

We will allow metaphysics to explain itself by taking up a particular question in it.

1.

Any particular metaphysical question will always be marked out (is essentially constituted) by the following characteristics:

- a) It maintains itself alongside the rest of metaphysics in such a way that it cannot be 'loosened out' from the whole.
- b) It indicates back to its own existential origins, and thereby implicates the questioner as well.

Today, the existential origins of any metaphysical inquiry (in other words, our existence) is determined by science, claims Heidegger.

Science has become diverse enough that the way of being of the objects each branch deals with largely differs, so that it can no longer have a meaningful source of unity (apart from the "technical organization of universities and faculties").

However, scientific existence can still be disclosed in a unity by way of the following aspects:

- a) Relation to the world: Each of the sciences is related to the world in its own unique way; what is common is that, in each case, this relation enables it to seek beings themselves, investigate them as objects and determine their ground.
- b) Attitude: While many other activities are related to beings, the attitude of man towards science is unique, being one of a "peculiarly delineated submission" to the beings themselves.
- c) Irruption: The sustenance of the relation and the guidance of the attitude can only be understood by placing a third component alongside it: Man "pursues" science, inducing an irruption which "breaks" beings open.

All these three aspects, by their rejection of it, refer implicitly to the 'nothing'. Every relation to the world refers to beings and *nothing* besides; every attitude is guided by beings and *nothing* besides; every irruption is in confrontation with beings and *nothing* besides.

"How is it with the nothing?"

2.

"What 'is' the nothing?" The question itself implies a contradiction in terms, much like the answer: "The nothing 'is' the negation of the totality of beings."

But the negation, and more generally logic itself (which is what lays down the rule of non-contradiction) are specific acts of the intellect which are given only *after* the 'nothing' is given; therefore, we cannot use them to determine the nothing itself. (Furthermore, how can the infinite totality of beings be penetrable for we finite beings?)

However, we are only able to raise the question of the nothing because we have already, in some sense, anticipated what it is; the above answer is our crude notion of it.

Now, we may not be able to *comprehend* the totality of beings, but we're always *dealing* with it in the unity of a whole, "if only in a shadowy way". This whole is revealed in moods like boredom and joy, says Heidegger. The founding mode of this moods is an essential characteristic of Dasein.

Those moods conceal the nothing; *anxiety* is the (fundamental) mood which reveals it.

Fear is a mood such that it is always essentially “for” or “in the face of” something determinate. For anxiety, however, this something (which is, in fact, the nothing) is left indeterminate, and is essentially impossible to determine; “a peculiar calm pervades it”. This indeterminateness finds its origin in the “slipping away” (and this is no “flight”) of the whole (and so also revelation of the nothing) which anxiety induces when it overcomes us.

Anxiety leaves us with a “vacant stillness”, and it is not “I” who feels anxious, but “one” who does, for pure Dasein is all that remains in it (the “who” of the Dasein is das Man, the “one”).

Having gone over our pre-ontological understanding of the nothing, we ask once again: How is it with the nothing?

3.

This “slipping away” of beings as a whole (which we encounter “at one with” the nothing) is not the same as its negation, nor its annihilation (the latter being impossible for us to do in anxiety due to the impotence it renders unto us). Heidegger calls it the *nihilation* of the nothing.

Nihilation is essentially constitutive of Dasein’s primordial disclosure of beings. But—Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being and relating to beings being a defining characteristic of ‘existence’ itself—this means that nihilation is essentially constitutive of existence. “Dasein means: being held out into the nothing.”

But in spite of the nothing’s essentiality to Dasein, we aren’t always anxious. This is because the falling of Dasein is typically distorting the originality of the nothing (although it remains clearer in those who are “daring”). The negation is an example of a distorted version of the nothing, which still holds the nothing in its origin. Other examples are “galling failure”, “merciless prohibition”, “bitter privation”, and so on.

Historically, the nothing was conceived of as merely the negation of being. As discussed, this is a metaphysical error. “From nothing, nothing comes to be”: The corrected version would read, “From nothing, all beings as beings come to be”. It is also now clear that scientific existence is only possible if “in advance it holds itself out into the nothing”. The nothing reveals beings in their strangeness, and thereby provokes the wondering “why” from Dasein.

Dasein is transcendent because, by virtue of nihilation being constitutive of its primordial openness, it is in some sense “beyond” beings as a whole. But this transcendence is metaphysics itself: Thus, metaphysics is an essential aspect of Dasein. Metaphysics is philosophy “coming to itself”. Thus, Plato says: “For by nature, my friend, man’s mind dwells in philosophy.”