothing is not merely that which is null and void. Nor is it the “not”, negatedness, and negation. Heidegger asserts “that the nothing is more original than the ‘not’, and negation”, because negatedness and negation (the “Not”) belong to a certain kind of proposition (WM, 99). The negative proposition and a proposition are still something that is (i.e., *ein Seiendes*), whereas the Nothing pertains to *das Sein*.

This assertion calls up the question of what the nothing itself is? That which we are interrogating can never avoid being put into sentences; a sentence inevitably describes it as “being there”. Where should we then find the nothing? Heidegger says:

Where will we find the nothing? In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there? Indeed! At first and for the most part man can seek only when he has anticipated the being at hand of what he is looking for. Now the nothing is what we are seeking. Is there ultimately such a thing as a search without that anticipation, a search to which pure discovery belongs? (WM, 99)

In this passage, Heidegger seems to be saying that the nothing must, in some sense, be there in order that we could interrogate it. But not quite. Heidegger says that “the ‘genuine’ nothing” is a “camouflaged and absurd concept of a nothing that is” (WM, 101). How can we conjure up the genuine nothing?

Heidegger avers that the genuine nothing can be considered as “the complete negation of the totality of beings” (WM, 100). Yet, the totality of beings is, beings as a whole, not tantamount to being. The totality of beings is essentially other than the being of beings, although the complete negation of the being of beings occurs in the nothing. The totality of beings must be known to us in advance so that it is able to be negated completely. Conceding the uncertainty of whether

we can comprehend the ensemble of beings in themselves, “we certainly do find ourselves stationed in the midst of beings that are revealed somehow as a whole” (WM, 101). This happens only in our existence (Dasein). “The complete negation of the totality of beings” happens in human existence.

Heidegger says that the basic occurrence (*Grundgeschehen*) of our Dasein “can and does occur ... in the fundamental mood of anxiety” (WM, 103). Anxiety is an intangible feeling of worry; it does not have any object of its own. In anxiety, the nothing reveals not so much as a being as itself: it is not given as an object (WM, 104). It is anxiety in which we as finite beings make the whole of beings penetrable for ourselves. In other words, anxiety is the nothing in terms of its complete negatedness of beings as a whole. In fact, our everyday experience, no matter how fragmented it appears to be, “always deals with beings in a unity of the whole” (WM, 101). It is us in which we find the nothing; for it can never be given or found in beings as such other than human beings that are the only being that can be revealed somehow as a whole. Indeed, human existence “is” in the midst of beings as such here and there. Through the human existence, Dasein, do human beings experience what secures the being of beings: being itself (*das Sein selbst*) (K, 73; G, 65). This is because we as Dasein can inquire being itself beyond or over beings by means of recovering them as such and as a whole for our grasp (WM, 109).

So, we find ourselves in the midst of beings as a whole. And the totality of beings is given beforehand the nothing. Our everyday experience, even though fragmented as it may appear, always and already deals with beings in a unity of the whole. “Even and precisely then when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves this ‘as a whole’ overcomes us—for example in genuine boredom [*Langeweile*]” (WM, 101). Heidegger says that only the human being as a being is able to experience profound boredom. “Profound boredom,” he asserts, “removes all things and men and oneself [*einen selbst*] along with it into a remarkable indifference”. That is to say, the boredom comes to the fore when “one is bored [*es einem langweilig*]”. According to Heidegger, “This boredom reveals beings as a whole” (WM, 101). In boredom, striving to rescue himself from a particular thing, one “becomes unsure of everything else and completely loses his head” (WM, 102).

However, Heidegger asserts:

Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a particular calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of ..., but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of ... is always anxiety for ..., but not for this or that. The

indeterminateness of that in the face of which and for which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it (WM, 103).

What does the “impossibility of determining it” make us anticipate? When Heidegger says that “All things and we ourselves sink into indifference”, moreover, that “[r]ather in this very receding [*Wegrucken*] [of] things” from ourselves they “turn toward us”, I hear him saying that the distance between all things and us provides no place for us to hold on. We can get no hold (*Halt*) in the receding. This “no place to halt” emerges in our anxiety. This “no place to halt” is encountered by us as a being in “the slipping away of beings” from being. Thus, in “no place to halt” we meet “the slipping away [*Entgleiten*] of beings” from being. That is, “Anxiety reveals the nothing”⁽³⁾.

We “halt” in anxiety. “More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole” (WM, 103). Human being “hovers” in anxiety. Heidegger says that “[i]n the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there” (WM, 103). It is this “nothing to hold onto” into which Dasein, in the experience of anxiety, is held. Consequently, when Dasein does not fear in the face for and of this or that thing, that in the face of which and for which we are anxious is the nothing, or precisely our “being-toward-the Nothing”. “Indeed: the nothing itself ‘as such’ was there” (WM, 103). However, if the nothing is neither a being nor an object at all, then what is the essence of the nothing? With what can we call the nothing the nothing that is?

3. The Nihilation of The Nothing

Heidegger says that the essence of the nothing is nihilation (*Nichtung*). What is the nihilation of the nothing? Or, what does Heidegger mean in saying that “[t]he nothing itself nihilates”? (WM, 105)

The nothing is encountered in our anxiety. It is met by us in human existence. As a being, Da-sein is held into the nothing by virtue of anxiety. Da-sein as the being of the human being encounters the nothing “at one with” (WM, 104) beings that are slipping away from being as a whole. Heidegger says that “[t]he nothing does not attract [us to] itself; it is essentially repelling” (WM, 105). The nothing does not allure beings but withdraws itself from them as a whole. This withdrawal of the nothing lightens (*lichten*) beings that are in retreat as a whole. Beings are in

retreat, slipping away from the being of beings as a whole.

If the nothing lightens up beings as a whole that are slipping away from being, and if the nothing repels beings that are in retreat as a whole, then the lightening (*die Lichtung*) of the nothing manifests the retreating whole of beings “in the clear night of the nothing of anxiety” (WM, 105). What is this all about? The nothing is, according to Heidegger, not an object posited before human existence. Nor is it beings as a whole at all. But the nothing comes to the fore when Da-sein itself, as a being, realizes its staying away from the being of beings as a whole. Thus, the nothing reveals its repelling gesture toward the retreating whole of beings. Heidegger says:

This wholly repelling gesture toward beings that are in retreat as a whole, which is the action of the nothing that oppresses Dasein in anxiety, is the essence of the nothing: nihilation. Nihilation will not submit to calculation in terms of annihilation and negation. *The nothing itself nihilates* (WM, 105, italics mine).

When Heidegger says that the nothing itself nihilates, I hear him pointing out that the nothing itself is precisely beings’ withdrawal from us, and so that this withdrawal accounts for our constantly missing it. The nothing is slipping away from being, because it comes to Dasein in anxiety which belongs only to human beings as beings. The point to be stressed here is that the nothing is not annihilation and negation of beings; rather, it is the complete negation of the totality of beings. We come across the nothing in things’ receding from us, and in the very receding of beings as a whole that closes in on us in anxiety, we find nothing to hold onto. “In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto” (WM, 103), Da-sein remains. Consequently, “Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing [*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*]” (WM, 105). Therefore, the nihilation of the nothing, that is, the essence of the nothing, is, as I read Heidegger, the revelation of beings’ staying or slipping away from being. And this revelation is to be revealed only in Dasein. Heidegger concludes:

The nothing is neither an object nor any being at all. The nothing comes forward neither for itself nor next to beings, to which it would, as it were, adhere. For human existence the nothing makes possible the openedness of beings as such. The nothing does not merely serve as the counter concept of beings; rather it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such. In the being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs (WM, 106).

Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is already beyond beings as a whole. Hovering in the nothing, Dasein as a being is the nearest to being. By contrast, being appears to be the most distant from us when we focus not on beings as a whole but merely on this or that thing. The nothing nihilates itself. The nothing brings forward the staying away of beings as such. This nihilation of the nothing occurs in human existence which is, as a being, though in anxiety, the closest to being.

4. Nihilism and The Nothing

In *What Is Metaphysics?*, Heidegger is concerned exclusively with the nothing as the only object of metaphysics. Does this imply that his philosophy of the nothing is nihilistic? Heidegger, in the postscript for that essay, rejects the claim that the philosophy of the nothing is a complete nihilism (K, 70; G, 62).

For Heidegger, nihilism is the name for the “historical process whereby the dominance of the ‘transcendent’ becomes null and void, so that all being loses its worth and meaning” (FMR, 4). The repudiation in this process is stipulated as a standpoint in its own; the repudiation as will to power gets interpreted as a standpoint, as something entirely subjective. Beings as such are experienced as willing subjects. The repudiation of subjective values amounts to the devaluation of the highest values. Heidegger regards that for the being of the totality of beings, for Nietzsche, is becoming that is will to power in terms of “eternal recurrence of the same”. This implies that the valuation as such is really a revaluation of a previous revaluation. Hence, this new revaluation reverses the “devaluation of all value hitherto” which Nietzsche calls nihilism. This revaluation is the “revaluation of values”, i.e., the affirmation of “new principle” of values. It is the affirmative negation of all the previous value that is.

But what is value *per se*? How should something be valid? Heidegger argues that “[t]o be valid’ is of course not nothing, but [rather is] the mode and manner in which value, indeed as value, ‘is’” (ND, 16). “To be valid is a mode of being. There can be value only in being-a-value” (ND, 16). Moreover, according to Heidegger, “[t]he determination of value and the valuation of something as valued, as valuable or valueless, are first grounded on a determination of whether and how something is, or whether it is ‘nothing’” (NNN, 18). The word “nothing” contains the negative tone, namely, devaluation.

In our everyday language, the word “nothing” does not signify a particular, concrete entity. When we say, “Nothing is done so far”, it does not mean that there is something called “nothing”

that is made, something that we can point out. An entity that one experiences is not being made or coming into being. Our retrospection into history does not allow us to find such a thing. On the other hand, if one says, “Nothing was found”, it means that the entity that one sought was not found. The word “nothing” appears as the subject of the negation of the verb, the predicate: “not found”. “Nothing” thus implies a thing’s not-being at hand, its not being right here or there. At this point, Heidegger says that the word “[n]othing’ and *nihil* therefore mean beings in their being and are concepts of being and not of value” (NNN, 18). In fact, for Heidegger, the “oblivion of being”, *das Nichts*, can only be “worth nothing” on the condition that it is already null and nothing in itself; the *Nichts* is worth nothing only because, on a deeper level, it is something. Thus, for Heidegger, “nothing” is concerned neither with the valuable *per se* nor with the valueless. On the contrary, “[t]he nothing here signifies, not the particular negation of an individual being, but the complete and absolute negation of all beings, of beings as a whole”. The essence of the nothing is nihilation, *Nichtung*.

As we have seen before, nihilation points out the retreating whole of beings: the retreating from being. It discloses these beings in their full but heretofore concealed essence, i.e., being. Nihilation thus reveals beings’ staying away from being. The later Heidegger calls this the oblivion of being. Negation, however, cannot reveal the oblivion of being, for negation is grounded in the nihilation of the nothing. Construed in this sense, according to Heidegger, nihilism is preoccupied with the oblivion of being in terms that it is originally concerned not with the essence of the nothing, *Nichtung*, but with “nothing” as a mere negation. But this implies that nihilism even forgets the oblivion of being. Consequently, for Heidegger, nihilism is the oblivion of the oblivion of being.

What is the essence of nihilism? Is it the devaluation of the uppermost value, being? Is it that the uppermost values devalue themselves? Heidegger suggests that “[p]erhaps the essence of nihilism consists in not taking the question of the nothing seriously” (NHB, 21). And he says:

Nihilism would then be the essential nonthinking of the essence of the nothing... Nietzsche knew and experienced nihilism because he himself thought nihilistically. Nietzsche’s concept of nihilism is itself nihilistic. Consequently, in spite of all his insights, he could not recognize the hidden essence of nihilism, because right from the outset, solely on the basis of evaluative thought, he conceived of nihilism as a process of the devaluation of the uppermost values (NHB, 22).

What is “the hidden essence of nihilism” which Nietzsche could not recognize? Heidegger claims that the oblivion of being is forgotten throughout the history of Western metaphysics. Even that there is nothing to being is forgotten in the history of metaphysics. “Inasmuch as metaphysics thinks the being on the basis of being, it does not think being as being” (NHB, 207). If the essence of nihilism is the history in which there is nothing to being itself, then can we say that the essence of nihilism thus understood remains closed to Nietzsche’s thought?

Nietzsche’s metaphysics remains nihilistic insofar as it is value thinking, and insofar as the latter is grounded in will to power as the principle of all valuation. In Nietzsche’s thought, beings as such and as a whole are experienced as will: “the being as such is at bottom experienced as will” (NHB, 205). Willing or will to power is regarded as the essence of a being, *inter alia*, of the human being. The human being is seen as a willing subject. However, the willing subject inevitably is a being. Therefore, in Nietzsche’s thought, there is nothing to the recognition that metaphysics forgets such a being’s staying away from being *per se*.

The difference between the being of beings as a whole and simply these beings is ignored. The human being standing in the difference is merely recognized as a willing subject. This means that the human being is no longer looked upon as standing in the difference, due to the oblivion of being. This is to say that Dasein is not held out into the nothing any more. Without holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is not in each case already beyond the ensemble of beings. This being beyond beings Heidegger calls “transcendence” (WM, 105). Heidegger alleges that “[i]f in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never be related to beings nor even to itself” (WM, 105–106). If Nietzsche’s thought has not dealt with the nothing as “the veil of being” (K, 81; G, 73), then it is not concerned with being itself. Thus, in this sense, Heidegger claims that Nietzsche’s thought itself is nihilistic. It reduces all “being” to “value” by affirming that there is nothing to being in itself. Nietzsche’s metaphysics experiences beings as such and as a whole as will.

Nietzsche’s metaphysics is nihilistic to the point that it ignores that there is being; the being of beings is forgotten. But this oblivion of being is itself forgotten in the history of Western metaphysics. This oblivion of the oblivion of being Heidegger calls nihilism. This implies that the nothing is not properly manifested but thought as the mere negation of beings in Nietzsche’s metaphysics. The nothing is confused with “nothing” as things, not being at hand. “Nothing” as a non-being or as “not being there”, can be thought of as the indeterminate opposite of beings or of “being there”, but the nothing cannot be thought merely as beings, not being at hand.

Instead, the nothing is the absence of being; it is being in its absence. The nothing rather “reveals itself as belonging to the being of beings” (WM, 110). But how does the nothing belong to being?

5. Are Being and the Nothing the same?

The nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings. The “nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole” (WM, 104). Thus, the slipping away of being, beings, staying away from being, reveals the nothing. The nothing is neither the staying away of something that is, nor the slipping away of that which is not at hand.

Implicit in this is that negation as such cannot avoid being involved in “is” of a given sentence. In other words, the nothing remains rooted in the “is”. This “is” predicates of the subject whatever it is even if it is the nothing. In this regard, we are apparently predicating an “is” of the nothing and making it into a being, so to speak. Moreover, if this “is” or “to be” is the predication for all beings, and if the negation entails “not” in the predication, “is” comes into being as the predication of being, and the nothing remains rooted in the “is” and thus in being (cf., BT, 45–50).

From this Heidegger claims that “[t]he nothing of negation or no-saying is a mere mental image, the most abstract of abstractions. The nothing is purely and simply ‘nothing’, what is most null, and so unworthy of any further attention or respect” (NNN, 21). So, do we have to stop paying heed to the nothing? Can the nothing be ignored by us?

Nihilism induces us to ignore and forget the question of the nothing and regards our Self as the willing subject. To put it in different way, nihilism keeps Dasein away from the nothing. It prevents Dasein from being held out into the nothing. This is the reason why Heidegger claims that the essence of nihilism lies in not taking the question of the nothing seriously. And he maintains:

With general approbation, one says that the nothing either “is” something thoroughly null or it must be a being. But because the nothing obviously can never be a being, the only other alternative is that it is *the purely null*. Who would wish to repudiate such compelling “logic”? (NNN, 21–22, italics mine)

Heidegger does not repudiate that logic by any means. He does not want to reduce the nothing to a being; nor beings to the nothing. After all, for Heidegger, the nothing is not the indeterminate opposite of beings; it is *not* the object (*Gegenstand*) of beings by any means. What is then the essence of the nothing?

I agree with the idea that the nothing is something that is the purely null. The affirmation of this idea envisages that by stating the nothing by means of the “is”, we speak of the nothing as that which “is”. This “is” or “to be”, according to Heidegger, exhibits being, *das Sein* (BT, 45–50). Everything *including the nothing* that remains rooted in the “is” remains ultimately in being. Consequently, Heidegger says that “the nothing reveals itself as belonging to the being of beings” (WM, 110). He also remarks that being itself also belongs to the nothing:

“Pure being and pure nothing [the nothing] are therefore the same”. This proposition of Hegel’s (*Science of Logic*, vol. I, *Werke* III, 74) is correct. Being and the nothing do belong together... because being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing (WM, 110).

We should not be hasty to conclude that the nothing and being are the same; their resemblance is ostensible to the extent that both of them are neither objects nor beings at all.

It is to be stressed here that among all beings only human being as a being can experience the wonder that beings are there. He or she experiences the being of beings. It is only the human existence in which being as the ensemble of beings unconceals itself. Especially the unfolding of being comes to pass in Da-sein which “is” a finite being. In other words, in Da-sein being becomes present by virtue of the predication, “is” or “to be”, although predicating is itself only one of Dasein’s essential possibilities for being. On the contrary, predicating does not bring forth such a possibility for the nothing. The nothing cannot be predicated to be a being.

In this sense, language is the abode (*die Unterkunft*) of being. Human existence is indissolubly linked with the predication of languages. The being of beings as a whole indwells in the predication as such. Therefore, to overcome nihilism, we need to “allow space for beings as a whole;” and, to “release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, to “liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which he is wont to go cringing” (WM, 112). What is the idol? That is that our Dasein is not held out into the nothing or is withheld from the nothing through a preconception with beings; that the being of beings as a whole is ignored; that the oblivion of being is forgotten; and that beings are erringly identified with being.

Construed in this way, the nothing is not being itself. According to Heidegger, we experience the nothing as the other of beings when our human existence is held out into the nothing. The nothing lies in the difference between beings and the being of beings as such. This difference is nothing but the hiddenness and withdrawnness of being. Hence the nothing is the hiddenness and withdrawnness of being in this difference and the hiddenness of this difference as such. And, in anxiety, human existence as the transcendent transcends beings. As seen before, in the being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs. The nothing can never be anything else but the nothing. Thus, the nothing is *not* being itself (*das Sein selbst*). Rather, it is “the veil of being”, as the other than beings.

What does “the nothing is the veil of being” imply? I think that it alludes or hints that in Heidegger’s thought being is always presupposed beforehand. The nothing can be talked of only in the presence of being. We can deal with the nothing only in relation to being since the nothing is being in its absence, not presence. For we know that there is being, we can speak of the nothing. In fact, for Heidegger, the nothing is not the antithesis to being at all. Rather, the nothing is the essential place which is laid to being. “The place is the shelter in which the default of unconcealment [of being] essentially persists” (NHB, 217). In Heidegger, this “default of unconcealment of being” is called the nothing (*das Nichts*). But how do we know that there always is being beforehand that is to be unconcealed? This question remains open.

Why is there being at all from the outset?

I think that Heidegger would not be eager to answer this question. Aspiration and enthusiasm for being (revealed as finite) has been always evident in the history of Western philosophy. The history of Western philosophy is, for Heidegger, the history of the elaboration of being, being which secures the existence for beings. Heidegger concedes that with studied indifference Western philosophy abandons the nothing as what “there is not” (NHB, 98). All the same, Heidegger asks “What is the nothing?” This question immediately leads us into a paradox. He points out:

In our asking we posit the nothing in advance as something that “is” such and such; we posit it as a being. But that is exactly what it is distinguished from. Interrogating the nothing—asking what and how it, the nothing, is—turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object (NHB, 98).

The nothing cannot stand as object (*Gegenstand*). The nothing is neither an object nor any

being at all. Heidegger goes on: “Accordingly, every answer to this question is also impossible from the start. For it necessarily assumes the form: the nothing ‘is’ this or that. With regard to the nothing question and answer alike are inherently *absurd*” (NHB, 98, italics mine).

The absurdity of the nothing reveals human existence in anxiety (*Angust*). What is important here is that being is lightened up in Dasein is presupposed; the primacy of being is preserved from the outset. In fact, in Heidegger’s system, we cannot get rid of being, *das Sein*. The notion of “being” plays the most significant role in his thought. Without it, Heidegger’s idea of the nothing would be meaningless, null. For all his thought on the nothing is based upon his idea of being. But why is there being, and why not rather the absurd? What motivates Heidegger to search for being, the ultimate security, in the absurd? How can Heidegger answer those questions? In no way can he! Indeed, for Heidegger, it is the elaboration of being that is the theme or aim of Western philosophy. For Heidegger, the nothing is the abode of being, being in its absence, and reveals itself in Dasein in its anxiety. On the contrary, in the Zen Buddhist tradition, the nothing, or nothingness (*Mu*), is not anticipatory to being on which beings are allegedly predicated. The nothing is rather the absurdity of all beings and the conceptualization of the nothing is the affirmation of the absurd as such. The nothing is, in the Zen Buddhist tradition, not something that makes itself present as an object of consciousness in representative form. Nor is it the absence of “being”. It is not the absence of something. The nothing in the Buddhist tradition is non-ego. That is to say that in the Buddhist philosophy the self, the ego, or Dasein is not attached to the nothing as the object, as something other whereas in Heidegger being is anticipated by its own denial by Dasein, the thinking human.

Again, let us ask: why is there being, and why not rather the absurd? The Zen Buddhist tradition simply accepts and affirms “the fact” that question and answer alike with regard to the nothing are inherently absurd, and its philosophy stems from such affirmation. By contrast, Heidegger wants to found being as the Ground for beings in the absurd. This implies that Heidegger wants to deny, or to go beyond, that “fact” of absurdity in order to postulate the ultimate ground for beings. Therefore, in this sense, Heidegger’s notion of being commences with the negation of, and thus by transcending, the absurdity of the nothing, the essence of the nothing, the nihilation of the nothing. Because being withholds, withdraws, or “nihilates” itself in relation to beings and Dasein, it inspires its own denial by Dasein. Perhaps, he affirms this negation because he wants to find something of “positive” interpretive significance in the nothing, the absence of being. Or, put another way, by thus at least seemingly delegating the powers of nihilation to being itself, Heidegger allows being to emerge, to “finitude” or

notwithstanding, as a sort of autonomous ground. If so, then it can be said that having admitted the “finitude” (i.e., non-self-groundedness) of being, Heidegger sets “being” up once more in Western philosophy as the Ground and posits it as undeniable. In Heidegger’s thought, being is thus regarded as undeniable or unnegatable. But how is it possible for us to negate the undeniable absurdity of the nothing in favor of the ultimate ground, *der Grund* so as to posit another the undeniable, being?

Heidegger insists that we can liberate ourselves from the idolatry of clinging to beings in the midst of the oblivion of being when “we release ourselves into the nothing” (WM, 112). However, are we not allowed to release ourselves even from being, which is embedded in the history of Western metaphysics? Or, are we allowed neither to cling to beings nor to being? Heidegger made clear that the ethos of Western philosophy is nothing but the elaboration of being. The nothing is like the veil through which we are allowed to observe being behind it. But why is there being at all, and why not rather the nothing itself? Or, why is it not that there is nothing but the nothing itself? This question remains open for Heidegger.

6. Concluding Remarks

Consequently, the question proposed by Heidegger as the basic question of metaphysics, “Why is there beings at all, and why not rather the nothing?”, could now be asked in a slightly different way: why is there being, and why not rather the nothing itself? The nothing means that which is not beings. To release ourselves into the absurd is, for Heidegger, to listen to the voice of being (*Stimme des Sein*). Among all beings, only human beings, being called by the *Stimme des Sein*, can experience the most wondrous of wonders: namely, that there exist beings. Heidegger commits a two-fold privileging; he privileges being over the nothing; he privileges the human over the non-human entities of the world. Thus, being reveals itself only in Dasein that is held out into the nothing.

The oblivion of being means, for Heidegger, that the human being is regarded as the subject that posits all the beings as its *Gegenstand*. In this regard, Heidegger rigorously refuses the metaphysics of subjectivity, the metaphysics which forgets the oblivion of being. Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche’s metaphysics which regards the human subject as willing subject is complete nihilism. Instead of human subject, in Heidegger, being is considered as the ground, *der Grund* of all the beings including human beings. Therefore, it can be said that Heidegger’s concept of the nothing is possible to the extent that being as such is given beforehand.

However, this awakens the possibility of the question of the validity of being as the ground. But how can Heidegger's concept of being as *a priori* be validated when he brings himself to a tradition of non-Western philosophy, say, Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition which is also concerned with the nothing (*Mu*)? The latter regards that being as such comes to pass as the self-determination of the nothing (c.f., Nishida, 1965–6; Nishitani, 1982). Heidegger's concept of being may be valid properly in the context of Western metaphysics. The validity of the concept of being will not entail "the uppermost value" in other traditions of metaphysics. Thus, there remains the question which the nothing itself compels: why is there being at all, and why not rather the nothing itself? This question remains open not just for Heidegger but for the entire tradition of Western metaphysics.

We conclude by summing up our exposition of Heidegger's concept of the nothing by line.

For scientific man the nothing is concealed as the indeterminate opposite of beings and thus rejected as what "there is not", as an inappropriate object for scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, "we [as a being] do know the nothing, if only as a word we rattle off every day. For this common nothing that glides so inconspicuously through our chatter, blanched with the anemic pallor of the obvious, we can without hesitating furnish even a 'definition'" (WM, 100). However, it does not merely remain the indeterminate opposite of beings; it induces the slipping away of beings as *a whole* in that it is a complete negation of the totality of beings. It is being itself (*das Sein selbst*) that secures being to beings—nothing else. This "nothing else" is not just an empty squabble in our everyday language, for it rather implies that we speak of something different precisely in the way we secure to ourselves what is most properly our manner of being: *Da-sein*.

On the one hand, the nothing is a complete negation of the totality of beings. On the other, the nothing is not an annihilation of something. Nor does it stem from a negation. Negation is rather a form of nihilating, which is grounded beforehand in the nihilation of the nothing (WM, 107). The nothing reveals itself through nihilation. "The nothing itself nihilates" (WM, 105). Therefore, since the essence of the nothing is nihilation, the nihilation of the nothing (*das Nichten des Nicht*) means even a complete affirmation of beings as a whole. This means that the totality of beings as such is to be given in advance—without being an object. Heidegger regards that what grounds that totality is neither beings nor their being by any means: being itself (*das Sein selbst*). Since among beings only *Dasein* is opened up to the being of beings and being itself, and since the nothing discloses itself only in rare anxiety, it is "[i]n the being of beings [that] the nihilation of the nothing occurs" (WM, 106). Hence, he maintains that *Dasein* means being held into the nothing of anxiety, that is, turning away from our preoccupations in beings, viz., from

“falling” (*Verfallen*) and that human existence is in essence always beyond beings as a whole: Dasein is of transcendence. Therefore, he asserts:

In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing. But this “and not nothing” we add in our talk is not some kind of appended clarification. Rather it makes possible in advance the revelation of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that *it brings Da-sein for the first time before the nothings as such* (WM, 105, italics mine).

The nothing is laid bare between (the being of) beings and being itself (*das Sein selbst*). Beyond the chasm does being itself glitter, and Heidegger expresses the nothing as the veil of being as the other than beings. And only our Dasein when it is held into the nothing of rare anxiety can approach being itself; it directs us precisely toward being itself albeit the latter occurs in the way it conceals itself from beings and the being of beings in every respect. In this way, Heidegger attempts to overcome traditional Western metaphysics which aims to grasp merely the objectified essence of things as appeared in the phenomenal world. He avers that Western metaphysics must turn away from such a manner of thinking toward a philosophy that questions and elaborates being itself, i.e., the source of both beings (*das Seiende*) and the being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*): the source without being grounded, i.e., the Ground (*der Grund*) itself that remains thoroughly concealed.

This way of thinking is a thought from an unlimiting bottom, abysmal abyss (*Abgrund*)—the Ground conceals itself. Beings and the being of beings in this world are deferent in every respect from being itself in that they spring from the latter. However, Heidegger regards that that difference is to come to coidentity or sameness. Construed in this way, we are led to say that the difference and coidentity between being itself and beings, and between the abysmal Ground and the occurred (*das Ereignis*) are to be called in together into ultimate coidentity. Nevertheless, as Eiko Nagaoka astutely points out, in Heidegger ultimate coidentity between sameness and difference remains unrevealed (Nagaoka, 123). Rightly so. In fact, Heidegger did not develop the idea that reciprocally equal, totally independent existence of each individual is identified with one another, though differing from being itself, while preserving its particular unbegotten way of being. That idea is not considered downright in Heidegger’s understanding of human existence (*Existenz*) (Nagaoka, 122). Heidegger understands each human existence as a guard (*der Hirt*) of being itself that is covered by the veil, “the nothing” into which man is held

out on the ground of concealed anxiety. Man's being held out into the nothing makes him a "lieutenant" or a "placeholder" of the nothing (WM, 108; G, 54). Being intercepted by the veil, man seems to be at all unable of returning home, *das Sein selbst*, rather to fatefully shade it night and day.

Notes

- (1) WM, 86. I refer to *Martin Heidegger Basic Writing* for the translation of Heidegger's texts that are largely quoted in this paper, and occasionally to Miles Groth's translation of *Was ist Metaphysik?*. However, I uniformly employ the word "being" for "Being" as originally translated in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writing*.
- (2) Hereafter, I distinguish "the nothing" from "nothing" that is the nothing's appearance as negativeness or negation "the Not". For more remarks, see section 4 in this essay.
- (3) All quotations in this paragraph are from WM, 103.

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不安の無の明るい夜において ——ハイデッガーの無の概念の一考察——

谷 口 隆一郎

抄 録

ハイデッガーは、伝統的に西洋形而上学は現象界に存在する事物の対象化された本質（存在者の存在）を問う形で思惟してきたことから脱却して、存在者とその本質という分離を超脱した、それらの根源である存在そのものから思惟することへと転換しなければならないと主張した。本稿は、ハイデッガーがどこまでも自らを秘匿する存在そのものにどこまで辿り着くことができたのかという関心を持って、この底なしの深淵からの思索に忠実に寄り添いながら、存在そのものへの帰還の途上で、無を頼りに存在そのものの性起の場の開けについて考察することを主として狙いとしている。そのためにも、無を隠れ蓑にして自らは隠れたままの存在そのものと、存在そのものが現存在の「現」において自らを開示するという現存在、そして現存在がその中に保たれているところの無について詳述し、次に、それらの概念的関連について述べる。以上の考察を基に先の関心に関して言えば、存在そのものはそれを訪れようと近づけば近づくほど却って遠ざかっていき、無のヴェールにわれわれが保たれていることを痛感するに終わる。ハイデッガーが敷いた道のりが伝統的な道の逆方向へ導くものであっても、存在そのものを一切の根拠あるいは超越者としている以上それはどこまでも西洋の形而上学の伝統に沿った道であり、その他にも道はあるとなると、帰還から異なる伝統の道へへと旅立つこともあるいは予期されるのである。

キーワード：無，存在，現存在，不安，実存