

READING HEIDEGGER'S "WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?"

Thomas Sheehan
Stanford University

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What follows is an English reading of the *first* edition of Martin Heidegger's inaugural lecture at Freiburg University, "Was ist Metaphysik?" delivered on Wednesday, July 24, 1929. The German text was first published in December of 1929, some five months after it was delivered, by Friedrich Cohen Verlag in Bonn, to whose heirs gratitude is expressed for the requisite arrangements. The original German publication of 1929 differs in a number of relatively minor ways from later editions -- for example, changes in wording, additions of certain phrases (and at one place two sentences), paragraphization, and the like - without any basic alteration of sense. Some of those changes are listed in an appendix at the end.¹

Whereas the 1929 Cohen-Verlag edition of "Was ist Metaphysik?" differs only in minor ways from the 1976 *Gesamtausgabe* edition, my own English reading of the former differs in significant ways from David Farrell Krell's able and elegant translation of the latter. Krell's English

¹. In this essay I abbreviate the various volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975ff.) as GA plus the volume number. Citations in the notes frequently refer to texts by page and line (with the two separated by a period; e.g.: 182.29-30 = page 182, lines 29-30). The line-count does not include either the "header" or any empty lines on the page, but does count the lines of section titles.

version, edited and revised by himself and William McNeill, appears in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 82-96. The German text underlying that translation is the eleventh, revised edition (1975) published in *GA 9 (Wegmarken*, second edition, 1976). However, the *Pathmarks* translation of that eleventh German edition (pp. 103-122) paradoxically provides the pagination of the *tenth* German edition (pp. 1-19), published in the first edition of *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967).

To clarify matters and facilitate comparison of the relatively inaccessible original edition and the readily available eleventh edition, the present reading of the first German edition provides, within square brackets, the pagination of the eleventh edition as that appears in *GA 9*.

Almost immediately after the publication of the original edition, Heidegger began annotating that text with marginal notes, and he continued the practice up through the tenth edition of 1967. Those remarks are closely paraphrased in footnotes keyed to the relevant words in the text of the first edition.

One of the chief differences between this rendition of the first edition and the English translation of the eleventh edition lies in how *Da-sein* is rendered in English. I follow Heidegger's insistence that the *Da* of *Dasein* does not refer to a "there" ("*Da ibi und ubi*": *GA 71*, forthcoming, ms. 121.18), as well as his suggestions that *Dasein* not be translated as "being-here" or "being-there."² Rather, in keeping with Heidegger's frequently repeated indications, I interpret

- *Da* as "the open" (namely, for all forms of being or "is")³

²."`Dasein' bedeutet für mich nicht. . . `me voilà'": "Lettre à Monsieur Beaufret (23 novembre 1945)" in *Lettre sur l'humanisme*, ed. Roger Munier, new, revised edition, (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1964), 182.29-30. Rather, Heidegger indicates that "Dasein" could be translated ("in einem vielleicht unmöglichen Französisch") as "être-le-là" -- but only if the "là" is understood as "Offenheit": *ibid.*, 182.30-184.3.

³. For example: *Zollikoner Seminare. Protokolle--*

- *Da-sein* as "openness" (i.e., "being-the-open," "being-open," or "the open-that-we-are").⁴

Gespräche--Briefe, ed. Medard Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 9.6-9: "Offenheit," "das Offene, Freie. In diesem Offenen finden wir uns"; 156.35-157.1: "Das *Da* meint in 'Sein und Zeit'...die Offenheit"; 157.30-32: "Weil aber der Mensch nur Mensch sein kann, . . . indem er in der Offenheit von Sein steht, ist das Menschsein als solches dadurch ausgezeichnet, auf seine Weise diese Offenheit selbst zu sein"; 188.14-15: "Wie ist das *Da* dort [in *Sein und Zeit*] bestimmt als das Offene? Diese Offenheit hat auch den Charakter des Raumes. Räumlichkeit gehört zur *Lichtung*, gehört zum Offenen, in dem wir uns als Existierende aufhalten....". See also GA 5, 40.1: "eine offene Stelle"; GA 9, 184.11: "innerhalb eines Offenen"; 184.25: "steht im Offenen"; 185.29: "in ein Offenes"; 187.32: "das Offenbare eines Offenen"; 188.21-22: "das Offene und dessen Offenheit, in die jegliches Seiende hereinsteht"; 201.30-32: "Die entscheidende Frage. . . nach der Offenheit. . . des Seins") etc.; GA 49, 56.20 ("die Offenheit, die *Lichtung*"); 56.27-28: "in einem in sich schon wesenden Offenen"; 56.31-2: "Die Frage nach . . . dem Offenen, darin einem Verstehen 'Sein' überhaupt. . . sich enthüllt"; GA 65, §205, 328.28: "das Offene"; 331.23: "Offenheit". Also "Lettre à Monsieur Beaufret (23 novembre 1945)" (*supra*), 184.3: "Offenheit."

⁴.GA 9, 325.20-21: "Der Mensch west so, daß er das 'Da,' das heißt die *Lichtung* des Seins, ist." GA 15, 415.10-13 (= *Vier Seminare*, 145.10-13): "Es gilt, das *Da-sein* in dem Sinne zu erfahren, daß der Mensch das 'Da', d.h. die Offenheit des Seins für ihn, selbst *ist*, indem er es übernimmt, sie zu bewahren und bewahrend zu entfalten" (Roughly: "The point is to experience *Da-sein*, in the sense that I, the human being, *am* the *Da*, the openness of being for me, insofar as I undertake to preserve this openness, and in preserving it, to unfold it." For a French rendering of this, see Heidegger's letter to Roger Munier, July 31, 1969, in *Le nouveau commerce*, 14 [1969], 58.8-11.) The translation of *Dasein* as "openness," "being-open," and "the open-that-we-are" is discussed in the essays "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 34, 2 (2001), 1-20, and "Kehre and Ereignis," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 3-16 and 263-274

Other differences between this reading and the *Pathmarks* translation include:

- *das Seiende*: "what-is" and "whatever-is" as well as "a being" and "beings."
- *Angst*: "dread" rather than "anxiety."
- *Nichtung*: "the action of the nothing" rather than "nihilation."

The numerous other differences are sometimes stylistic but frequently substantive. I welcome any corrections to the following text or suggestions for its improvement.

AN OUTLINE OF "WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?"

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Conclusion
Putting the questioner in question
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CONCLUSION

MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S INAUGURAL LECTURE AT FREIBURG UNIVERSITY

A Reading of "What is Metaphysics?" first edition (1929).

[103]

INTRODUCTION

The question "What is metaphysics?" might lead one to expect a general discussion about metaphysics, but we waive that in order to discuss one specific metaphysical question. This is the way, it seems, to let ourselves be transported directly into metaphysics, and the only way to give metaphysics the possibility of properly introducing itself to us.

We carry out this project by first unfolding a metaphysical question, then working it out, and finally answering it.

**PART ONE
UNFOLDING A METAPHYSICAL QUESTION**

As Hegel says, when sound common sense looks at philosophy, it sees "the world turned upside down." So the peculiar nature of our undertaking demands some preparatory remarks. They come from the twofold character of metaphysical questioning.

THE TWOFOLD CHARACTER OF METAPHYSICAL QUESTIONING

First, each metaphysical question always encompasses the whole problematic of metaphysics and in fact *is* the whole of metaphysics. Secondly, to ask any metaphysical question, the questioner as such must also be present in the question, i.e., must be put in question.

From this we conclude that metaphysical questions must be posed (1) in terms of the whole and (2) always from the essential situation of the existence that asks the question. Right now we are asking about ourselves. Within this community of scholars, teachers, and students, our human existence is

determined by science. When science becomes our passion, something essential occurs with us in the very grounds of our existence -- but what exactly? [104]

THE THREEFOLD STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONING

The fields of science are quite distinct, and their respective methods for investigating objects are fundamentally different. Nowadays the only thing that unites the expanding array of disciplines and gives them some coherence is the technical organization of universities and their departments, along with the practical goals set by each discipline. But even so, the sciences have lost their rootedness in their essential ground.

Relation-to-the-world. Nonetheless, when we follow the inner trajectory of any given science, we always relate to what-is. In the view of science, no one field has priority over another -- not history over nature or nature over history -- nor does any one method for investigating objects take precedence over another. Mathematical knowledge is no more rigorous than philological-historical knowledge. It merely has the character of "exactness," which is not the same as rigor. To demand exactness from historical studies is to violate the idea of rigor that is specific to the humanities. The *relation-to-the-world* that governs every science qua science lets the sciences pursue beings and make them, in their whatness and howness, an object of research, definition, and grounding. The ideal of the sciences is to help us achieve an approximation to the essence of all things.

Orientation. Science's special relation to beings is sustained and guided by a freely chosen *orientation* on the part of human existence. Our pre- and extra-scientific activities are also ways of relating to what-is, but science is unique insofar as it gives the subject-matter, and it alone, a basic, complete and explicit primacy. This focus on the subject-matter in scientific questioning, defining and grounding involves a unique and specific submission to whatever-is, in order that it might appear as what it is. Scientific research and theory are beholden to their objects, and this is the reason why the sciences [105] are able to assume a proper, if limited, role of leadership in the whole of human existence.

In-break. The way to fully understand science's special relation-to-the-world and the human orientation that guides it

is to understand what happens along with this orientation and its relation-to-the-world. Human beings -- one kind of being among others -- "pursue science." What happens in this "pursuit" is nothing less than the *in-break* of this one being, the human, into the whole of what-is, with the result that this in-break "breaks open" beings as what and how they are. In its own way, the in-break that breaks-open helps beings become themselves for the first time.

SCIENCE'S AMBIVALENT RELATION TO THE NOTHING

Taken in its radical unity, this trinity of relation-to-the-world, orientation, and in-break brings to our scientific existence the clarifying simplicity and rigor of human openness. Once we explicitly grasp that clarified scientific openness, we have to say:

Our relation-to-the world relates only to whatever-is -- and to nothing else.¹

Every orientation is guided by what-is -- and by nothing besides.

In the break-in, our research activity confronts what-is -- and nothing more.

It is remarkable that as scientists stake out their own territory, they speak about something else. They investigate only what-is, and nothing else; just what-is, and nothing besides; only what-is and nothing more.

What about this "nothing?" Is it just an accident that we speak this way so naturally? Is it a mere turn of phrase -- and nothing else? [106]

Why trouble ourselves about this "nothing"? Science rejects it, dismisses it as "just nothing." But by giving up the nothing in this way, do we not concede it? Yet how can we talk of "conceding" when we concede nothing? Maybe all this back-and-forth is just word-play. Science must now reassert its hard-headed seriousness and insist that it deals only with what-is. Science views the nothing as an absurdity, a ghost.

If science is right, this much is sure: science wants to know nothing about the nothing. In the final analysis that is

¹ Some have dismissed the words after the dash as arbitrary and contrived, without realizing that Taine, whom we may take as symbolizing and representing the entire era that is still dominant, explicitly uses that formula to characterize his basic position and intent. (1st ed., 1929.)

the scientifically rigorous conception of the nothing. We know it only by wanting to know nothing about it.

Science wants to know nothing about the nothing. Yet it is equally certain that when science tries to express its own essence,² it appeals to the nothing for help. It makes a claim on what it rejects. What kind of double valence³ is showing up here?

By reflecting on our factual existence -- an existence determined by science -- we find ourselves caught up in a controversy in which a question has already unfolded. That question merely needs to be directly asked: What about the nothing?

PART TWO WORKING OUT THE QUESTION

Working out the question of the nothing must lead us to the point where either an answer becomes possible or the impossibility of an answer becomes clear. The nothing has been conceded -- in the sense that science, with a [107] studied indifference, dismisses it as "what-is-not." Nonetheless, we will try to ask about the nothing.

AN INADEQUATE FORMULATION OF THE QUESTION

"What is the nothing?" This first approach to the question reveals something odd. This way of asking the question begins by positing the nothing as something that "is" thus and so. We take the nothing as a being, whereas that is exactly what it is different from.⁴ Posing the question in terms of what and how the nothing *is* changes what we are asking about into its opposite. The question robs itself of its own object. Thus any answer to this question is utterly impossible because it necessarily takes the form: "The nothing *is* this or that." Both the question and the answer about the nothing are inherently absurd.

²i.e., its positive, disclosive orientation to what-is. (5th ed., 1949.)

³The ontological difference. (3rd ed., 1931.)
The nothing as "being/*Sein*." (5th ed., 1949.)

⁴The difference [*der Unterschied, die Differenz*]. (5th ed., 1949.)

Logic seems to defeat the question. We do not even need science's rejection of the nothing. The question is already defeated by the principle commonly adduced as the basic rule of thinking -- that contradiction must be avoided -- along with general "logic." Since the essence of thought is to always think about *something*, thought would contradict its own essence if it thought about *nothing*.

Since we are not allowed to turn the nothing into an object, our question about nothing is already at an end -- presuming, of course, that "logic"⁵ is the supreme authority in this question, that discursive reason is the means, and that thinking is the way, to understand the nothing originally and to decide if it can even be disclosed.

How can we impugn the authority of "logic"? Discursive reason is surely lord and master of the question about the nothing. We need its help to define the nothing and pose it as a problem, even if the problem ultimately unravels. The nothing is the negation of everything that is: [108] it is non-being pure and simple. In saying this, we locate the nothing within the category of "what-is-not" and thus within the negated. According to the dominant and unchallenged doctrine of "logic," negation is a specific act of discursive reason. So how could we ever dismiss reason when inquiring into the nothing and its ability to be questioned?

But are we entirely sure what we are presupposing here? Is it really the case that "is-not," negatedness, and thus negation, are the category into which the nothing fits as a specific case of "the negated"? It might be the other way around. Maybe the occurrence of the nothing does not depend on the "is-not" and the act of negating. Maybe the act of negation and its "is-not" can occur only if the nothing first occurs. This point has never even been explicitly raised as a question, much less decided.

⁵That is, logic in the usual sense, what people take to be logic. (1st ed., 1929.)

Heidegger's thesis. Our own position is that the nothing is closer to the origin⁶ than the act of negation and its "i-not." If this thesis is correct, then the possibility of negation as an act of reason (and therefore reason itself) is dependent in some way on the nothing. In that case reason would have no decision-power over the nothing. In the final analysis the alleged "absurdity" of both the question and answer about the nothing may be simply due to the blind willfulness of our self-vaunting reason.⁷

A renewed attempt fails. If we refuse to be deterred by the formal impossibility of asking about the nothing, and persist instead in asking the question, we still have to satisfy the basic minimum requirement for raising any question. If we are to question the nothing, it must first be given. We have to be able to encounter it.

Where should we look for the nothing? How will we find it? Surely to find something, we have to already know in a general way that [109] it is there. Ordinarily we can search for something only by anticipating the presence of what we are looking for. In the current instance we are looking for the nothing. Can there ever be a search without an anticipation, a search that would end in pure discovery?

Whatever we make of the nothing, we do know it -- if only as something we constantly mention in everyday talk. With no hesitation we can even give a "definition" of this very obvious and ordinary nothing that runs unnoticed through our talk: "*The nothing is the utter negation of everything that is.*" This characterization of the nothing apparently indicates the only way to encounter it. (1) The totality of whatever-is must be already given beforehand, (2) so that it can be subjected to a direct act of negation, (3) so that the nothing itself may show up.

This relation between negation and the nothing is very dubious; but even putting that aside, how are we finite beings supposed to make all-that-is, in its totality, accessible both in itself and for us? We can of course (1) think up all-that-is in an "idea", (2) then mentally negate what we have imagined, and then (3) "think" of it as negated. This procedure yields the formal concept of an imagined nothing,

⁶In the order of origination. (5th ed., 1949.)

⁷Blind willfulness: the *certitudo* of the *ego cogito*, subjectivity. (5th ed., 1949.)

but never the nothing itself.

What is more, the nothing is nothing; and since "nothing" represents total indistinguishability from anything, there can be no distinction between the imagined nothing and the "real" nothing. The so-called "real" nothing would be only the disguised (but still absurd) concept of a nothing that "is."

Conclusion. For the last time, then, the objections raised by reason have put an end to our search. From now on we will be able to demonstrate the legitimacy of this search only by way of a *basic experience* of the nothing. [110]

AN INADEQUATE APPROACH THROUGH ORDINARY MOODS (BOREDOM, LOVE)

Two things are equally certain: (1) all-that-is can never be grasped absolutely in itself; and (2) the beings among which we find ourselves disposed always appear in the unity of a *whole*. In the final analysis there is an essential difference between grasping *all-that-is* in itself and finding ourselves among beings in terms of a *whole*. The first is impossible in principle, the second is always happening in our openness.

Experiencing the whole through boredom. In our everyday preoccupations we do seem to cling to this or that particular being and to get lost in this or that region of beings. But no matter how fragmented our everyday existence may seem to be, it always deals with what-is in the unity of a "*whole*," even if only vaguely. In fact it is precisely when we are not preoccupied with things and with ourselves that this "in-terms-of-a-whole" overtakes us -- for example, in genuine boredom. Genuine boredom has not yet arrived if we are merely bored with this book or that movie, with this job or that idle moment. Genuine boredom occurs when *one's whole world is boring*. Then abysmal boredom, like a muffling fog, drifts where it will in the depths of our openness, sucking everything and everyone, and ourselves along with them, into a numbing sameness. This kind of boredom reveals what-is in terms of a *whole*.

Such a revelation of the whole can also occur with the joy we feel in the presence of someone we love -- not just the presence of the person, but the presence of that person's *openness*.

When we are thoroughly wrapped up in these moods -- in which one's world just "is" a certain way -- we feel ourselves disposed among beings in terms of a *whole*. Each mood or disposition has its own way of revealing the whole of what-is; and such revealing is no ordinary event but the fundamental way our open-ness occurs. What we call a "feeling" is not a passing addition to thinking and willing, it is not just what motivates and drives those acts, and it is no mere condition that we somehow must put up with. [111]

Such moods reveal the whole but conceal the nothing.

However, just when such moods confront us with what-is in terms of a *whole*, they also conceal from us the *nothing* we are seeking. Now we are less convinced than ever that we could meet the nothing by merely negating the beings that our moods reveal in the unity of a whole. Rather, an original encounter with the nothing occurs only in a mood whose disclosive essence is dedicated to revealing that nothing.

AN ADEQUATE APPROACH: EXPERIENCING THE NOTHING THROUGH DREAD

Does human openness ever have such a mood that brings us face-to-face with the nothing? Yes, this can and does occur in the basic mood of dread, although rarely and only for a fleeting moment.

Dread contrasted with fear. By "dread" we do not mean the quite common experience of anxiety, ultimately reducible to the fear that can so easily overcome us. Dread is fundamentally different from fear. What we have fear of is always a specific thing that threatens us in a specific way. Moreover, such fear of . . . is always fear for something specific. Because fear of and fear for are defined by specific objects, whenever we experience fear we are seized and held by some *thing* that affects us. In trying to save ourselves from that particular thing, we become unsure of our relation to other things and lose our bearings as a whole.

Dread never lets such confusion occur. On the contrary, dread is suffused with a peculiar kind of calm. Yes, dread is dread of, but not of this or that thing. And dread of is always dread for, but again, not for a specific thing. What we have dread of and for is indeterminate -- not because we are unable to define it, but because it itself cannot be defined. This may be illustrated by a familiar experience:

The whole recedes, the nothing is revealed. During dread

we say "It feels so strange!" What is the "it"? and "who" feels it? We cannot say what makes one feel so strange. It just is that way for "someone" -- as a whole. All things, and we along with them, sink into indifference⁸ [112] -- but not in the sense of disappearing. Rather, as beings recede, they turn toward us. It is the receding of the *whole* of what-is that presses in on us and oppresses us. Without the whole there is *no hold*. As beings slip away, what remains and overwhelms us is precisely this "no. . . ." Dread reveals the nothing.

Dread reveals open-ness. We hang suspended in dread. More precisely, it is dread that leaves us hanging insofar as it makes the *whole* of whatever-is slip away. This implies that we ourselves -- we who exist⁹ -- also slip away from ourselves right there in the midst of what-is. Ultimately, then, the world becomes strange not for "you" or "me" but for some "one." That is, in the unnerving state of "left-hanging-with-nothing-to-hold-on-to," all that remains is pure open-ness.¹⁰

Dread strikes us dumb. As the unified whole of what-is slips away and the nothing crowds in on us, all utterance of "is" falls silent in the face of it. Amidst the strangeness of dread we often try to shatter the empty stillness with mindless chatter, but that only proves the presence of the nothing.

Later, when dread has dissolved, we ourselves offer first-hand testimony that dread reveals the nothing. In the clear vision that preserves a fresh memory, we find ourselves obliged to say that what we had dread of and for was -- nothing, really. And that is exactly right. The nothing itself -- as such -- was there.¹¹

With this basic mood of dread we have reached the very occurrence of openness, within which the nothing is revealed and from out of which we must raise the question of the nothing.

What about this nothing? [113]

⁸Whatever-is no longer speaks to us. (5th ed., 1949.)

⁹But not human being *qua* openness. (5th ed., 1949)

¹⁰That is, the open-ness "in" human beings. (5th ed., 1949.)

¹¹That is, was revealed: disclosure and mood. (5th ed., 1949.)

PART THREE
ANSWERING THE QUESTION

We now have the one essential answer we need for our purposes -- provided we take care to keep the question of the nothing truly alive. This demands that we transform our human being¹² into its openness (dread effects this transformation in us) so that we can grasp the nothing that shows up in dread exactly as it shows up.¹³ It also demands that we expressly avoid all characterizations of the nothing that do not come from a corresponding experience of the nothing.

WHAT THE NOTHING IS NOT.

Not an entity. The nothing shows up in dread, but not as something-that-is and certainly not as an object. Dread is not at all a grasp of the nothing. The nothing does show up in and through dread, but not as detached from or "next to" the beings as-a-whole that we meet in all their strangeness.¹⁴ We said, rather, that during dread we encounter the nothing as *at one with* the whole of what-is. What does it mean to say the nothing is "at one with"¹⁵ the whole?

Not annihilation. In dread beings as-a-whole become superfluous. But how? Beings are not annihilated by dread so that the nothing is left over. That cannot happen because dread is utterly powerless before the whole of what-is. Rather, the nothing appears *with and in* the beings that are slipping away in terms of a whole. In dread, therefore, there is no annihilation of all-that-is.

Not negation. But neither do we perform a mental negation of beings as-a-whole in order to arrive at the nothing for the first time. Performing a thematic act of negation during dread

¹²i.e., *qua* subject. We already have a prior, thoughtful experience of openness, which alone makes us able to ask the question "What is metaphysics?" (5th ed., 1949.)

¹³Disclosure. (5th ed., 1949.)

¹⁴Strangeness and unhiddenness. (5th ed., 1949.)

¹⁵The difference. (5th ed., 1949.)

is out of the question; but even apart from that, [114] any such negation would always arrive too late to produce the nothing -- because we have already met up with the nothing beforehand. As we said, we already encounter the nothing as "one with" the whole of the beings that are slipping away.

WHAT THE NOTHING DOES.

It relegates openness to what-is. In dread we "draw back from" This is not flight, but the calmness of wonder. This movement "back from" is initiated by the nothing. The nothing does not draw us into itself; rather, its essence is to push us away. In pushing us back away from itself, it directs us to the receding beings that it lets slip away in terms of their whole. This business of pushing us back and directing us toward the beings that are slipping away as a whole,¹⁶ is the way the nothing presses in upon openness during dread: this is the *essence* of the nothing, the *action* of the nothing. The nothing is not the annihilation of what-is, nor does it come from an act of negation. Annihilation and negation cannot account for the action of the nothing. The nothing *itself* "nothings."¹⁷

¹⁶Pushing-back: [from] beings as just for-themselves. Directing-to: into the *being* of beings. (5th ed., 1949.)

¹⁷That is: occurs as the action-of-the-nothing; holds forth; grants the nothing.

It discloses that things are. The action of the nothing is no ordinary event. It pushes us back and directs us toward the beings that are slipping away as-a-whole, and in so doing it discloses these beings in their full and heretofore hidden strangeness as the radically other, i.e., other than the nothing. In the clear night of the nothing experienced in dread, there occurs the original revelation of the "is" of what-is: the fact that things are and are not nothing. But this "and-are-not-nothing" is not some later clarification. It comes first, it is what makes possible¹⁸ all disclosure of what-is. In its essence the action of the nothing lies at the origin and consists in letting openness encounter¹⁹ for the first time what-is insofar as it *is*.

It is responsible for transcendence, selfhood, and freedom. Human openness can approach and gain access to beings only on the basis of the original revelation of the nothing. [115] The essence of openness is to relate to beings (both those it is and those it is not), but it can do so only if openness is always already *returning from* the revealed nothing. Being-open means:²⁰ being held out into the nothing.

Held out into the nothing,²¹ openness is always already beyond what-is as a whole. Such being-beyond-what-is we call "transcendence." If openness in its essence were not transcendence -- i.e., held out into the nothing, as we now put it -- it could never relate to what-is,²² not even to itself. Without the original revelation of the nothing, there is no selfhood and no freedom.²³

Conclusion. With this we have reached the answer to our question about the nothing. The nothing is not an object or

¹⁸That is, it is being. (5th ed., 1949.)

¹⁹Properly speaking, it lets openness encounter the *being* of what-is, i.e., the difference. (5th ed., 1949.)

²⁰(1) It means other things as well, not just that; and (2) it does not follow that "nothing is all there is," but the exact opposite: now we can appropriate and understand whatever-is. Being and finitude. (1st ed., 1929.)

²¹Who does this in an original way? (5th ed., 1949.)

²²Because being and nothing are the same. (5th ed., 1949.)

²³Freedom and truth are treated in the lecture "On the Essence of Truth." (5th ed., 1949.)

anything that is. The nothing does not show up either for itself or alongside what-is as if it were an add-on. Rather, the nothing makes possible the appearance of whatever-is, as such, for²⁴ human openness . The nothing is not just the opposite of beings; it is essential to their very emergence.²⁵ The action of the nothing takes place in the very is-ness of what-is.

AN OBJECTION AND A RESPONSE

The objection. We must finally address a hesitation we have been harboring for some time now. If openness can relate to what-is -- indeed can exist at all -- only by being held out into the nothing, and if the nothing is originally disclosed only in dread, then we would have to constantly hover in this dread in order to exist at all. But on the contrary, we admitted that such original dread is rare. [116] More importantly, all of us do exist and do relate to beings (both those we are and those we not) without this experience of dread. So dread appears to be an arbitrary invention, and the nothing associated with it seems only a fantasy.

Dread is rare due to fallenness. But what does it mean to say that originary dread happens only in rare moments? This simply means that the nothing in its originary nature is mostly disguised because in a quite specific way we are completely lost in what-is. The more our preoccupations turn us toward what-is, the less we let it slip away in its being. Thus the more easily we turn away from the nothing, and the more likely we are to fall into superficial, "public" ways of being-open.

²⁴. But not "caused by." (5th ed., 1949.)

²⁵Taking "Wesen" in a verbal sense, as in "das Wesen des Seins," "the emergence of being." (5th ed., 1949.)

Nonetheless, our constant if ambivalent estrangement from the nothing does accord with the essential sense of the nothing, at least within certain limits. The action of the nothing consists in directing us to what-is,²⁶ and it does this constantly, whether or not our everyday knowledge is actually aware of the occurrence.

The nothing makes negation possible. What more compelling witness do we have that the nothing is always and everywhere revealed in our openness (albeit in a disguised way) than the act of negation? Negation no doubt belongs to the essence of human thinking, and it gives expression to a negativity by saying "is-not." However, this "is-not" by which we enact differences and contrasts within the given, is not produced by the act of negation itself and then, as it were, inserted between things. Negation cannot generate the "not" from out of itself, because in order to negate something, the act of negation first requires that something negate-able be presented to it. But to see that something is negate-able, i.e., susceptible of a "not," our thinking must already see that "not-ness" beforehand. But we cannot see such "not-ness" unless its origin (i.e., the action of the nothing, and thus the nothing itself) first emerges from hiddenness. The act of negation does not generate the "not" but is grounded in the "not," [117] and the "not" in turn is generated by the action of the nothing.²⁷ What is more, the act of negation is only one way of relating to and being already grounded in the action of the nothing.

We have now demonstrated the main features of our earlier thesis, that the nothing is the origin of negation rather than vice versa. If we have broken discursive reason's power over the question about the nothing and about being, then we have also decided the fate of the dominance of "logic"²⁸ within philosophy. The very idea of "logic" dissolves in the vortex of a more original inquiry.

Negation is not the most original experience of the nothing. Whether expressed or implied, the act of negation does permeate all our thinking in so many ways, and yet it is

²⁶because it directs us to the *being* of what-is. (5th ed., 1949.)

²⁷As analogously with assertions, so too with acts of negation: the negation arrives too late and is understood too extrinsically. (1st ed., 1929.)

²⁸By "logic" I mean the *traditional* interpretation of thought. (1st ed., 1929.)

not the best evidence of the revelation of the nothing essential to openness. Negation should not be seen as the only (much less the primary) activity in which openness relates to and is shaken by the action of the nothing. Cruel hostility and the sting of hatred go deeper than the formalities of mental negations. Painful denial and ruthless refusal are closer to -- and bitter privation is a greater burden of -- the nothing. These more primary possibilities of relating to the nothing -- powerful ways in which openness puts up with but never masters its thrownness -- are not sub-sets of the genus "negation." However, that does not prevent them from expressing themselves in the "not" and "negation." In fact they first reveal the depth and breadth of negation.

Dread is there but dormant. Openness is thus saturated with its relation to the nothing -- evidence that the nothing is always, if obscurely, revealed even though dread is required to disclose it in an ordinary way. But this also implies that ordinary dread is mostly suppressed in our openness. Dread is there, but dormant. Its breathing ever stirs within our openness, [118] not very much in the nervous, hardly at all in the yeas and nays of the busy bourgeoisie. It is most astir in the reserved, and most surely in the openness of those who take the basic risk. This happens by spending oneself on the essential so as to preserve the greatness of the open that we are.

This dread born of risk is not the opposite of joy, or even of quiet activity and calm enjoyment. It transcends such oppositions and lives in secret communion with the serene and gentle yearnings of creativity.

Ordinary dread can awaken in openness at any moment; no exceptional event is needed to rouse it. Its power is as deep as its possible occasions are unexceptional. It is always on the verge of springing forth but seldom does. But when it does, it seizes us and leaves us hanging.

Because openness is held out into the nothing by this hidden dread, each human being holds open a place for the nothing. We are so finite that our own wills and decisions cannot effect an original encounter with the nothing. Being finite is so profoundly embedded in openness that even our freedom cannot control our own abyssmal finitude.

Our being held out into the nothing by this hidden dread is our surpassing of the whole of what-is. It is transcendence.

THE NOTHING AND METAPHYSICS

Our question about the nothing is supposed to bring us face-to-face with metaphysics itself. The word "metaphysics" comes from the Greek $\mu\gamma\tau\cdot\tau\cdot\nu\sigma\iota\kappa\upsilon$. This curious title was eventually used to designate an inquiry that goes $\mu\gamma\tau\upsilon$ or *trans*, i.e., "beyond" whatever-is as such. Metaphysics means questioning beyond beings so as to regain them, as such and in the unity of a whole, for understanding.

The question about the nothing is one place where [119] this "going beyond beings as such and in the unity of a whole" takes place. Hence it is a "metaphysical" question. We said at the beginning that such questioning has a double character: every metaphysical question (1) encompasses the whole of metaphysics and (2) always includes in its question the very openness that asks the question.

To what degree does the question about the nothing pervade and encompass metaphysics as a whole?

Encompassing the whole of metaphysics

The nothing in Greek metaphysics. Antiquity's view of the nothing is expressed in the thesis *ex nihilo nihil fit*, "From nothing comes nothing," a sentence that of course can have many meanings. The thesis expresses what was then the dominant conception of beings in terms of the then current view of the nothing -- even though the problem of the nothing never gets explicitly posed when the thesis is discussed. Ancient metaphysics conceived the nothing as non-being, i.e., unformed matter that cannot shape itself into a formed being and thus offer an appearance ($\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omicron\varsigma$). In this view, whatever-is is a "self-forming formed" which shows itself as itself in a "form," i.e., something that can be seen. Ancient metaphysics never discusses the origins, legitimacy, or limits of this notion of being, any more than it discusses what the nothing is.

The nothing in Christian metaphysics. Christian theology, on the other hand, denies the truth of the thesis *ex nihilo nihil fit* and changes the meaning of the nothing. The nothing now means the complete absence of beings other than God. Hence, *ex nihilo fit -- ens creatum*: "Out of that complete absence come all created beings." Here "the nothing" is conceived as the opposite of really existing beings. "The

nothing" thus becomes the *summum ens*, God as *ens increatum*. Here again the then dominant conception of beings is expressed in terms of the then current interpretation of the nothing. But the metaphysical discussion of beings remains on the same level as the question about the nothing -- that is, in both ancient and Christian metaphysics the question of being and the question of the nothing as such go unasked. Thus no one seems troubled by the problem that if God creates *out of* nothing, he must be able to relate *to* the nothing. But if God is God, and if the "Absolute" excludes all nothingness, God cannot know the nothing. [120]

The nothing and being. This rough historical review shows that the nothing is conceived as the opposite -- the negation -- of whatever really exists. But if we manage to make the nothing a problem, we give this opposition a clearer definition and awaken authentic metaphysical inquiry into the being of what-is. The nothing ceases to be the vague opposite of what-is; instead, it is seen to belong to the very being of what-is.

"Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same." This thesis of Hegel's (*Science of Logic*, vol. I, *Werke* III, 78) is quite right. Being and the nothing do belong together, but not because they are equally indeterminate and immediate, as in Hegel's notion of thinking, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and shows up only in the transcendence of openness, held out into the nothing.

Conclusion. Granted that the question of being-as-such is the overarching question of metaphysics, the question of the nothing proves to be one that encompasses the whole of metaphysics. The question of the nothing also pervades the whole of metaphysics insofar as it forces us to confront the problem of the origin of negation -- that is, to finally decide whether the domination of metaphysics by "logic"²⁹ is legitimate.

Putting the questioner in question

The nothing "gives" being. The ancient thesis *ex nihilo nihil fit* takes on yet another meaning, one that touches on the problem of being itself. It becomes *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit*, "From the nothing comes all that is insofar as it

²⁹I always mean traditional logic and its *logos* understood as the origin of categories. (1st ed., 1929.)

is." Beings as-a-whole, in keeping with their ownmost possibility -- that is, finitely -- become what they are only within the nothing of openness. To what extent, then, does the question about the nothing, as a metaphysical question, encompass even us, the openness that asks the question?

The nothing puts the scientific questioner in question.

Earlier we characterized our current openness as one that is determined essentially by science. But if our science-determined openness is included in the question [121] about the nothing, it has been put in question by this very question.

Our scientific openness gets its single-minded focus and rigor from the distinctive way it relates to beings and to them alone. Science would like to dismiss the nothing with a superior gesture. But our inquiry into the nothing has shown that our scientific openness is possible only if it is already held out into the nothing. Scientific openness understands itself as it is only if it does not surrender the nothing. The alleged superiority of hard-headed science becomes ridiculous if science refuses to take the nothing seriously. Science cannot take beings themselves as objects of investigation unless the nothing is already manifest. Only by existing on the basis of metaphysics can science renew and fulfill its essential task, which is not to amass and classify bits of knowledge but to disclose, in ever fresh ways, the whole realm of truth in both nature and history.

From the nothing to science. Only because the nothing is already manifest in the depths of our openness can we be overwhelmed by the utter strangeness of whatever-is. Only when the strangeness of what-is presses in upon us does it awaken and arouse wonder. Only on the basis of wonder -- i.e., the revelation of the nothing -- does the question "Why?" arise. Only because the "why" as such is possible can we demand and give reasons for things in a definite way. Only because we are able to demand and give reasons, can our existence be possibly destined for scientific research.

Thus the question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, into question. It is a metaphysical question.

CONCLUSION

Human openness can relate to whatever-is only if it is held out into the nothing. This going-beyond-what-is occurs in

the very essence of openness. But such going-beyond is metaphysics itself. This entails that metaphysics belongs to the "nature of human being." It is neither a specialization [122] within academic philosophy nor a field of fanciful ideas. Metaphysics is the most basic happening within openness -- in fact it is openness itself. Because the truth of metaphysics dwells in this groundless ground, its closest neighbor is the ever-present possibility of profound error. Thus the rigor of science, as strong as it is, never equals the seriousness of metaphysics, and philosophy can never be measured by the standard of the scientific ideal.

If we have really participated in this unfolding of the question of the nothing, we neither brought metaphysics to ourselves from the outside nor "transported" ourselves into it as if for the first time. We cannot transport ourselves into metaphysics because we are always already there insofar as we exist. *ἡσθγι γῆρ, ἰ ἠλγ, ἡγστ\ τις ἠλοσση\α τ® τοθ •νδρῖς διανο* (*Phaedrus*, 279a): Insofar as human beings exist, philosophizing is already somehow going on.

Philosophy (as we call it) means simply enacting the metaphysics in which philosophy comes to itself and to its explicit tasks.³⁰ Philosophy begins only when our own existence undertakes a personal commitment to the basic possibilities of being-open as a whole. What most matters in this commitment is that we first open the space for beings in terms of a whole; then liberate ourselves for the nothing, i.e., free ourselves from the idols that each of us has and goes cringing to; and finally, as we are left hanging, let ourselves be swept back into that basic question of metaphysics, the question that the nothing itself imposes:

Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?

³⁰This is meant in two senses: the "essence" of metaphysics, and its own history as the dispensing of being. Both are included under the later rubric of "getting over [metaphysics]." (1st ed. of *Wegmarken*, 1967.)

APPENDIX

Some differences between the 1929 and 1975 editions

(Page-and-line references below are to GA 9.)

<u>GA 9</u>	<u>1929 edition:</u>
103.21	new paragraph at <i>Hieraus</i> .
103.22	inserts <i>je</i> between <i>und</i> and <i>aus</i> .
104.16	<i>was</i> instead of <i>die</i> .
104.30	<i>grundsätzlich</i> in place of <i>in einer ihr eigenen Weise</i>
104.32-33	no <i>eigentümlich begrenzte</i> before <i>Unterwerfung</i> .
104.34	<i>an ihm</i> instead of <i>an diesem</i>
105.6	<i>ein seiendes</i> instead of <i>ein Seiendes</i> .
105.24-25	no <i>ob ausdrücklich oder nicht</i>
105.25-26	<i>das Seiende nur und sonst --</i> instead of <i>nur das Seiende und sonst --</i>
106.7	<i>Muß nicht gerade jetzt. . . ?</i> instead of <i>Dagegen muß jetzt</i> (in declarative mode)
106.8	<i>einsetzen</i> instead of <i>behaupten</i> .
106.10	new paragraph at <i>Ist</i> .
106.29	<i>zugegeben, d.h. mit überlegener Gleichgültigkeit dagegen von der Wissenschaft preisgegeben als das. . .</i>
107.20	<i>Denken -- wesenhaft immer Denken von etwas --</i> instead of <i>Denken, das wesenhaft immer Denken von etwas ist,</i>
109.12	<i>schlechthinnige</i> instead of <i>vollständige</i>
109.30	no <i>jedoch</i>
110.7	new paragraph at <i>Freilich</i> .
110.11-12	<i>das Seiende im Ganzen, wenngleich schattenhaft, zusammen</i> instead of <i>das Seiende, wenngleich schattenhaft, in einer Einheit des "Ganzen"</i>
110.27	<i>läßt uns inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen -- von ihm durchstimmt --</i> instead of <i>läßt uns -- von ihm [i.e., das Gestimmtsein] durchstimmt -- inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen.</i>
111.30	<i>in einer bekannten</i> instead of <i>in der folgenden bekannten.</i>
112.19	new paragraph at <i>Daß</i> .

116.22 inserts two sentences between *Verneinung?* and *Diese bringt*, namely: *Diese [i.e., die Verneinung] soll ja zum Wesen des menschlichen Denkens gehören. Die Verneinung spricht sich im Nein-Sagen je über ein Nicht aus.*

117.27 new paragraph at *Die Durchdrungenheit.*

118.4 no *Dasein* after *verwegene.*

118.30 τV μγτV τV νυσικV (misaccented) instead of μγτ• τ• νυσικV.

119.14 new paragraph at *Die antike.*

119.21 new paragraph at *Die christliche.*

120.21 omits *uns* after *sie.*

120.31 new paragraph at *Wir.*

120.32 no *jetzt und hier erfahrenes* before *Dasein.*

121.9 *nur* instead of *erst.*

121.14 *Und* before *nur.*

122.1-2 *Einfälle -- sie ist. . .* instead of *Einfälle. Die Metaphysik ist. . .*

122.3 new paragraph at *Weil.*

122.7 *Und* before *die Philsoophie.*

122.16 new paragraph at *Philosophie*

122.17 *ist nur das* instead of *ist das*

122.18 no *zu* before *ihren.*

122.18 *Und* before *die.*

122.19 *Einsatz* instead of *Einsprung.*

122.21 *Einsatz* instead of *Einsprung.*

122.24 *und am Ende* instead of *zuletzt.*

122.27 new paragraph at *Warum.*