The Meaning of Nothingness in the Early Philosophy of Martin Heidegger

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THE MEANING OF NOTHINGNESS IN THE EARLY PHILOSOPHY OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER

by

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VITA AUCTORIS

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In 1959 he graduated from St. Mary's College, Winona, Minnesota, receiving the Bachelor of Arts degree cum laude in Religion-Education. Since then he has taught at St. Mel High School in Chicago (four years), Christian Brothers College in Memphis (two years), and St. Mary's College, Winona (one summer). During summers and at night schools he completed the Master of Arts degree in English at De Paul University in Chicago (awarded February, 1962) and the Master of Education degree at St. Mary's College in Winona (awarded February, 1965). After completing the course work for the Master of Arts degree in philosophy at Loyola University, he began doctoral course work at St. Louis University.
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INTRODUCTION

This essay presupposes a familiarity with Martin Heidegger's terminology, although a few key terms are defined in the first two chapters. Similarly, it presupposes a familiarity with Heidegger's "cosmology," that is, his concept of the world as a structural unity having its meaning through Dasein.

Nearly all the references are to Sein und Zeit or Was Ist Metaphysik?, although I have consulted a good number of secondary sources. There is the possibility that Heidegger's thought has gone far beyond these two early works, but I have limited my investigation to them. I think this limitation is not only expedient but also justified, since most commentators themselves focus on these two works. Perhaps the present project can be the beginning of a doctoral dissertation extending to his more recent writings.

In the first two chapters I have not tried to capsulize Heidegger, but I have tried to emphasize, under my own interpretation, those points which would have required clarification later in the essay. The main ideas of these two preliminary chapters are Dasein's existentialia and the relation of Angst to death. Because I have not tried to add
anything of my own in these chapters (though it naturally has the stamp of my interpretation of his doctrine), they are not heavily documented. To do so would require footnotes after almost every sentence.
CHAPTER I

THE STRUCTURE OF DASEIN: PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF DASEIN'S ESSENCE WHICH IS CARE: BEFINDLICHKEIT, EXISTENTIALITY, FALLENNESS

The condition of thrownness in which Dasein "finds himself" is his fundamental state (Befindlichkeit), in which he is sensitive or "attuned" to existence. This "attunedness" (also translated as Befindlichkeit; a fundamental affective state) is not to be confused with any psychologically discoverable "mood," although such moods are ontic correlates to this fundamental attunedness of the Dasein. In Befindlichkeit, Dasein becomes aware of its state of "thrownness" (Geworfenheit). It is also disclosed to itself as Being-in-the-world, and therefore as having a circumspectual relationship in its "there" to the elements of the world, viz., the ready-to-hand, the present-at-hand, and other Daseins. In the mood of Befindlichkeit, the world is seen primarily as a force acting upon Dasein, as well as being the arena into which Dasein is thrown. As we shall see later, the most basic state of this Befindlichkeit is that of dread (Angst); the most
familiar ontic correlate is that of fear.

The "existentialium," or category of existence, of Befindlichkeit is primarily a concern for the "whence" of Dasein. The second of the three existentialia of in-Being, understanding, is a concern for the "whither" of Dasein's world-relationship; it sheds light, so to speak, on the "there" of Dasein, in a more active way than the attunedness of Befindlichkeit. Most basically, understanding discloses to Dasein the "for-the-sake-of-which" it exists. And the third is discourse, or articulation, in which Dasein formulates the content of its understanding into intelligible structures.

The Being of Being-in-the-world which is essential to Dasein is ontologically constituted as Care. Care itself has a structure, having the phases of thrownness, existentiality, and fallenness. The first of these phenomena, thrownness, is of course related to the above-described existentialium of Befindlichkeit, for man finds himself thrown into the world: he did not ask to be here. The connotation of such a phrase

\[1\]While the terms ontisch ('ontical') and ontologisch ('ontological') are not explicitly defined, their meanings . . . emerge rather clearly. Ontological ["existential"] inquiry is concerned primarily with Being; ontical ["existentiell"] inquiry is concerned primarily with entities and the facts about them." Sein und Zeit. (Emphasis added.) Tr. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as Being and Time (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 11, n. 3. (All references to Sein und Zeit, henceforth abbreviated as SZ, are to Heidegger's original pagination, as given in the margin of the English translation.)
as "thrown" or "cast" into the world is an unpleasant one, and probably was so intended by Heidegger, who wrote Sein und Zeit in the bitter aftermath of the First World War. Certainly such a posture of being cast into a hostile and unloving world, with the consequent dilemmas of suicide as posed by many modern authors who are labeled existentialists, is characteristic to our time. However, this connotation is incidental. The important characteristic of thrownness is not any hostility that Dasein might experience ontically, as living in the world, but rather the radical finitude implied in Dasein's very origin, as well as the definiteness of its present Being-there. This definiteness of Being-there is a fact, and the understanding of this fact of its involvement in the world is termed by Heidegger "facticity."\(^2\)

The facticity of Dasein is not the same as the brute fact of something present-at-hand, which Heidegger terms "factuality." Facticity is a character of Dasein's Being, and a characteristic from which it can never escape.

The second constituent of care, Dasein's existentiality, or projection, is essentially tied in with temporality. As a

\(^2\)"Whenever Dasein is, it is as a fact. The factuality of such a fact is what we call Dasein's 'facticity'. . . . The concept of facticity implies that an entity within the world has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its destiny with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world." SZ, p. 56.
matter of fact, it is this constituent of care which constitutes temporality. Dasein is precisely to project itself. This projection is an activity which, although towards possibilities, is the proper act of its existence. Dasein's definition is precisely that-which-projects-itself or "ex-sists" into the future. Whether the facticity of Dasein gives rise to an authentic repetition of past possibilities, or whether it leads to an inauthentic ignoring of past possibilities, Dasein's future projections decide and fashion the form of its present existence. To "throw itself forward" is an ex-static movement. It presupposes, or better, is identifiable with, that basic standing-outside-of-itself which is Dasein's Ek-sistenz. The futurity which underlies this projection is obvious.

The third constituent of care, oddly enough, is fallenness. Dasein is thrown into a world of things present-at-hand and ready-to-hand. Dasein itself has some characteristics of such entities, so that it is not at all surprising and is most obvious from experience that Dasein tends to relate itself to the parts of the world more than to the world as a whole. In its limitations Dasein becomes concern-full, concernful for its physical survival, concernful for its social security, and concernful for more vaguely determined goals.

The insecurities of fallen Dasein are caused by its

\[^3\text{SZ, p. 57.}\]
condition of thrownness; i.e., its continued presence in the world is by no means guaranteed, just as there was no guarantee or adequate explanation for its coming into the world.

As we shall see later, it is essential to Dasein not only that it have possibility for authentic existence, but also that it have possibility even to lose itself in the world of things. With the exception of that ultimate impossibility of possibility, death itself, this possibility of falling is the most dramatic illustration of man's freedom over the world in his very condition of being in the world.
CHAPTER II

DREAD AND BEING-TOWARDS-DEATH, AS SUBSTANTIALLY
THE SAME PHENOMENON: ANOTHER
PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

The third existentialium, fallenness, is the point of de­
parture for Heidegger's analysis of the most proper and funda­
mental Befindlichkeit of Dasein, Dread or "Anxiety." In a later
chapter we shall see Dread as the point of departure for the in­
dividual Dasein's own existential comprehension of Nothingness.
In this chapter we shall discuss Dread as it is in itself.

A. Anxiety (Dread)

The characteristic of fallenness, or absorption in the
world of concern, if a fleeing. It is a fleeing by Dasein "in
the face of itself and in the face of its authenticity."¹ The
privative character of fallenness which is flight discloses that
Dasein flees in the face of something. "To be sure, that in the
face of which it flees is not grasped in thus turning away and
falling."² This existentiell-ontico³ turning away is the

¹SZ, p. 184.
²Ibid., p. 185.
³Existentiell is defined by Heidegger in SZ, p. 12. Cf.
translators' note (n. 2) on that page.
beginning of Heidegger's parallel analyses of the ontological Befindlichkeiten of fear and of dread.

The Region of Fear

Heidegger's interpretation of fear as a state of mind shows that "that-in-the-face-of-which" we fear is "a detrimental entity within-the-world, which comes from some definite region but is close by and is bringing itself close, yet might stay away." 4 That which Dasein fears, besides having a threatening character, also has the character of entity-within-the-world; but in falling, Dasein is fleeing from itself. Hence Heidegger concludes that "turning away is not a fear that is founded upon entities within the world. . . . The turning away of falling is grounded in anxiety, which in turn is what first makes fear possible." 5

What then, is fear all about? The basic state of Dasein is Being-in-the-world as such. The difference between the objects of fear and dread is, first, that the object of fear is an entity within the world, whereas that of dread is not, and secondly, that the object of fear is defined whereas that of dread is completely indefinite.

The Structure of Fear

The mood of fear is broken down by Heidegger into three

4 Ibid., p. 136.
5 Ibid.
components: (a) what is feared; (b) the fearing itself; (c) that-for-the-sake-of-which one fears. First, what is feared is always an entity within the world, as pointed out above. It is definite in its source and in that which it threatens, viz. that particular ontical potentiality of Dasein's Being.

Secondly, the fearing itself meets this specific threat more or less explicitly. It is an encounter with the threat which is explicit to the point of being able to erect safeguards and counterattacks against that which threatens.

Thirdly, that-for-the-sake-of-which or that-on-behalf-of-which the fear fears is Dasein itself. Consequently, the fear always discloses the Da of the Dasein, in the Being of its "there," although the emphasis is on the ontic condition of its there.

The Structure of Dread

The phenomenon of dread, which is the basis of fear, ultimately has a similar structure: (a) that-in-the-face-of-which one dreads, (b) the dreading itself, and (c) that-for-the-sake-of-which one dreads.

The first of these, which is not exactly an "object" of dread, differs from the object of fear in that it does not have a definite detrimentality within it. There is not a special "factual potentiality-for-Being" which is threatened.

6 Ibid.
Furthermore, the entities within the world, present-at-hand or ready-to-hand, are irrelevant; Dasein as in its state of dread is essentially non-involved. The totality of its involvements in the world is of no consequence: Dasein collapses into itself, and the world "has the character of completely lacking significance."\(^7\)

Beyond this the region of that-in-the-face-of-which one dreads is equally undetermined. It is Nowhere. There is no spatial or psychic area in which this foreboding cloud originates. It is intensely immediate. Without coming from a definite direction, it is already-there. This in-the-face-of-which, this vectorless force, "is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is Nowhere."\(^8\) Much earlier, Kierkegaard wrote that dread "is the reality of freedom as a potentiality, before this potentiality has materialized"; it is "a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy" and its object is "the something which is nothing."\(^9\)

Heidegger states that this first component, that-in-the-face-of-which one dreads, is precisely Being-in-the-world, which does not signify, however, that the worldhood of the world gets

\(^{7}\)Ibid.  
\(^{8}\)Ibid.  
conceptualized. Dasein is radically limited not only by its present ontic deficiencies and its coming death, but also by its origin: Dasein cannot account for its having come into the world instead of something else or nothing at all. The indeterminate object of dread is Dasein's Being-in-the-world.

Corresponding to the second component of fear is the dreading itself. This dreading, as has been said, is the most proper and fundamental Befindlichkeit of Dasein. As we will see later, this anxiety itself grounds Dasein in its there, viz. as a world-existing-but-transcending being.

The third component, that on behalf of which dread is anxious, is not, as in the case of fear, "a definite kind of being for Dasein or a definite possibility for it." On the contrary, the threat itself is indefinite, and therefore does not threaten any ontic potentiality of Dasein. That-for-the-sake-of-which Dasein is in dread is its very Being-in-the-world.

The Disclosure of Dread

The state of dread does not destroy freedom; it discloses to Dasein the very starkness and ultimacy of its freedom. Dread "brings Dasein face-to-face with Being-free-for (propensio in . . .) the authenticity of its Being, and for this

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10 Ibid., p. 187.
11 Ibid.
authenticity as a possibility which it always is." But freedom is not only a privilege: it is also an inescapable burden, a responsibility. A man can destroy his freedom only by destroying himself. In the comprehension of itself as thrown into the world and now free in the world, Dasein is disclosed as solus ipse. It sees itself as alone in the starkness of its own self-sufficiency and yet in the finitude of its sufficiency. Furthermore, in the disclosure of dread (anxiety), Dasein becomes acutely aware of the peculiar way in which it is in the world, i.e., as a transcendent being. "In anxiety one feels uncanny. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety comes proximately to expression: the 'Nothing and Nowhere.' But here 'uncanniness' also means 'not-being-at-home.'" In other words, the uncanniness which one feels in anxiety is an awareness of the distance existing between himself and the world in which he is.

The state of fallenness is seen as therefore flowing from this fundamental Befindlichkeit of dread. Dasein does not flee in the face of entities within the world, as in the case of

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12 Ibid., p. 183.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 At this point Marcel and other Christian existentialists would insert the concept of nostalgia which points to an ultimate transcendent Good for man.
fear; rather it is towards these entities that it flees in the act of fallenness. These are entities alongside of which the Dasein lost in the "they" can dwell in "tranquilized familiar-ity." In falling, one tries to create a home which is really a public place, because of the overwhelming character of the uncanniness or not-at-homeness which is the basic constitution of dread.

The Being-in-the-world which is central to dread is illustrated by Heidegger's example of darkness, in which there is most definitely "Nothing" to see, though the world is still there and "there more obtrusively." Heidegger summarizes dread (anxiety) as follows: "The entire stock of what lies therein may be counted up formally and recorded: anxiousness as a state of mind is a way of Being-in-the-world; that-in-the-face-of-which we have anxiety about is thrown Being in the world; that which we have anxiety about is our potentiality for Being-in-the-world. Thus the entire phenomenon of anxiety shows Dasein as factically existing Being-in-the-world." And this Being-in-the-world is essentially care, the essence of Dasein.

16 Ibid., p. 189.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 191.
B. The Being-Towards-Death of Dasein

As we have seen, the object of Dread and that for-the-sake-of-which, or that which-is-at-stake, in Dread are substantially the same, viz., Being-in-the-world. It is still unclear however, why Being-in-the-world should have the oppressive characteristic of something dreadful. The most inexorable phase of Dasein's Being-in-the-world is the possibility of Death. Death is the formal aspect, it seems to me, of the Being-in-the-world which is dreaded. Death has the unique character of the possibility of impossibility. It cannot be overcome: once dead, always dead.

It is Dasein's prerogative, as a Being which is there to itself, to grasp this end of its existence in a way which informs all the other possibilities of its existence. At the moment of death, when Dasein has run the span of its life, it (Dasein) reaches its ontic totality of possibilities; it reaches its fullness. But at the moment of death it simultaneously loses itself: "It loses the Being of its 'there.'" This determination of existence which is the point of wholeness for the Dasein is something which is seen daily and yet never understood until Dasein reaches the point of its own death. Heidegger has a very elaborate analysis of the everyday "circumspective" views of death, with which this essay is not

\[19\] Ibid., pp. 238, 278.
concerned. We are rather concerned with the authentic understanding of death which gives meaning to the phenomenon of anxiety, which in its turn gives meaning to Dasein's structure as a care-full being-in-the-world. Death is also obviously the most dramatic case of the entry of Nothingness into the being of Dasein.

Speaking most precisely, it is not the event of death that is the object of Heidegger's investigation, but Being-towards-one's-own-death, Sein zum Tode. Death is the ending of Dasein; but it is not the ending simply in the sense of a terminus, which, as Brock points out, would be symbolized by the cutting of the thread by one of the three Parcae. Rather death is included within the being of Dasein; the ending which is death is characterized as "Being-towards-the-end." Death is the ultimate Being-there; it is a mode of being for which Dasein is responsible and in which Dasein as a being which is there is actually involved. In other words, death is authentic possibility for Dasein, and not simply the termination of its possibilities.

In its being-towards-death Dasein exhibits a not-yet character which is identifiable with its very being. However, the not-yet character which is death is not something which is outstanding, in the sense of "still due," as in the case of a debt which has "not yet" been liquidated. Entities for which

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anything is still outstanding are ready-to-hand. Their totality is the totality of a sum, and any lack of totality which is a missing of something cannot in any way define the "not-yet" which belongs to Dasein as its possible death.

Heidegger contrasts the outstandingness of the last quarter of the moon and the outstandingness of the ripeness of a fruit to the not-yet character of death for Dasein. In the first case, the last quarter of the moon is outstanding in the sense that it is not yet in our grasp perceptually. On the contrary, Dasein's possibility of death is not yet actual at all. In the example of the fruit, which itself goes towards its ripeness through process, there is a further analogy; but the fruit goes towards its ripeness without realizing that towards which it moves; also, in the ripeness, the fruit fulfills itself. But with death Dasein hardly fulfills itself. Indeed it fulfills its course, but it has not necessarily exhausted its specific possibilities. It is difficult to imagine Dasein, at the point of death, as having exhausted every possibility it has had, and hence for Dasein death does not necessarily mean fulfilling itself. Nor is death a "getting finished" which is possible only as a determinate form of something present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. Dasein not only has a not-yet character, as do the lower entities, but Dasein is not-yet,
and it is its not-yet as long as it is. Consequently, as long as Dasein is, it is already its end as well. "The ending" which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's being at an end, but a being-towards-the-end of this entity. Death is a way to be which Dasein takes over as soon as it is."²² As Heidegger himself recalls, "As soon as man comes to life, he is old enough to die."²³

The phenomenon of death, interpreted as being-towards-the-end, is the first act, so to speak, of Dasein's being, which is defined as care. The ontological significance of care has already been expressed in the definition, "ahead-of-itself being-already-in-the-world as being-alongside-entities-which we encounter within the world."²⁴ This definition contains the three fundamental characteristics of care: existentiality, facticity, and fallenness. If indeed, death is the proper possibility of Dasein, then it must be defined in terms of these characteristics.

Existentiality and Death

Death is seen as something impending. However, "impending" is not limited to death, for many environmental events impend, involving entities which are ready-to-hand and present-at-hand,

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²²Ibid., p. 246.
²³From Ackermann aus Bohmen, quoted by Heidegger, SZ, p. 245, n. iv.
²⁴Ibid., p. 249.
as well as other Daseins which are there with us. But the impending character of death, which is due to its futurity, is rooted in Dasein's own possibility of being. Death is a possibility of Being which Dasein "itself has to take over in every case." Dasein stands before itself in a moment of ecstatic projection and seizes death as something which is real and imminent. Death is the possibility of no longer being there and of no longer being able to be there. In the ecstatic awareness of this radical possibility, Dasein "has been fully assigned to its ownmost potentiality for Being." When Dasein thus stands before itself, it is stripped of its relations to any other Dasein. It stands in a moment of awe-full anxiety, isolated from the experience of everyday and common man. This possibility of death which is ownmost, i.e., devoid of relationships, is a state of being cut off from all relationships of ontological communication of ontological possibility (meaning that when one is dead he cannot do anything), and is at the same time the uttermost possibility of Dasein, i.e., that possibility which closes, terminates, and gives meaning to all other possibilities.

Dasein is not the only entity which undergoes the ontical phenomenon of death. However, Dasein is the only entity which, as Being-there, can already be unto-itself. And this

25 Ibid., p. 250.
26 Ibid.
distinctive possibility, realized as such, is the only certain element of this otherwise thoroughly indeterminate phenomenon of death. It is certain that I will die. How I will die and when I will die and the full reality of my dying are indeterminate until the possibility is actualized.

**Facticity and Death**

This basic possibility of Dasein is not one which it accidentally encounters in the course of its Being. On the contrary as Heidegger points out, if Dasein exists at all, it has already been thrown into this possibility of death. Dasein has been delivered over to death; this is its factual destiny. Dasein’s condition of being thrown into the world towards death has an inexorable character. It is something which a man can exercise no basic control over. And it reveals to a man his radical finitude.

**Fallenness and Death**

The fact that many or even most men are largely ignorant of death, especially in its ontological significations, does not argue against the fact that Dasein is basically a being towards death, but rather illustrates this fact through the phenomenon of fallenness. Dasein seeks to evade this possibility of its own impossibility. Recognizing its possibility of no longer being-in-the-world, it evades or flees from this possibility by absorbing itself into the world of its concern. Its
fallenness, therefore, is one of the most powerful illustrations of the otherness of its destiny, i.e., that it is progressing towards absolute Nothingness.

Man has a set of phrases, such as "one dies," "people die," or "everyone must die." This set of phrases reveals not only the certainty of death, but also its truth for each individual. It is a certainty which is based not on empirical evidence (repeated instances grounding the high probability of more such instances), but on the fundamental Befindlichkeit of thrownness. Oddly enough, the state of Being-towards-death constitutes or makes possible all other possibilities. It is in virtue of its Being-towards-death that Dasein is free to project itself into a future which is authentic only in terms of death.

Summarizing the interplay of these three existentialia, Existentiality, Facticity and Fallenness, Heidegger explains that the anticipation of the future possibility of death reveals to Dasein its lostness in the mass and brings it face to face with the innermost possibility of its own identity. This possibility is primarily supported not by that concernful solicitude which is an ontic and familiar phenomenon, but rather by Being itself in an impassioned freedom-towards-death. This is a freedom which is released from the illusions of the "they" and which is rooted in anxiety. "Anxiety as a basic state of mind belongs to such a self-understanding of Dasein, on the
basis of Dasein itself. Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety."\textsuperscript{27}

C. Dread is Being-Towards-Death

The indeterminate "object" of dread is, as said above (p. 12), precisely Being-in-the-world. And that "for-the-sake-of-which" Dasein is in dread is also Being-in-the-world. But that "Being-in-the-world" which Dasein dreads is nothing more than his Being-towards-death, since his life is essentially death-directed. Brock seems to concur with this analysis of mine:

In the phenomenon of dread, therefore, both what is dreaded and for the sake of what [sic] the Dasein is in dread are substantially the same. The one is Being-in-the-world in the state of 'thrownness'; the other is the potentiality of Being-in-the-world authentically.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid. (Emphasis added.)

\textsuperscript{28}Brock, op. cit., p. 48.
CHAPTER III

DERIVATIVES OF NOTHINGNESS: NEGATION AND THE THREE EXISTENTIALIA (BEFINDLICHKEIT, FALLENNESS, AND EXISTENTIALITY)

A. Negation

The Structure of Discourse

To speak of Nothingness one must speak of, and in, negation, which is an act of Dasein in the realm not of things but of thought about things. The whole process of human reason depends upon the categories of negation, such as distinction, contradiction, and incrementation. Dasein, in the face of entities ready-to-hand, relates itself to them as individual entities or groups of entities, seizing upon their ontic qualities in an attempt to use them, and to ascertain their essences. It recognizes the disparateness of these entities, and to understand each one's essence Dasein resorts to isolating each one by declaring what it is not. As Dasein's understanding expands, it attempts to comprehend the structural unity of these entities, and though now using a different set of propositions, it still resorts to negation as the only way it can delineate their structural relations.
No matter how profoundly it understands any reality—be it in an ontic mode of knowing or an ontological one—as soon as Dasein articulates (which is the inevitable aftermath of its understanding), it thrusts the Not between things; i.e., Dasein negates. Even the first statement of the philosopher is a negation: Being is not Seiendendheit.¹

"Nothing" is More Than Negation

Negation is not what Heidegger is talking about when he speaks of Nothing. This positing of "conceptual opposites,"² so explicit and bound to a specific act of Dasein, is hardly the ground for Being. If Negation were equatable with Nothing, then the very question "What is Nothing?" (which is recognized by Heidegger as being very badly worded, implying as it does that Nothing is a "what," i.e., an entity³) would be an impossible one, since it would deprive itself of its own object.⁴ Nothing is not simply a negation of an entity, nor even a negation of the totality of what-is, that is to say that which


²Martin Heidegger, Was Ist Metaphysik?, translated by Werner Brock in Existence and Being, op. cit., p. 340. (Hereafter abbreviated as WM.)

³Ibid., p. 330.

⁴Ibid.
absolutely is not. Logical thinking brings Nothing "into the higher [i.e., less fundamental] category of the Negative and therefore of what is negated [i.e., entities]." Therefore, Nothing does not "exist" only because of the Not which is negation. On the contrary, it is the other way about: the Nothing makes negation possible.

B. The Existentialia of Befindlichkeit, Fallenness, and Existentiality: Dasein as Riddled with Nothingness

Besides negation, there are other areas of conscious existence structured by the Nothing in one or another of its secondary modes. Each of these areas, Befindlichkeit, fallenness, and existence within understood temporality, lead to negation when interpreted and articulated in discourse (Rede). But in themselves and ontologically prior to their formulation in discourse, they exist in the Nothing—although as we discuss them here, we are forced to be negating.

**Befindlichkeit**

Dasein "finds itself" as thrown. In this defining condition, the sheer positive fact of its Being instead of not-Being is most impressive. But bound into Dasein's facticity is not only the fact that it is, but also that it was not, illustrating Dasein's non-necessity and pointing ahead to its

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expendability.

The connection between the Befindlichkeit of thrownness and Nothingness is quite direct: Thrownness, the "NOT" which is constitutive of the Being of Dasein,\(^7\) is precisely Dasein's factual state of not being an adequate explanation of its own existence, i.e., not being its existential origin and projection. By "explanation" I mean, of course, more than a logical account: I rather mean the ratio, the real ground or basis of its reality.

Dasein's basis is thrown. Because Dasein is Dasein, it takes this basis into its own existence, but there is always a separateness, a transcendence, which is traceable to the "Not" of this basis. Dasein does not exist before its basis, of course; it has not "laid that basis itself; it reposes in the weight of it, which is made manifest as a burden by Dasein's mood."\(^8\) Because of this separateness (which is not to be regarded as the dualism of two things,) the Self can never get its basis totally into its power, i.e., "from the ground up."\(^9\)

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**Dasein's New Relationship to Its Basis**

But this is not particularly impressive: few philosophers have claimed that man or any visible being was its own

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\(^7\)SZ, p. 285.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 284.

\(^9\)Ibid.
cause. What is striking and central to our question is that Heidegger sees Dasein as entering into a new relationship with its basis after the initial throwing of Dasein into the world. For Dasein then becomes its own basis, not in the sense of existing as the basis of its own Being, but as the Being of its own basis.

In being a basis—that is, in existing as thrown—Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent before its basis, but only from it and as this basis. Thus 'Being-a-basis' means never to have power over one's innermost Being from the ground up. This 'not' belongs to the existential meaning of 'thrownness.' It itself, being a basis, is a nullity of itself. 'Nullity' [Nichtigkeit] does not signify anything like not-being-present-at-hand or not-subsisting; what one has in view here is rather a 'not' as a 'not' which is constitutive for this Being of Dasein—its thrownness. The character of this 'not' as a 'not' may be defined existentially: in being its Self, Dasein is, as a Self, the entity that has been thrown. It has been released from its basis, not through itself but to itself, so as to be as this basis. Dasein is not itself the basis of its Being, inasmuch as this basis first arises from its projection: rather, as Being-its-Self, it is the Being of its basis. This basis is never anything but the basis for an entity whose Being has to take over Being-a-basis.  

It remains for Dasein, therefore, to "take over Being-a-basis," although it was not a basis initially but instead was thrown. In its moment of care Dasein is its "that-it-is"; it is "delivered over to its own entity." and as this now-existing entity it is the basis—the thrown basis—of its

10 Ibid., pp. 284-85.
11 Ibid., p. 284.
potentiality-for-Being, which is precisely the issue of care. The potentiality-for-Being, this projection into the future upon possibilities towards which Dasein has been thrown, is what Heidegger means by Dasein’s "being its own thrown basis." This basis is not a thing, existing apart from Dasein, but rather can only have any kind of Being in Dasein itself: "Dasein is not itself the basis of its Being; . . . it is the Being of its basis."

And so Nothingness (or Nullity, as Macquarrie and Robinson have translated Nichtigkeit) determines the basis of Dasein in at least two ways: first, in that Dasein was not before its basis, that is, did not throw itself and is not an adequate explanation of the fact that it is; and second, in that its projection itself "is essentially null,"¹² because it is a movement towards that which Dasein is not. Allied to this second nullity is the fact that in its freedom (made possible by this "essential nullity") Dasein chooses one possibility and tolerates not having chosen the others and not being able to now choose them. A dramatic case of this offshoot of the second nullity (the exclusion of other possibilities) is the possibility of inauthenticity, which is paradoxically a nullification of nullity, i.e., a refusal to recognize the Not as the basis

¹² Ibid., p. 285.
"Guilthood"

The first consequence of this permeation of Dasein's essence (viz. care) is that "Dasein as such is guilty," using Heidegger's definition of guilt as "Being-the-basis-of-anullity." Being-guilty is more primordial than any knowledge of it, states Heidegger, and as a matter of fact, it is even prior to all notions of morality. It is rather a constituent of Dasein's Being, substantially the same as care. It is a call to authenticity, a call to "bring itself back to itself from its lostness in the 'they.'" Being-guilty does not mean being evil, but being responsible; hearing the appeal of Being correctly means that one sees oneself as potential-towards-Being, as care-full, as answerable, as "guilty." This is man's state even prior to his actually making the response.

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 286. A better word than "guilt" in this context would be "responsible," but we shall use "guilt" to be consistent with the translation of Sein und Zeit. Also, its negative connotation is significant, as we shall see shortly.

16 Ibid., pp. 286-37.

17 Ibid.
and so Heidegger sees man as guilty in himself. Heidegger is careful to emphasize that he is not attaching an ethical import to guilt, but simply describing the ontological condition of man. However, if not to be considered as a moral evil, as a privatio boni which is present-at-hand, guilt has a definitely negative connotation for Heidegger, because it is man's condition as a limited, thrown and still-potential entity.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Fallenness}

The condition of fallenness is most obviously a mode of the Nothing, since it can only be spoken of in negative terms, such as inauthenticity, fleeing from, etc. Excepting death, it is the most dramatic instance of man's potentiality to be other-than. Of course in its deceptiveness it poses as positive: as an involvement in concrete action and an alleviation of the vacuum of everyday life. Dasein likes to think of itself as most fulfilled when expending itself in prattle (Gerade) and concern (Besorgen), and the measure of a successful life is usually in terms of a man's possessive relations to entities ready-to-hand. But one does not even have to be a student of Heidegger to perceive the fallacy of such arguments. The frenzy of fallenness is due to a void which Dasein senses and

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid. As Ralph Harper observes, the "teleologically important question" as to whether this guilt comes from some original sin against the Creator is irrelevant to Heidegger's phenomenological analysis; cf. Existentialism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 90.
is trying to fill up before it ceases to be. Furthermore, the manner in which Dasein tries to fill this void is rooted in the Nothing as a flight-from, a turning-away, a falling.

And yet ironically enough, it is this inauthentic state of fallenness which opens the door to an ontological understanding of Nothingness itself. The opening of this door is the ultimately fundamental Befindlichkeit of Dread. (Cf. the next chapter.)

Existentiality

Included in Dasein's "existentiality" are its (a) self-projection, (b) finitude, (c) temporality, (d) freedom, and (e) other affective projections. Like Negation, all these phases of existentiality are founded in the Nothing, since they are all relations to that which is NOT Dasein. As a matter of fact, the logical device of negation, itself grounded in Nothingness, is the principle through which the following paragraphs are constructed. For, existentiality is a procession from Self to Other, and the only way the latter term can be defined is by a negation of the former term.

Self-Projection

In virtue of its ex-static Being, Dasein projects itself towards that which it is not, as well as being present to its own self. In its presence to itself, which is a Being-there towards its own Being, Dasein is impressed with its own
thrownness. But in its presence towards that which it is not, it is existential, moving towards further possibility through the temporality which it gives to the world. In both self-presence (Befindlichkeit) and self-projection (existentiality) there is a fundamental Otherness which, rooted in the Nothing, founds the dynamism of its Being as Dasein—Care.

Finitude

In its care towards the future, Dasein sees itself in process, as moving towards a unity with itself and the world, a unity which it does not yet possess. This projection is because of the finitude of Dasein, as well as its freedom. Because it is finite, there is room for futurity; because it is free, there is control over this futurity.

Temporality

Similarly, the horizon of the past presupposes an otherness to the Dasein which, in its understanding of possibilities that have been actualized, sees itself and the conditions surrounding those possibilities as no-longer-present. (Although in seeing them as such, Dasein renders them present in a new way.)

The durational limitation of its past—only so many years of life behind it—also reveals to Dasein its own finitude, as the durational limit of its death reveals the finitude of its future-horizon. Dasein sees its existence as bracketed, and
though the intervening points of possibility may be imaginary, they have a beginning and end: limits. Beyond these limits is Nothing.

The present extasis of Dasein's existentiality, which contains the extasises of the future and past, is grounded in Nothing primarily because it has meaning only in terms of the future and past. Dasein's present extasis is one of incompleteness (How else account for man's drive to achieve himself?) and of awareness of itself as not being the totality of the things-that-are. The fact that, at present, Dasein is, is constantly colored by the fact that it need not be, not even at this very moment; this is proven to Dasein by its simultaneous presence to its future death and to its past thrownness.

**Freedom**

And yet in this presence to its own limitation, Dasein is freely caring for its Being-in-the-world. Freedom is a projection-towards, of course, but it is a projecting-in and a projecting-with as well. It cannot be analyzed without reference to the future, yet Dasein's most intimate experience of its own freedom is an act in the present: it can be radically understood only in actu exercito through an inanalytic self-awareness proper only to Dasein. Through the ex-stasis of freedom, Dasein emerges as distant from all, even its own Being (such as occurs when a man freely takes his own life). The ontic
mood which would most appropriately reflect the free state of Dasein's present would seem to be a kind of psychic chill, occasioned by a man's realization that he is all alone, supreme yet not without limitation.

It might be asked: Is not freedom—the existentiality of Dasein—a positive phenomenon rather than negative, since it is a freedom towards something as well as the fullness of what Dasein already is? And of course it must be admitted that it is a positive phenomenon, but this does not mean that it has no negative components. If Dasein's Being were so totally positive that it had no room for furthering itself towards its Being and no danger of relapsing into a less positive state, then that Dasein would hardly be free. There would be no "towards" to its horizon, and indeed, no horizon. The absence of all nothingness would be a static summit, destroying the ecstatic state of care which is the essence of Dasein, and being no more desirable than that lapsing into total nothingness which is death. 19

19 From this it should be obvious that there is no place for God as actus purus in Heidegger's ontology. Although he sees Being as having many faces, he does not have an analogy structure such as that by which Aquinas attributed Being to God. However, all of this is not to say that Heidegger's ontology is atheistic, but rather "non-theistic." His study of Hölderin's poetry, climaxing in the Holy, points to God, but from a separate mountain peak, that of the poet. Bultmann's and Tillich's reliance on Heidegger also indicates the possibility of his ontology being compatible with the fact of God's existence. Cf. Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology (New York: Macmillan, 1955).
CHAPTER IV

THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDERSTANDING THE NOTHING:

NOT THROUGH LOGIC, BUT THROUGH THE

BEFINDLICHKEIT OF DREAD

As said at the beginning of the previous chapter, logic alone is incapable of understanding the Nothing, since it can regard it only in its derivative mode of negation. How then, may reason investigate the Nothing? If logic is not the way to understanding it, what mental process is? What realities must be encountered prior to an understanding of the Nothing? What is the nature of such encounters: their ontic manifestations as well as their ontological significance?

A. Dread is Basically an Awareness of Death

We finite beings cannot explicitly and exhaustively interpret the totality of what-is in itself (and definitely not in-itself-in-relation-to-us). And therefore we do not proceed to Nothingness by simply negating this totality which is too great even to be positively comprehended.\(^1\) But we are nevertheless amid this totality, not as its adjunct but as a

\(^1\)WM, p. 331.
relating being. Hence we are at least vaguely aware of the wholeness of reality; we are primordially "there" to it.

Our finding ourselves "there" to this totality is in the fundamental affective states, Befindlichkeiten, of boredom and of joy in the presence of our beloved. It is curious that Heidegger only alludes\(^2\) to the metaphysical disclosure of "loving joy," although other thinkers such as Marcel have seen love as the avenue to the mystery of Being.\(^3\) The Befindlichkeit of loving joy directly discloses the totality of what-is, as the songs of lovers inevitably illustrate. In this disclosure one's value-structure is reshaped, one's concern for the things ready-to-hand takes a new direction, and Nature itself becomes transparent.

But while disclosing the totality of what is and grounding Dasein's phenomenal world, both boredom and loving joy hide the Nothing; this Nothing is more than the simple negation of

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 334. "There is another possibility of such revelation, and this is in the joy we feel in the presence of the being—not merely the person—of someone we love."

\(^3\)William A. Luijpen adds to Heidegger's phenomenology another possibility for authentic existence: "Without the love of his fellow-man, man is not capable of affectively affirming the real world. This truth has been definitely established by empirical psychology. . . . The more a man stands alone, i.e. unloved, in the world, the more difficult it is for him to realize himself in the world and to consent to his own being. . . . His authentic being-himself is not the lonely, isolated, doomed-to-death being-in-the-world, but being together with his fellow-men in love. . . ." Existential Phenomenology (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1962), p. 349. Cf. Roger Troisfontaines, Existentialism et pensée chrétienne (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1948), pp. 14-15.
this totality which is revealed in the moods of boredom and joy.4

The Nothing is revealed in an even more primordial mood, that mood which as we have seen is the basis of care: Dread.5

In the vision of the last moment [which constitutes dread—cf. p. 22 above] I see literally everything slipping away together, dissolving in the gloom of an all-pervading Nothing.6

(The expression "slipping away" indicates first of all a movement. But it also indicates a field, and within that field terms which are apart from each other. This apartness or "in-between" which is noticed during dread is the DISTANCE that I

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4WM, p. 334.

5In Sein und Zeit, Dread and Care were explicated for their own sake; but in Was Ist Metaphysik? Heidegger sees them as leading to the only authentic understanding of Nothing, because grounded in it. In Sein und Zeit he sees dread as moving to care, while in Was Ist Metaphysik? he proceeds from Nothingness through the totality-of-what-is to Being. Cf. Brock, pp. 48-49.

6"The metaphysician never discovered that the fundamental experience of the basis of this relation is that anguish [Angst] before my death in which I am afforded a compelling grip on the reality of my contingency. In the vision of the last moment I see literally everything slipping away together, dissolving in the gloom of an all-pervading Nothing. It is thus that I come to see that the presence of anything and everything before me is a united whole, as I also see that it is due to nothing other than my own finite horizon-projection. [WM, pp. 29-30] I see for the first time clearly, that the Selendien als Ganzen could not 'be' without my Da-sein, and at the same time I realize that the apparent solidity of that 'world' of things offers no lasting thing upon which I can depend as a protection from the dissolution of the world in death." Langan, op. cit., p. 93.
consider Nothingness to be. More will be said shortly (Chapter V) on distance as an analogate of nothingness, but the comparison should be kept in mind during the following paragraphs about "slipping away.")

B. Dread is a Slipping-away of the Totality

The slipping-away of the world is more than an awareness that I cannot depend upon anything ready-to-hand to preserve my Being-in-the-world, as Langan implies. In dread more is slipping away from me than the utility of those entities which I had regarded as ready-to-hand: the world as a totality is slipping away from me. The slipping-away occurs in a reflective view of my horizon which, like a physical horizon, recedes. In this receding, I do not lose my "bearings," though I may become disoriented in my relations to things from a practical point of view: such would be the proper symptom of fear, or of ontic psychosis. Dread is not a frantic thing, but even has its own "peculiar peace" which is not a tranquility of order as much as it is the indifferentness of suspense.

The spatial metaphor of "slipping-away" is not a clear one, for in dread the totality not only recedes, but "crowds around

7Ibid., p. 93.
8WM, p. 337.
9Ibid.
us ... oppresses us." Our Being-in-the-world is not only what we are anxious for, but also that which makes us anxious. The object of our anxiety (dread) is not only the act of dying, be it noted—though death is the climax of this object—but our very Being-there.

The point of all this is as follows: The totality of the world, and even my own self, slips away from me. There is nothing to grip. All that remains is Nothing.

This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread, this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this 'nothing.'

Dread reveals nothing.

"Nothing" Is Comprehended in Experience, Not in Abstract Logic.

This revelation of Nothing may simply seem to be a play on words, or at best a merely logical negation. If Heidegger is simply leaning hard on the etymological formation of the word "no-thing" and finally regarding it as the logical counterposit of that-which-has-slipped-away, he is violating his own standards, since he rejected such logical negation a few pages...

10 Ibid., p. 336.

11 A Thomistic parallel is the explaining of fortitude as an attitude in the face of death, although the specific act of dying is not the only object of fortitude.

12 Ibid.
prior to these remarks. But when Heidegger says "There is
nothing to hold on to," he is not making a logical negation,
but recording a fact of experience. This experience is the
fundamental Befindlichkeit of Angst, which is just as much an
indisputable "given" as the more secondary power of rationality
(which, it seems, no epistemology has ever really demonstrated
to exist).

"All that remains is nothing." At this extremity of
dread, all affirmation fails, for what can be affirmed of noth-
ing? The only alternatives are a respectful silence ("a spell-
bound peace") or frantic prattle. And the alternative chosen
by each Dasein determines its authenticity.

C. Some Literary Descriptions of Nothingness—
Disclosing Experiences

In a recent article, John H. Walsh includes several
striking accounts of this experience of dread, which are worth
repeating here. Nietzsche rather poetically describes the

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13 Ibid., p. 331. Furthermore, in saying "The only thing
that remains . . . is nothing," Heidegger seems to be making the
Nothing into an entity itself. The unfortunate use of the word
thing (Ding) is simply that: unfortunate. It might have been
better for Heidegger to have said "The only reality . . . ," but
he did not, and since the entire essay Was Ist Metaphysik? is an
attempt to strip the Nothing of its thingness in the minds of
his readers, I believe that this word-accident can be overlooked.

14 John H. Walsh, "Heidegger's Understanding of No-Thing-
ness," Cross Currents, XIII (Summer, 1963), 305-23. Also, an
excellent description of the clinical aspects of this experi-
ence is given in Stephan Strasser's "The Concept of Dread in
Heidegger's Philosophy," The Modern Schoolman, XXXV (Spring,
1957), 1-20.
The notion of revelation describes the condition quite simply; by which I mean something profoundly convulsive and disturbing suddenly becomes visible and audible with indescribable definiteness and exactness. . . . There is the feeling that one is utterly out of hand, with the most distinct consciousness of an infinitude of shuddering thrills that pass through one from head to foot;—there is a profound happiness in which the most painful and gloomy feelings are not discordant in effect, but are required as necessary colors in this overflow of light. 15

Thomas Wolfe also recounts:

It seemed that I had inside me, swelling and gathering all the time, a huge black cloud, and that this cloud was loaded with electricity, pregnant, crested with a kind of hurricane violence that could not be held in check much longer. 16

But the most impressive example, as well as one that parallels the development of Heidegger's lecture Was Ist Metaphysik? is Christine Ritter's.

I myself stand forlornly by the water's edge. The power of this world-wide peace takes hold of me although my senses are unable to grasp it. And as though I had no real existence, was no longer there, the infinite space penetrates through me and swells out, the surging of the sea passes through my being, and what was once a personal will dissolves like a cloud against the inflexible cliffs.

I am conscious of the immense solitude around me. There is nothing that is like me, no


16 Walsh, p. 319.
creature in whose appearance I might retain a consciousness of my own self; I feel that the limits of my being are being lost in this all-too-powerful-nature and for the first time I have a sense of the divine gift of companionship.

With an effort I return to the hut, fasten my skis and move to the distant headland. I move because I have ordered myself to move, but I do not feel that I am moving. I am weightless as the air. And I cast no shadow on the strangely glowing surface; my feet leave no tracks in the porcelain-hard snow.

And so I go on almost without consciousness, without any familiar object to hold onto through the vast solitude, through the radiant twilight that has no shadows, through the unmoving timeless quiet.17

CHAPTER V

NOTHINGNESS CONSIDERED AS DISTANCE

The meaning of "nothing" is, then, richer than that of any other word except "Being" itself. But this richness has to be filtered before it can be appreciated, and it seems to me that this can best be done by reading "distance" for "nothing" in almost every sentence of Was Ist Metaphysik? and in many parts of Sein und Zeit. Distance is actually an analogate of nothingness, just as the terms—usually physical entities—which are distant are themselves analogates of Being. Distance is not a being, and yet it inevitably accompanies beings as a measure of their displacements, just as the Nothing inevitably accompanies Being. I am not saying that distance is more fundamental than the Nothing, however; I am simply playing it against the Nothing as its appropriate analogue, hoping for their mutual clarification. Involved in any concept of distance is the "between,"

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1Egon Vietta compares nothingness to a gap, which is totally opposite to being: "Without a gap we never would have an insight into that which is. Only where the rocks move apart, does an abyss open. If there were not something [the gap] which contrasts beings in their totality, but only being, if there were no outlet into the totally opposite, being as being could not appear or 'sojourn' for us." Die Seinsfrage bei Martin Heidegger (Stuttgart: Curt E. Schwab, 1950), p. 84.
which in turn implies a principle and a term: as viewed from without, two terms. This two-ness, which need not be between things of the same order of reality, contains the problem of Parmenides: Why two? Why not One? It is amazing enough that there is Being; it is almost a scandal that there are relationships within Being. To put it all another way, the fact of distance—especially in its ontological meanings—can be accounted for only by a reality other than Being itself (yet inseparable from it), namely Nothing. Or more briefly and more generally, DISTANCE MEANS OTHERNESS. And otherness requires Nothingness.

A. Some Types of Distance

The word "distance" has a series of meaning, all related since all constructed from the concept of physical space between two bodies. And all these meanings imply an OTHER: to be distant—from is to be in reference to that which one is not. Some of the different types of "distance" which bear this out are spatial distance, aesthetic distance, intentional distance, and ontological distances of (a) the diversity in things and (b) Dasein's existential "negativities."

The NOT in Distance: Spatial, Aesthetic, Intentional Distance

Spatially, this ash tray is not that cloud, most obviously because they are not in the same place. In the artistic
process there must also be a not if the work is to be truly great: the not of aesthetic distance (sometimes called psychic distance). The creator and his audience must realize that they are present to a work of art, not an actual reality. For instance, the ravishing of Lucrece, in the Wilder-Obey-Katherine Cornell presentation, was set off by pantomime with a narrator; it then relied on the actors' skill to reach across and involve the audience in the problems of the characters. Improper distancing either makes the work seem so artificial that it does not involve the audience at all, or so "realistic" that it is merely a technological success (the "3-D" and scented movies, for instance) or a kind of hypnosis (cinerama or stereophonic sound, when conducted for their own sake, i.e., to create the illusion of actually being "on the spot"). In the artist's creating process itself, he must step back from the scene or event he is trying to re-create, objectivizing the emotions and drama involved. Thus the Wordsworth who lies pensive and creative on his couch in tranquil recollection of the powerful emotion which overtook him in the daffodil field is not the same as when he was flooded with emotion earlier; he is able to poetize on the couch whereas in the field he simply gave an inchoate response to beauty.

In the intentional order, the knower is not the known, although the process of knowledge can be viewed as a formal identification, since in some way the otherness of the object must
be dissolved. However, the dissolution is obviously not physical, nor is it any kind of psychic coalescence: It is apparently a characteristic of the psychotic (and the animal) that he does not see the object as other.

Ontological Distances

Ontologically—and here is the important point—the distance, the not-being-the-same-as, makes possible (a) the structural unity of the world as a knowable totality of diverse and disparate beings, and (b) the existentiality of Dasein as shown in its "negativities." Each of these distances is a phase of Being, but none of them would be possible without the fact of the Nothing. Why? Because, as in the previous distances, to explain them we must have recourse to a not.

Distance of Disparateness in Relation

There could be no kind of relation without diversity (hence distance), and there could be no structural unity without relatedness.² For this reason, we may say that Nothingness makes possible not only the projections of Dasein, but also the world-as-a-totality. Nothingness does not do away with beings, but gives them room to breathe, so to speak. Ultimately it

²Heidegger's structural relations of the "world" are too complex to be summarized here. Suffice it to say that they include beings ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, all in reference to Dasein.
fuses with Being as "an original part of essence," 3 since it is not an adjunct nor a mere logical nullity.

B. Existential Distances: Dasein's "Negativities"

A second set of "ontological distances" (the term is mine) is found by examining Dasein itself. As pointed out in the first chapter, Dasein's existentiality is an existentiality of possibility rather than of actuality. It might be said that for Heidegger, possibility is the highest form of human actuality. Man is most in act when in the flux of possibility; his very definition as an acting being is that he is potential. When he ceases to be in potency, he is not in act, but is dead, i.e., purely nothing. In this possibility, which is a coming-to-be, the distance character of Dasein is again disclosed. Harper neatly lists five cases of distance or otherness (he calls them "negativities") in human nature:

1. The existence of one man is separated from the existence of another. (I am not you.)
2. The existence of man is not essential. (Man can die at any time.)
3. The existence of man is not complete even while he exists. (I am not what I can be.) The kind of being (or existence) I am is an existence containing its negation (death) within it, and whether I wish to or not, I go forward always toward my death.
4. At the same time, I do not quite know that being that I am, but feel it. My self-concern, my awareness that I am, is not defined or

3WM, p. 340.
transparent; it is not comprehensible.

5. Conscious and unconscious reflection is not a whole. It is a series of transcendings.  

Love

The first of these negativities, the existence of one man as separated from the existence of another, is the ground or basis of human love. (Heidegger would probably agree with me here, but certainly does not emphasize this ontic phenomenon. Cf. p. 36 supra.) In human love we can become acutely aware of our separateness, our distance, from the beloved—aware of our Nothingness which is the ground and root of this love.

This Nothingness drives the lovers to such fantastic statements as the lovers' parley, "I could devour you," and the Liebestod—drive towards dissolution of their separateness in death, illustrated in the legend of Tristan and Isolde and the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.

thrownness

The second negativity, the existence of man as not essential, is an illustration of man's thrownness, in which he is distant from that which he would be if he did die. This

4Harper, op. cit., p. 80. This is a well-wrought series of distinctions. What follows them is, for better or for worse, not Harper's, but my own.

negativity of Dasein was discussed at length in Chapter III above.  

**Futurity**

The third of Dasein's negativities, the incompleteness and futurity to its Being. The distance between what Dasein is and what it will be constitutes the radical Nothingness of temporality. But what is time? And what does it mean to be temporal?

The classic definition of time is "a measure of motion," and although this is not a satisfactory definition for Heidegger, nevertheless even in this classic definition the question arises, a measure by whom of motion?

Relativistic physics emphasizes the importance of the observer in constituting a time-reference, and further points out that this observer is himself relative, that is, in another frame of reference. Similarly, Heidegger sees Dasein, the "thinking reed," as at the center of time. However, Heidegger does not see Dasein as merely a relative measurer of time, but as its very source. Time is not simply another dimension of the physical universe, but a self-projecting towards future possibilities: a measure of possibility, not of physical motion.

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⁶Supra, pp. 32-33.
In other words, Dasein does not observe time as much as it generates it. But time is not simply a Kantian shape which man's mind gives to a noumenal world; it is rather the meaning and content of Dasein's known world, its own knowing, and Dasein-itself-in-action. There is a reciprocal relationship between Dasein and time, the underside of which is "temporality." The "thereness" of Dasein is constituted by time and is ultimately the same as temporality. For, to say that Dasein "is there" is to imply that it is there in a temporal structure, i.e., Dasein is there in the present through a future-directed projection and a harking back to the past. In virtue of Dasein's temporality, entities can be present-at-hand or ready-to-hand for it, and it can even experience the totality itself of the world. (And yet time does not function as an entity itself, although it is obviously a reality.7)

With all this said, the distance-character of temporality becomes apparent. Dasein goes beyond the reality to which it is related in time, and even transcends time itself in understanding it. The distance here is not only a temporal distance between the Dasein as it is and the Dasein as it will be "later on" or

7 John Walsh, in his article in Cross Currents (loc. cit.), regards time as equatable with the Nothing for precisely this reason, viz., time is not a thing and yet is obviously a reality. I would take issue with Walsh over this identification, not only because it is too facile a play on the English word "no-thing," but also because it seems to me that time itself is further grounded in the Nothing—Nothingness considered as Distance. It is only in man's ability to transcend all that is, including himself, that there is temporality.
was "a while ago," but it is also a transcendental distance between Dasein and the flux of time.

Questioning

The fourth negativity is related to the fact that things have meaning for Dasein, i.e., that man is a knowing being. This is an important part of Dasein's existentiality, its transcendence which is a questioning of the world in which it is present.

What sort of questions does Dasein ask? About what does it ask these questions? And more basically, what is it that enables Dasein to ask these questions, and how account for its impetus to ask them? Furthermore, how are these questions related to the basic fact of Nothingness?

In asking a question, Dasein stands before the horizon which its rationality opens. In asking questions a man may concern himself with everyday things which are ready-to-hand, or he may inquire speculatively into the nature of that which is present-at-hand. He may also question himself in a reflective awareness. All of his questions are questions about the world. "World is no definition of the Being which man essentially is not, but a character of man himself."⁸ That is, Dasein is questioning within the totality of that-which-is. The world is the

⁸SZ, tr. by Harper, p. 82.
given of sense and experience: it is both the fact of experience itself and the connectedness of that fact. However, Dasein rises above the given and views itself-in-action. Its consciousness has an essentially worldly character.

Thus the core of Dasein's essence is to-be-distant, that is, to know standing apart both from that which is not and from itself. The essence of Dasein is, in short, to-be-distant from that-which-is. This distance is not itself something else which-is, but rather is Nothing. Indeed, how else could it be: for if the distance which is between the knowing Dasein and that-which-is were itself a "what-is," then there would be no distance at all between Dasein and what-is: it would be pressed into the totality of that-which-is, without perceiving it as a fact or as a totality.

It is true that Heidegger refuses to posit an intermediary representation, be it an impressed species as id quod or a Kantian manifold of sensible or intelligible forms. He insists that man in his Being is directly present to the given world. But although this presence is immediate, it is a presence, not an identity. That is, presence requires, among other things, Otherness, which implies the Not of Nothingness. Without Nothingness, in other words, there could be no presence, and no Being-there. As Harper puts it, "Man living authentically, accepts himself fully and resolves to face his being, shot through with the nothingness of finitude, disparateness, and
When Dasein asks a question, it is transcending or standing beyond that which it is questioning, in order to find its meaning (Sinn). Meaning is for Heidegger the "where-to" of the primary 'project,' from and by which something can be comprehended as what it is 'in its inner possibility.' In seeking the meaning of what-is, therefore, Dasein is working within a horizon, trying to extend that horizon. It will be recalled that the horizon itself is a where-to, a directional field of possibilities, always receding as man moves towards it. For example, the meaning (which is its inner possibility) of care is temporality itself.

Thus ontic truth is rooted in ontological meaning as the condition of its possibility. Or, as Langan expresses it in traditional language, "the 'intentionality' of the knower in relation to the things-that-are depends for its possibility on the ontological structure of the knower as transcendence. Truth, then, is more than a 'property of expression,' as was

10 Brock, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

11 Macquarrie and Robinson interpret Horizontes somewhat differently: "a connotation somewhat different from that to which the English-speaking reader is likely to be accustomed. We tend to think of a horizon as something which we may widen or extend or go beyond; Heidegger, however, seems to think of it rather as something which we can neither widen nor go beyond, but which provides the limits for certain intellectual activities performed 'within' it." SZ, p. 1, n. 4. But it seems to me that the English connotation is consistent with Heidegger's philosophy.
once said; it is the essence of the existent."

Freedom

Dasein's existentiality, noted so far in terms of its futurity (the third negativity) and its questioning (the fourth negativity), also manifests itself in freedom (the fifth negativity: "a series of transcendings"), which is again rooted in distance or Nothingness. Freedom is a transcending, a dominating indifference over a plurality of possibilities. This indifference or transcendence implies a distance or otherness.

\[^{12}\text{Langan, op. cit., p. 88; cf. Heidegger's Vom Wesen des Grundes, p. 15.}\]
CHAPTER VI

NIHILATION: THE DYNAMIC CHARACTER
OF THE NOTHING

A. Heidegger's Presentation in Was Ist Metaphysik?

Dread reveals Nothingness to us as the "veil of Being."¹

Like a veil, and unlike a shroud, Nothingness does not hide
Being, but emphasizes it, or better, puts it at a distance from
us so that its reality and shape are appreciated. But unlike
a veil, it is intrinsic to Being, as a fissure is intrinsic to
the constitution of a jagged mountainside, silence to the sym­
phony, or space to the composition of a painting. In dread we
see Nothingness as if at one with what-is-in-totality.²

But the Nothing is more than intrinsic; it also has a
dynamism which has only been hinted at in the preceding pages.
It does not annihilate Being,³ but is in process with it. Nor
does it negate Being, for "it is anterior to negation."⁴ What
then, does Nothing "do"?

It nihilates.

¹"Nothing, conceived as the pure 'Other' than what-is, is
the veil of Being." WM, p. 360.
²Ibid., p. 337.
³Ibid., p. 338.
⁴Ibid.
Nothing repels, i.e., expels to; "this total relegation to the vanishing what-is-in-totality . . . is the essence of Nothing: Nihilation." (The English word "relegation" means not only alienating, but doing so with the intention of getting rid of, or exiling. But Heidegger does not stress this connotation which is of personal intention. The stress is rather on the "alienation" implied in the word "relegation.") What is it that is being so relegated? Everything! All is "slipping away" from Dasein, even its own Being, revealing the totality of what-is as "purely Other," though positive and real.

Nihilation is the establishing of a distance; but to establish this distance, Being must collapse and disintegrate, in order to "slip away." The principle of this collapse could hardly be Being itself: it is rather the Nothing.

Furthermore—and this is the heart of the matter—Nothing nihilates originally. It is the basis of all negation, all relationships, all beings and Being itself, because it establishes the multiplicity and diversity within Being. Without this multiplicity and diversity within Being, there would not only be no awareness of the totality, but no totality at all.

The essence of Nothing as original nihilation lies in this: that it alone brings Dasein face to face with what-is as such . . . [Nothingness

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 339.
reveals the Being of beings, i.e.) that which it [Dasein] is not and which itself is.7

Nothingness is the distance which is natural to Dasein, which "naturally relates to what-is" and is other than itself. For Dasein, to be there is to be projected through Nothing—considered not as a senseless void, but a distance of transcendence, a medium of presence. Consequently, (1) Dasein is beyond what-is-in-totality; (2) Dasein has a relationship to itself (and hence is multiple, riddled with Nothingness); (3) Dasein has self-hood and freedom. Each of these three phases of its Being flows from the previous one.

Heidegger's succinct conclusion:

Nothing does not merely provide the conceptual opposite of what-is [through negation] but is also an original part of essence. It is in the Being of what-is that the Nihilation of Nothing occurs.9

B. Nihilation in Terms of the Analogue of Distance

And so, as Heidegger explains in Was Ist Metaphysik? everything is slipping away in its totality. (This is the disclosure of the Befindlichkeit of dread.) The dynamism under this slipping-away process is the Nothing; it repels. Nothing nihilates of itself.

7 Ibid., emphasis mine.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 340.
10 Supra, pp. 38-42.
As said above, nihilation is the establishing of a distance. Hence, the enigmatic phrase "Nothing nihilates of itself" can also be read as "Distance separates of itself." To ask, "In virtue of what is something at all?" and be answered "In virtue of Nothing," is similar to asking "In virtue of what are two things apart?" and be answered, "In virtue of the distance between them." The phrasing of the definition of nihilation, namely "the relegation to the vanishing totality-of-what-is," reveals this nihilation as separation. The totality-of-what-is is positive and purely Other. The relegating relationship is one of exile, of putting off into another sphere.

Nothing nihilates originally; i.e., it is the basis of negation, of knowledge, of all relationships and of all Being. Nothing in its separating or nihilating role not only provides the basis of Dasein's presence to that-which-is, but also grounds the disparateteness of things in themselves. "Nothing not merely provides the conceptual opposite of what-is, but is also an original part of essence. It is in the being of what-is that the nihilation of Nothing occurs." In saying that Nothing is an original part of essence, Heidegger says very much: when we see the non-identity of two beings, we are looking towards their essences. These essences are not

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11 Supra, p. 56.
only principles of operation, a quo, but they are also the loci of the differences between things. Therefore, within an essence there must be an element of Nothingness, i.e., a distance from other things that are. Hence Nothingness is a fissure in the Being of what-is. The nihilation of Nothing is precisely that ontological distance or disparateness which grounds the multiplicity of Being.
CHAPTER VII

HEIDEGGER'S PLACE IN HISTORY

For Heidegger, the Nothing is not simply an absence of reality. Nor is it simply a reality which is not a thing (as Walsh has described it), i.e., the "nothingness" of reality. If there is anything which Heidegger has consistently emphasized in his treatment of Nothingness, it is that the Nothing is not to be regarded as an entity. It is not to be regarded as some kind of mysterious substance which is in the same order of existence as the substances we apprehend positively.

Also, Heidegger has emphasized that the Nothing is more than a logical principle, a negation. Rather, the Nothing is the basis of any entity, woven into the very fabric of Being itself. In the last part of Was Ist Metaphysik? he raises the question of to what extent the problem of the Nothing has pervaded metaphysical thought. He points to the axiom of ancient philosophy that ex nihilo nihil fit,¹ in which the Nothing is unformed matter powerless to form itself. To these ancient philosophers, Being was something which had form; the absence of form was the absence of Being; "Nothing" equaled unformed

¹WM, p. 334.
matter. \(^2\) On the other hand, Heidegger claims that \textit{ex nihilo omne ens fit}, that is, only in the Nothing of Da-Sein can what-is-in-totality—and this in accordance with its peculiar possibilities—come to itself. \(^3\) This means that it is the transcending character of Dasein which gives the universe a totality. Only through the destiny of man does the universe have a destiny, a direction, a meaning. \(^4\) Being is separated from itself in the fissure of Nothingness, and it is this separation which accounts for the dynamism of existence. This separation is not a conceptual opposition: it is not a logical negation, but this separation is a separation which is rooted in Being itself.

The tendency to reify Nothingness is upon us as soon as we begin to speak of it or articulate at all, for our language is spatial. Our verb structures, our nouns, all ideas have the characteristics of physical substances with spatial relationships. Hence we speak of ideas "coming from," we refer to "intermediaries," we talk about "projection" as though in the sense of being hurled through space. The first problem in ontology is understanding the limitations of articulation.

It is my uneasy opinion that John Walsh, for all his

\(^2\) "... Nothing as signifying Not-being, that is to say, unformed matter which is powerless to form itself into 'being' and cannot therefore present an appearance (\textit{eidos})." \textit{Ibid.}, p. 345.

\(^3\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 347.

\(^4\) One cannot help but think of Teilhard de Chardin in such a context.
perceptiveness, fails to recognize this limitation, and reifies the Nothing by viewing it as a "primeval chaos of fullness," a chaos which in itself is unintelligible, and out of which all things are formed or made. This is the same position as that of the ancients, which was rejected by Heidegger. Not ex nihilo nihil fit, but ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit.

To say that Nothing is the ground or basis of Being is itself a spatial metaphor; however, in this regard Walsh does compensate for its inadequacies, by recourse to the other metaphor of the symphony, which is constituted not only by the sound, but also by the silence, the in-between, the distance. The silence is the ground, so to speak, out of which the symphony is formed. I also agree with his point that this latter metaphor is more than a metaphor of similarity; a symphony has its being as present-at-hand, and this being must be grounded in Nothingness as all of Being must.

Thus it seems that Heidegger is a twentieth-century Parmenides, seeking to unlock the mystery of Being. His answer is not the same as that of Parmenides, who was forced to regard Being as a huge static entity with no real divisions, no real motion, but only with a deceptive reflection in the minds of men, who must regard it as disparate and changing. The classic antipode of Parmenides is Heraclitus. It may also be said that Heidegger is a twentieth-century Heraclitus, seeing as he does that reality is a process, a becoming or a projection, and
regarding as he does the highest order of reality as possibility.

But the principle of possibility which Heidegger sees is a principle of Nothingness. Because his philosophy as revealed in Sein und Zeit is a philosophy of existence, that is, of self-projection towards Being, the question of the Nothing is central to Heidegger. What he has said about the Nothing in Sein und Zeit and Was Ist Metaphysik? is only a beginning to an understanding of Being. But it is a beginning which seems to be most fruitful in its meaning and in its implications for future possibilities of understanding.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Leo B. Wren, F.S.C., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

2-7-65
Date

Signature of Adviser