



UNTHINKING AND THINKING WITH HEIDEGGER: ON NIHILISM AND THE METAPHYSICS OF CLOSURE

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to partly sketch Martin Heidegger's project of ontology via the route of his discussion of nihilistic thought. It employs a purely hermeneutical analysis of selected texts of available literature on print and online on Heidegger, nihilism, and metaphysics. Examining a selection of his writings, the paper contends that Heidegger's articulation of the problem of Being, of thinking, and of technology may be weaved together by looking at the nihilistic elements by which these problems were addressed. It does this by first looking at the discussion of traditional metaphysics and sciences found in Heidegger's work, and second, because of the representational frame by which these traditions work these traditions tended to overlook the question of Being. The paper concludes by retrieving Heidegger's retrieval of a kind thinking that is no longer calculative but meditative.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mencoba untuk membuat sketsa sebagian proyek ontologi Martin Heidegger melalui jalur pembahasannya tentang pemikiran nihilistik. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis hermeneutika murni, yaitu penelitian kualitatif yang berfokus pada penafsiran teks, simbol, dan makna dalam konteksnya.

Sejalan dengan itu, penelitian ini menganalisis dan menafsirkan teks-teks

terpilih dari literatur cetak dan daring yang tersedia tentang Heidegger, nihilisme, dan metafisika. Dengan meneliti pilihan tulisannya, artikel ini berpendapat bahwa artikulasi Heidegger tentang masalah Keberadaan, pemikiran, dan teknologi dapat dijalin bersama dengan melihat elemen-elemen nihilistik yang digunakan untuk mengatasi masalah-masalah ini. Artikel ini melakukannya dengan pertama-tama melihat pembahasan metafisika dan sains tradisional yang ditemukan dalam karya Heidegger, dan kedua, karena kerangka representasional yang digunakan oleh tradisi-tradisi ini, tradisi-tradisi ini cenderung mengabaikan pertanyaan tentang Keberadaan. Makalah ini diakhiri dengan mengambil kembali pemikiran Heidegger yang tidak lagi kalkulatif tetapi meditatif.

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INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to partly sketch Martin Heidegger's project of ontology via the route of his discussion of nihilistic thought. Examining a selection of his writings, the paper contends that Heidegger's articulation of the problem of Being, of thinking, and of technology may be weaved together by looking at the nihilistic elements by which these problems were addressed. It does this by first looking at the discussion of traditional metaphysics and sciences found in Heidegger's work, and second, because of the representational frame by which these traditions work these traditions tended to overlook the question of Being. The paper concludes by retrieving Heidegger's retrieval of a kind thinking that is no longer calculative but meditative.

METHOD

This work employs a purely hermeneutical approach, which is qualitative research aimed at analyzing texts, symbols, and meanings in their context. In keeping with this, this study examines and interprets chosen texts from the available print and online literature on Heidegger, nihilism, and metaphysics.

DISCUSSION

Nihilism and the Nothing

In one of the Heidegger's early work, *Being and Time*, whose objective was fundamental ontology, Heidegger mentions there are several moods of Dasein's being. One of which is *Angst*. In order to better understanding *Angst*, the word could best be demonstrated by contrasting it to a related English word, anxiety. For example, in the expression "one is afraid of..." or "one has fear of ...," the preposition "of" would always point to something by which or from which the emotion or feeling, which is fear, give rise to. There is cause of this fear, which is an object or thing. Although anxiety may be associated with the word fear, anxiety in this case has an object, an object that is feared. *Angst*, on the other hand, is a state of existence by which "Dasein finds itself face to face with the nothing of the possible impossibility of existence."¹

But in contrast to anxiety, in this mood there is no actual thing or object that one can point to that causes this mood to arise. But this having no object is precisely its disturbing command of evocation. It is "there" but "nowhere." And this is the very character of *Angst*. It is an attunement by which "Dasein finds itself face to face with 'nothing' of the possible impossibility of existence." Meaning, it arises out Dasein's anticipation of death, of none existence. That for Dasein death is certain and may come anytime. But the certainty of death and the uncertainty of when and where this will happen catalyses a feeling of insignificance of things and of the world, of material

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 310. *Hereafter BT*.

things, (how precious, expensive, or valuable they may be), of people and one's relationship with them, within the ambit the one's world. As Heidegger writes:

that in the face of which one has anxiety is not encountered as something's definite with which one can concern oneself; the threatening does come from what is ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but rather from the fact that neither of these 'says' anything any longer. Environmental entities no longer have any involvement. The world in which I exist has sunk into insignificance.²

This attunement which brings about the insignificance of things causes a certain nihilation, a nihilation not in the sense of destruction, but a nihilation in the sense of meaninglessness, of neglect, of abandonment. With Angst, seeing things, the world, or even existence have no import at all. Deflecting the rudimentary problems of existence and the failure to inquire about its roots can also be a form of nihilism. It may come in the form of relegating fundamental concerns of the human being, such as the question of Being, life, God, or even the "nothing" to be already self-evident, or known.³

This kind of thinking is manifest in the way in which science and representational thinking views the "nothing." Heidegger would comment that "what is remarkable is that, precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks of something different. What should be examined are beings only, and besides that – nothing; beings alone, and further – nothing; solely beings, and beyond that – nothing . . . The nothing is rejected precisely by science, given as nullity."⁴

Since science is primarily concerned with the ontic or beings, it does not go deep into the heart of things, it does not question or put into question "how is it that there are beings at all and not nothing." "*Science wants to know nothing of the nothing.*"⁵ And since the "nothing" is not an issue for science we could say that this avoidance of the question is also its abandonment of Being and the "nothing", it is manifestation of nihilism itself.⁶ No less misconceived about the "nothing" is the way we, victims of traditions that we are,⁷ represent it in thought and in language. This is characteristic of what Heidegger calls calculative and representational thinking. Representational thought tries to encapsulate everything, such as entities, within the frame of object or image formed in the intellect.

² BT. 393.

³ See BT. 22-23 & Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 20. Hereafter N IV.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics" in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrel Krell (New York: Harper & Row), 97. Hereafter WIM.

⁵ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics," 98.

⁶ "Can we, however, speak of concession when we concede nothing? But perhaps our confused talk already degenerates into an empty squabble over words. Against it science must now reassert its seriousness and soberness of mind, insisting that is concerned solely with beings. The nothing- what else can it be for science but an outrage and a phantasm?" Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics," 98.

⁷ See the three prejudices/presuppositions of philosophy in BT. 22-23.

This can be seen for example in the way logic through terms and proposition represent beings. The term becomes the privileged of the object of thought. It is this kind of approach to the enquiry about the “nothing,” as for example in asking the question – ‘what is the nothing?’ that representational thought misses. Already implied in the structure of this kind of question, this kind of thinking is that the “nothing” is conceived as a being, as an entity.⁸

Logic,⁹ which seems to operate in this kind of thinking, falls prey to this error by condensing the “nothing” in Terms and Proposition and subjecting it to its rules, e.g., the rule of contradiction.¹⁰ What happens in this mode of thinking is that the “nothing” is negated.¹¹ As Heidegger astutely puts it:

Certainly the prevailing opinion and the traditional convictions of philosophy are right to insist that the nothing is not a ‘being’, no ‘object’. But that does not satisfy the question as to whether this non-objective matter really ‘is’, inasmuch as it determines the essential unfolding of Being. The question remains whether what is not an object and never can be an object therefore ‘is’ simply nothingness, and this in turn a ‘nullity’. The question arises whether the innermost essence of nihilism and the power of its dominion do not consist precisely in considering the nothing merely as nullity, considering nihilism as an apotheosis of the merely vacuous, as a negation that can be set to rights at once by an energetic affirmation.¹²

In the instances discussed above, the “nothing” has not been placed under serious contemplation, or, more appropriately, the “nothing” have become unthought. Neglect of the “nothing” is already a form of abandonment of the “nothing”, which is a form of nihilism.¹³

Representational thought is also a form of nihilism for it approaches the investigation of the “nothing” in the wrong foot, curing it within the confines of its lens, thus it misconceives the “nothing” as some entity which can be represented. What does this have to do with the human being’s primordial constitution as being-in-the-world.?

Dasein’s Being-in-the-world means that Dasein’s Being is that of relations, that of care, of being concerned with. Dasein resides or dwells alongside the world.¹⁴ One of the main objectives of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is to uncover the way in which philosophy, particularly metaphysics, has treated Being. Now, recalling that

⁸ See N IV. 20.

⁹ See N IV. 21.

¹⁰ See WIM. 99.

¹¹ N IV. 20.

¹² N IV. 21.

¹³ “Nihilism, conceived and experienced in a more essential way, would be that history of metaphysics which is heading towards a fundamental metaphysical position in which the essence of the nothing not only cannot be understood but also will no longer be understood.” N IV. 22.

¹⁴ See BT. 79-81.

“[t]he essence if nihilism is the history where there is nothing to being itself,”¹⁵ it would seem that the treatment of the “nothing” as not of major importance is part of this history.

In the light of the phenomena of nihilism, angst, as a mode by which beings as a whole, as already given, as encountered in the world,¹⁶ are revealed to Dasein, is subsumed, covered or is put under the rag through consigning it in representations. Being and its partner, the “nothing”, comes to be unrecognized.

Nihilism and the Logic of Metaphysical Closure

In the lecture *The End of Philosophy and The task of Thinking* Heidegger speaks of the end of philosophy. He identifies philosophy and philosophical activity with metaphysics, i.e., metaphysics that thinks beings as grounded in Being, a thinking which represents being and Being and grounds it in Being.¹⁷

When Heidegger speaks about the end of metaphysics he does not mean a stop or lack of continuity. What he means by “end” here is a certain kind of history of “completion” of metaphysics, that is, it has reached the point where everything has been exhausted. “The end of philosophy is the place, that place in which the whole of philosophy is history gathered in its most extreme possibility. The end as completion is this gathering.”¹⁸

But what does this completion consist of? To complete a race means that you have reached its finished line, that you have completed the course. A race, of course, would also presuppose a certain structure, it has its rules, its boundaries, so to speak. Completion of a race means that you have followed the already laid out rules and have gone through the whole course.

Completion would also mean that there is a certain task to be done, like building a house. At the instance that everything in the plan is actualized then the house is already considered as finished, where everything in the blueprint is put into actuality, the plan has been accomplished. Therefore metaphysics, as philosophy, is completed or has reached its end when it has “gathered in its most extreme possibility”, the point where it has exhausted everything within its sphere, where it can no longer say anything new about itself. But Heidegger intimates in the title of that work that there is an important task to be done. And the task would seem to be to refuse that the exhaustion of metaphysics is also the end of thinking.

Heidegger emphasized that the whole history of Western philosophy has gathered in its most extreme possibility. What does he mean by this? The lecture given

¹⁵ N IV. 201.

¹⁶ WIM. 100.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” in *Basic Writings*, 374. Hereafter EPTT.

¹⁸ EPTT. 375.

in 1957 provides very important insights on this predicament. Reflecting on the whole history of Western thought, he says that “Western metaphysics . . . since its beginning with the Greeks has eminently been both ontology and theology.”¹⁹

Metaphysics is ontology for it “aims to recover [being] as such and as a whole”.²⁰ That is, metaphysics thinks of being in general as a whole with respect to Being. Being in this sense becomes the ground with respect to Being. Being in this sense becomes the ground or *arche* of beings; on the other hand, metaphysics is theology for it grounds being and Being to a first cause, and this first cause is God as *causa sui*. As Heidegger puts it:

Metaphysics thinks of Beings of being both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid anywhere, and also in the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All- Highest. The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called account by the ground. And finally what calls the ground to account.²¹

For Heidegger the history of Western thought, as metaphysics, has been characterized by onto-theology, that is, a thinking which thinks of beings and Being and searches generative ground. “Metaphysics States what beings are as beings. It offers a *logos* (statement) about the *onta* (beings)... Metaphysics moves in the sphere of the *on to on*: it deals with beings as beings.

In this manner, metaphysics always represents beings as such in their totality; it deals with the beingness of beings (the *ousia* of the *on*). But metaphysics represents the beingness of being [*die Seiendheit de Seienden*] in a twofold manner: in the first place, the totality of beings as such with an eye to their most universal traits; but at the same times also the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest and therefore divine being.”²² According to this frame of thinking, Being or Sein, which is not an entity, is the ground of entities.

Now if in the history of Western thought God, the Highest being, is considered as the Supreme Being, then He would fall under the category of entities. This would also entail that the highest, or God, considered as the Supreme Being, is the supreme entity, but only as an entity. Metaphysical thought as onto-theology says that God is grounded in being. Being makes God thinkable. But God as *causa sui* grounds Being and bring beings into existence and perfection. In the metaphysical frame of thinking,

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 54. Hereafter OTL.

²⁰ WIM. 109.

²¹ OTL. 58.

²² Martin Heidegger, “The Way Back to the Ground of Metaphysics” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 217.

such for example as that of Aristotle's the *arche* is considered as the efficient and final cause.

Thus, there is the double grounding: Being or Sein grounds beings but God, as an entity, grounds Being, the cause, the source of Being. "But if metaphysics as such does not think Being itself because it thinks Being in the sense of the being as such, ontology and theology, on the basis of their mutual dependence on each other, both must leave Being itself unthought."²³ It is this circularity which makes metaphysics problematic.

Metaphysics have only thought of Being of beings in such a double grounding. This double grounding exhibits the logic of closure of metaphysics. A closure that does not think of Being as presencing, and the play of concealment and unconcealment far removed from its space and thinking. This closure is a thinking which is still captive of subjectivist metaphysics which posits the human being as a being which, through his faculties of reason and apprehension, projects, comprehends and, through technicity and calculation, utilize beings.

Enamoured by this tradition the human being has ceased to think Being in its primordial sense. In the words of Heidegger, Being remains unthought:

Accordingly, how does metaphysics comport itself to Being itself? does metaphysics think Being itself? No, it never does. It thinks *the being* with a view to Being. Being is first and last what answers the question in which the being is always what is interrogated. What is interrogated is not Being as such. Hence, Being itself remains unthought in metaphysics, not just incidentally, but in accord with metaphysics' own inquiry. By thinking the being as such, the question and the answer necessarily think Being itself, precisely because in the most proper sense of the metaphysical question Being is thought as the being in its Being. Inasmuch as metaphysics thinks the being in the basis of Being. It does not think Being as *Being*.²⁴

By failing to reflect upon being and its mystery man ever comes close to danger and annihilation.²⁵ This failure to think about Being is rooted in scientific and a calculative thinking²⁶ and , if I may add, covered by the trappings of the "they," organized politically, economically and ideologically through manifold ways of

²³ N IV. 210.

²⁴ N IV. 207.

²⁵ See the essay "The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Row, 1977). Hereafter QCT.

²⁶ Calculative thinking "consists in the fact that whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with the conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we count on definite results. This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with number nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking... computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities." See Martin Heidegger, "Memorial Address" in *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gellassenheit* by J.E. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 46. Hereafter MA.

forgetfulness and concealments, whose ground is *thoughtlessness*.²⁷ This failure also leads to abandonment and turning away of the human being from his essence. It is this “waning of light of Being,”²⁸ as a sign of nihilism, which characterizes modern thought.

As continuing consequence of metaphysics in the modern period, metaphysics ever becomes tightly embroiled around subjectivity, and truth becomes clustered to certitude.²⁹ According to Heidegger, the culmination of subjectivity and abandonment of Being can be seen in the philosophy of Nietzsche.

For Heidegger, it was Nietzsche who spoke candidly of nihilism, and vigorously of how it can be overcome. Keeping in mind that the essence of nihilism is “where there is nothing to Being itself,” Heidegger says we must look at Nietzsche’s thought with a view of “finding out to what extent there is nothing to Being itself in Nietzsche’s metaphysics”³⁰ Having proclaimed the advent and predicament of nihilism,³¹ Nietzsche through his philosophical interrogation, lays bare a way by which it can be overcome. What Nietzsche proposes is that we must engage nihilism through revaluation of all previous values.

It is this notion of revaluation of all values, according to Heidegger, that is the key to understanding nihilism and essentially Nietzsche’s thought. Heidegger says that “Nietzsche’s question about the meaning of nihilism is a question that for its part still thinks nihilistically.”³² What does he mean by this? Obviously Heidegger conceives Nietzsche’s philosophy as nihilistic. What Heidegger means by this is that Nietzsche is captive of a frame of thinking which is nihilistic.

To think nihilistically means thinking within the frame that there is nothing to Being. In the case of Nietzsche, Heidegger says that his thinking is that kind of thinking which thinks nothing to Being because he thinks it in terms of value. Heidegger says that “for Nietzsche ‘revaluation’ means the very ‘place’ for previous value disappears, not merely that the values themselves fall away.

This implies that the nature and direction of valuation, and the definition of the essence of value are transformed. The revaluation thinks of Being *for* the first time as value.”³³ Thus, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche’s philosophy is in fact metaphysical. Metaphysical for it sets up for itself a lens by which it measures everything, and through it, gives a ground and an account for its ground.

²⁷ “man today is in flight from thinking. This flight-from-thought is the ground of thoughtlessness,” MA. 45.

²⁸ Gregory Bruce Smith, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Transition to Postmodernity*, 228.

²⁹ See N IV. 139.

³⁰ N IV. 202.

³¹ In the Preface of the collection of notes published under the title *Will to Power*, Nietzsche writes: “What I relate is the history of the last two centuries.” In Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 3.

³² N IV. 205.

³³ N IV. IV, 6 emphasis mine.

It is through the revaluation of the uppermost values that Nietzsche proposes to overcome nihilism. According to Heidegger the very manner by which Nietzsche thinks of nihilism is also nihilistic in the sense it is calculating and values forming. In other words, it is a reckoning. In the words of Heidegger

With the downfall of the values also comes the elimination of the ‘above’ and the ‘high’ and the beyond,’ the former place in which values could be posited. Such elimination means that the valuation must become a different one. Even for which the new values are supposed to be values is, after the downfall of the beyond, no longer something of this worldly. But this implies that the way in which the values must be transformed. This earth-shaking change behind the devaluation of uppermost values, arising from unequivocally known phenomena, the new valuation must have its origin in a new and enhanced consciousness (reckoning).³⁴

The world is gauged in the eyes of an evaluating lens that reckons. This reckoning is done by none other than being which thinks “everything as a configuration of will to power.”³⁵ This being is man as the subject which posits values, which calculates, which utilizes beings as instruments, appraising “everything on the basis of value, will to power.”³⁶

In Heidegger’s evaluation of Nietzsche’s thought, he has found that “the will to power” becomes the *arche*, the ground and foundation of everything. Being is conceived in terms of power, of will to power.³⁷ The revaluation, as Heidegger stressed, “however... is not... that it supplants all earlier values with power... but first and foremost because power and only power posits values, validates them, and makes decisions about possible justification and valuation.”³⁸

It is in this way that Nietzsche’s effort to overcome nihilism becomes futile for it is captured by the very logic of nihilistic thinking. This thinking, as we have said earlier, is a thinking which is a reckoning, a thinking which thinks nothing to Being and conceives Being as mere value. As Heidegger appropriately puts it:

We have said, however, that Nietzsche’s metaphysics is nihilism proper. This implies not only that Nietzsche’s nihilism does not overcome nihilism but also that it can never overcome it. For it is precisely in the positing of new values from the will to power, by which and through which Nietzsche believe he will overcome nihilism, that nihilism proper first proclaims that there is nothing to Being itself, which has now become a value, As a result Nietzsche experiences the historical movement of nihilism as a history of the devaluation of the highest

³⁴ N IV. 49.

³⁵ N IV. 48.

³⁶ N IV.

³⁷ “Every being, in so far as it is, and is as it is, is ‘will to power.’” Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 7.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*.

values hitherto. On the same basis, he represent overcoming as revaluation and carries it through, not only in a new valuation, but also in such a way that he experiences will to power as the principle of the new and ultimately of all – valuation. Value thinking is now elevated into principle. Being itself, as a matter of principle, is not admitted as Being. According to its own principle, in this metaphysics there is *nothing* to Being. How can what is worthy of thought be given here with Being itself, namely, being as – Being? How could the overcoming of nihilism occur here, or even make itself felt?³⁹

Viewed from the perspective of metaphysics, that is, from the perspective of a thinking which tries to look for the ground and essence of things, Nietzsche's thought, as value thinking simply does not arrive at the proper understanding of Being. It mistakenly conceives it. Nietzsche's philosophy, according to Heidegger, is fundamentally nihilistic, and whose characteristic is that of metaphysics of subjectivity. It is a metaphysics which runs in the logic that there is a subject and that subject posits value to being. We may recall that Nietzsche proclaimed the event of "death of God." This phenomenon both as a historical and philosophical event is of utmost importance to Nietzsche that it pre-occupied his work till the end of his life.

The "death of God" means that all transcendent value and ideals become superfluous. This means that these values and ideals become questionable that they can no longer hold as a ground and foundation by which a man can cling to. This is what Nietzsche, according to Heidegger, describes as nihilism. Nihilism is associated with the end of metaphysics in the sense that "the truth of being as a whole had been called metaphysics. Every era, every human epoch, is sustained by some metaphysics and is placed thereby in a definite related to being as a whole and also to itself. The end of metaphysics discloses itself as the collapse of the reign of the transcendent and the ideal' that sprang from it. But the end of metaphysics does not mean the cessation of history. It is the beginning of serious concern with that 'event': 'God is dead.'" ⁴⁰

Understanding the full implication of nihilism requires understanding its essence and the full import of the status of the human being within the sphere of metaphysics. From the above passage we can discern the essence and ground of nihilism. The essence of nihilism is not the metaphysics of the will to power (the metaphysics that sees being as will), but simply metaphysics is nihilism proper. "The essence of nihilism is historically metaphysics."⁴¹ Nihilism as metaphysics does not grasp its essence because of the manner by which it proceeds to think Being as the most general or universal, as an overarching category, as principle and source of beings, as the Highest of all principles. It is a metaphysics that has historically lost "thinking" of Being. That is why

³⁹ N IV. 203.

⁴⁰ N IV. 5.

⁴¹ N IV. 205.

Heidegger had expressed that “the metaphysics of Plato is no less nihilistic than that Nietzsche.”⁴²

In nihilism as metaphysics, Being is concealed in the manner that even though it thinks it, it unreflectively conceives it as the most general or abstract concern, as the first principle, as the Highest, as the source, as *causa sui*. Nihilism is the oblivion of Being because there is a constant thinking and association of the *nihil* in Being.

In Nietzsche, according to Heidegger, this is typified by the fact that Being is conceived as value. This conception of value, as earlier explained is associated with Nietzsche’s conception of subjectivity, of the sole being capable of positing value to beings. Man for Nietzsche, states Heidegger, is a value-positing being whose overarching principle is Being conceived as Will to Power. It is in this way, gauged from the evaluation of Heidegger, that Nietzsche’s thought leaves Being unthought, and contributes to its oblivion.

Politically, nihilism can come through organized concealment, as manifests in instrumental conceptions of the world and of life, in technology for example; the unconcealment of being comes to that of standing reserve.⁴³ It could come as the unrecognition and or misrecognition of Being as merely nothing, as the emptiest of conception Being may bring about the being of beings but Being is nowhere. Its mystery is nowhere. Thus, conceived in this way, there is nothing in Being.

Traditional Metaphysics inquiries about beings and finds that it is grounded by Being and yet, it brushes aside Being by not inquiring about it, it leaves it unthought, and for the most part, misconceives it as another entity encapsulated in concepts and abstraction, rather than recognizing the play of concealment and unconcealment, its giving and givenness (It is/ Est gibt).

If this is the case, according to Heidegger, then we must prepare the way by which we could conceive Being with its mystery. And this requires a new mode of thinking, a thinking that is not bagged down by the tradition which has avoided and set aside Being (it is a tradition which, with all its trappings, still fails to think Being or think that there is “nothing” that is called Being).

But we would ask ourselves can nihilism be overcome? If nihilism is the very history by which being and Being is of the utmost issue should it not be more pressing and appropriate to inquire into its essence? This is what Heidegger precisely has engaged in. To overcome nihilism requires that we not just see its manifold manifestations, but more importantly we must grasp its essence to pave the way to its overcoming. As Heidegger writes:

Hence, *before* overcoming, it is necessary to have the kind of confrontation with nihilism that will for the first time bring to light the essence of nihilism. If we

⁴² N IV.

⁴³ OCT. 17.

grant that there is some way in which human thought is to participate in that confrontation with the essence of nihilism, which concerns Being itself, then such thinking must for its parts first be stunned by the essence of nihilism. Therefore... we must ask in what phenomenon of nihilism proper... has its ground.⁴⁴

We have seen that the essence of nihilism is the thinking that there is nothing to Being. We have also seen that the ground of nihilism is metaphysics. Therefore the overcoming of nihilism is also the overcoming of metaphysics itself.

If metaphysical thought is characterized as a system of thought which thinks Being as the most abstract and universal concept and searches for a generative ground or principle for Being and beings then man must tread a different path. A path which is free from metaphysical, valuative, representational and calculative thinking. If nihilism is metaphysical in such a way that it is a kind of thinking that omits Being by thinking it metaphysically, by failing to carefully think of Being in its unconcealment, then a new kind of thinking must be initiated.

CONCLUSION: OPENNESS AND THE RECOVERY OF WONDER

The putative practice of value positing grounded in the will to power forms as a tyrannical gaze of metaphysics which commands and measures everything as value for the “enhancement” of life. This nihilistic element comes to the fore in the modern age in the way in which modern technology’s shows its mode of revealing.

Technology according to Heidegger is a mode of revealing. But what is insidious and dangerous about modern technology’s mode of revealing is that the “revealing that rules over modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”⁴⁵

Instrumentality accompanies modern technology’s revealing “driving onto the maximum yield at minimum expense.”⁴⁶ Where as originally the Greek word *techne* means a bringing forth, a bringing forth which is similar to *poiesis* “It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before is.”⁴⁷ It means that *techne* bringing about what does not naturally come to be. The bringing forth of *techne* as *poiesis* is not that of calculative measuring hostile to being. It’s mode of revealing is that of letting be.

As man comes to be captive of nihilism and its manifestation, the grip by which Being and being is conceived comes tighter. Overcoming nihilism comes tighter. Overcoming nihilism requires loosening and eventual opening of the grip by which the man has consigned Being and being. He must cease to be the center of everything. We have ourselves been witness to this centering which have consequently turned him as

⁴⁴ N IV. 205.

⁴⁵ QCT. 14.

⁴⁶ QCT. 15.

⁴⁷ QCT. 13.

the master and commander of beings, seeing beings as mere resources, thinking that there is nothing to Being, and that beings are mere resources.⁴⁸

Thinking that there is nothing to Being, “phusis [is] itself laid out in a technological economy.”⁴⁹ As a result homelessness and the loss of ground pervade, and the continuing cycle of nihilism remains, as man arrogantly sets himself as the measure of things technology consequently claims him, thinking all the while that he rules over beings. Thus, man’s in conception of technology as standing reserve the logic of negation of Being continues.

Hence, there is a need for a recovery of wonder, for a new form of sensibility. This is the path shown by Heidegger, and the way seems to be a new attitude of thinking and dwelling. A thinking that is not merely scientific nor propositional, but that of a poetic kind.⁵⁰

Many of his writings, especially those written in the late nineteen forties, fifties and sixties strongly suggest that Heidegger wants to revive a kind of thinking that was prevalent among the ancient Greek philosophers, a thinking that was lost or have been buried in human history.

Astute descriptions for this kind of thinking are laid out in Heidegger’s lectures on the early Greek thinkers, poetry, dwelling and thinking and among these works Heidegger openly says this kind of thinking is “a path that will lead to a new ground and foundation.”⁵¹ But the ground or foundation is no longer that of a metaphysical kind. It is a kind of thinking that hearkens to being. And it seems that the key here is *Gelassen* or “letting.”

It seems that the way for the human being is to step back, to ponder and think for a moment and to go “back to the things themselves”. Going back into things themselves means going back to the roots. The “letting” would also mean allowing oneself to be claimed by Being so that man is no longer the center of everything. The center but would be that of “letting Being be,” thus ridding the centricism at same time.⁵²

In discussing the Heraclitus fragment, for instance, Heidegger tries signal this kind of thinking in discussing the retrieval of the original meaning of the Greek word

⁴⁸ MA, 50.

⁴⁹ Reinier Schurmann, *On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 191.

⁵⁰ Reflecting on the poem of Holderlin Heidegger noticed this kind of thinking in Holderlin. He says that poetry “pay heed to the kind of taking... which does not consists in a clutching or any other kind of grasping, but rather in a letting come what has been dealt out.” See Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells” in PLT, 224.

⁵¹ MA, 56.

⁵² “To free really means to spare. The itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real sparring is something positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we ‘free’ it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature.” Building Dwelling Thinking” in PLT p.149.

logos. The *logos* is derived from the word *legein* which originally means laying. “Laying, as *legein*, simply tries to let what itself lies together here before is, as what lies before, into its protection, a protection which it remains laid down.. What lies together before is as stored, laid away, secured and deposited in unconcealment the lying before for-itself is nothing more and nothing less than the presencing of that which lies before us as unconcealment... Because *legein* which lets things lie together before us, concerns itself solely with the safety of that which lies before us as unconcealment, the gathering to such a laying is determined in advance by safekeeping.”⁵³

Notice how Heidegger's intimation regarding this kind of thinking, as Being illumines it also conceals the lighting which is also the occasion by which man must see that there is an overwhelming background by which his “vision” cannot see and that this source in fact the very unexhaustible source of creation. This clearly shows that the richness of Being, that this unknown is an emphatic manifestation of man's finitude, that he cannot ever be the center of everything, and perhaps, the richness and mystery of Being may provide an important key to changing the attitude of man from that of arrogance and hubris to that of openness and receptivity, specially in dealings with fellow beings and the natural environment.

This renewed stance would seem to also light up the human being's essence,⁵⁴ that she *is* because *she* is within Being, *she* is gathered with it. The human being is in fact owned by Being in rather than the other way around and that in this sense the presencing of Being is gathered within and thus appropriated by it. It is in this way that Being's gift of unconcealment that the human being comes to presence. As Heidegger clearly puts it:

The lighting not only illumines what is present, but gathers it together and secures it in advance in presencing... Gods and men are not only lighted by the light. They are appropriated in the event of lighting, and therefore never concealed... Just as those who are far distant belong to the distance, so are the revealed entrusted to the lighting that keeps and shelters them. According to their essence, they are Trans-posed [*verlegt*] to the concealing of the mystery gathered together, belonging to the *logos* in *omologein*.⁵⁵

The renewed kind of thinking would be a meditative kind, that which is open to mystery and hearkens to Being. This kind of thinking is no longer reckoning as it

⁵³ Martin Heidegger, “Logos” in *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 62-63.

⁵⁴ “The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old world *bauen*, which says that man is in so far as he dwells, this world *bauen* however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine.” PLT. 147.

⁵⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Aletheia” in *Early Greek Thinking*, 120.

“demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one track course of ideas.”⁵⁶ It is a poetic kind of thinking that heartens and reflects.

This task is not easy for in avoiding the temptations of calculative thinking and representational thought (both of which are imbibed from our traditions and pedagogic formations) requires greater courage, effort and patience. It demands “that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all.”⁵⁷ This radical mode of thinking which heeds the call and lets Being be is receptive and yet it fundamentally tough for it is open to the mystery and does not “enslave” beings and lets Being be itself.

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⁵⁶ MA. 55.

⁵⁷ MA.

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