

The revelatory function of the nothing: an interpretation of Heidegger's "What Is metaphysics?"

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Abstract

By reading mainly Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?," the aim of this paper is to illuminate the ontological revelatory function of the nothing that occurs in anxiety. The two parts of this paper describe the same night of anxiety. While the first part shows this night from the point of view of the movement or sweep of anxiety, the second studies this same night from the point of view of the ontological revelatory role of the nothing and its negative logic of disclosure. It is crucial for my analysis to keep apart two different meanings of the nothing. There is the nothing as being's totally other (*nihil negativum*), on the one hand, and the nothing as Being, on the other. While with this second meaning one dwells in the realm of the ontological, it is the first meaning—which is the focus of this paper—that secures our access to it.

Keywords: Heidegger, nothing, anxiety, wonder, *nihil negativum*, Being as nothing

La función reveladora de la nada: una interpretación del texto "¿Qué es metafísica?" de Martin Heidegger.

Resumen

Mediante la lectura principalmente del texto "¿Qué es metafísica?" de Heidegger, el objetivo de este artículo es iluminar la función reveladora ontológica de la nada que ocurre en la angustia. Las dos secciones de este artículo describen la misma noche de la angustia. Mientras que la primera sección muestra esta noche desde el punto de vista del movimiento o vaivén de la angustia, la segunda estudia esta misma noche desde el punto de vista del papel revelador ontológico de la nada y su lógica negativa de desvelamiento. Para nuestro análisis es crucial mantener separados dos sentidos distintos del concepto de nada: por un lado, está la nada como lo totalmente otro con respecto al ente (*nihil negativum*); y por el otro lado, la nada como Ser. Si bien con este segundo significado uno habita en el ámbito de lo ontológico, es el primer significado, el cual es el tema central de este artículo, el que asegura nuestro acceso a él.

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Palabras clave: Heidegger, la nada, angustia, asombro, nihil negativum, Ser como nada

Introduction

By reading mainly Heidegger's lecture "What Is Metaphysics?," the aim of this paper is to illuminate the ontological revelatory function of the notion of the nothing. Rather than offering a summary of the history of this notion or an exhaustive analysis of Heidegger's various uses of it, I focus on one of its meanings which, I argue, the secondary literature has not clarified appropriately, namely, the absolute nothing or the *nihil negativum*. Although Heidegger himself often dismisses this notion, I claim that, at the climax of his "What Is Metaphysics?," it is the absolute nothing that reveals the meaning of Being and prepares the soil for further questioning.

At stake in addressing the question of the nothing is to secure our access to the hitherto concealed meaning of the Being of beings. Implicit here are two still unclear ideas: First, although we think to know what *to be* means, most of the time, we don't. This relates to Heidegger's trope of the oblivion of Being, which do not mean necessarily to be silent about Being, but rather the opposite, to profusely utter and write about it while meaning some determined entity (thus confusing the Being of beings for a being). Second, while we think to know nothing about the nothing, it turns out that—by knowing nothing about the nothing—we do know its meaning. The meaning of the nothing lingers in us regardless our awareness, keeping its revelatory potential at hold. In this paper I argue that "What Is Metaphysics?" evokes the meaning of the nothing that we—habitually unaware—know, in order to reveal the mysterious meaning of Being that breaks through our familiar but misleading understanding of it.

And yet, it is the ambiguity of the various meanings of nothing what seems precisely to prevent the capacity of the nothing to reveal the meaning of the Being of beings. For instance, against the referential capacity of the nothing, the French phenomenologist and Christian thinker Jean-Luc Marion writes: "Nothingness does not mean anything; nor does it refer to anything, nor show anything—and being less than anything else. Nothingness opens no way to being, but proves a dead end or—which amounts to the same thing—refers to itself only" (Marion, 1996: 188). Differently, this paper argues for the nothing's revelatory or referential capacity by offering a hermeneutical context upon which one can illuminate the various meanings of this notion.

In the first part, I review Heidegger's now classic account on anxiety in "What Is Metaphysics?." Heidegger gives concise guidance regarding how one, when attuned to anxiety, may experience the meaning of Being. First, we gain the point of view of beings as whole. Then, we may let anxiety's sweep take its full course and disclose the nothing. This disclosure offers access to an experience of the meaning of Being, i.e., to the fact that beings are instead of nothing. Although in this lecture the link between the nothing and the question of the meaning of Being is clearly affirmed, this connection (about the fact that the experience of the nothing discloses the meaning of Being) gets obscured—and thus unnoticed—due to the ambiguity of the nothing.

Hence, in the second part, I explicitly display the logic of the nothing by articulating two different meanings of it, which when confused, I argue, obscure the logic of the nothing and its ontological revelatory function. I distinguish between the nothing as being's totally other (absolute nothing, *nihil negativum*), on the one hand, and the nothing as Being, on the other. While Heidegger most of the time focuses on the latter (specially in his later works), I argue that it is the understanding of the former that opens up our access for grasping the latter. Within the limits of this paper, I will focus on the first meaning and leave the full discussion of the second meaning for another work.

The two parts of this paper describe the same night of anxiety. While the first part shows this night from the point of view of the movement or sweep of anxiety, the second studies this same night from the point of view of the *negative logic of disclosure* of the nothing and its ontological revelatory role.

1. Anxiety and the nothing

We can discern in "What Is Metaphysics?" some specific steps that capture the work of anxiety as a basic disposition that enables a mode of philosophizing receptive to the revelatory function of the nothing. Let us begin our reading of this text with its ending. Here Heidegger gives concise guidance for experiencing anxiety and philosophizing:

First, that we allow space for beings as a whole; second, that we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols [*Götzen*] everyone has and to which they are wont to go cringing; and finally, that we let the sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back into the fundamental question of metaphysics which the nothing itself

compels: Why are there beings at all, and why not rather Nothing?
(Heidegger, 1998a: 96).¹

Following Heidegger's advice, I structure this first part in three sections: (1.1.) allowing space for beings as a whole, (1.2.) releasing ourselves into the nothing, and (1.3.) swinging back—the countermovement or recoil.

1.1. Allowing space for beings as a whole.

“We allow space for beings as a whole.”

Although Heidegger often uses the expression “beings as a whole,” it is not always clear that this seemingly abstract expression denotes some concrete experience that is made possible by basic or fundamental dispositions or attunements. Heidegger distinguishes this expression from the similar “the whole of beings”:

As surely as we can never comprehend absolutely the whole of beings in themselves we certainly do find ourselves stationed in the midst of beings that are unveiled somehow as a whole. In the end an essential distinction prevails between comprehending the whole of beings in themselves [*Ganzen des Seienden an sich*] and finding oneself in the midst of beings as a whole [*Seienden im Ganzen*]. The former is impossible in principle. The latter happens all the time in our Dasein (1998a: 87).

Although we humans experience beings as a whole all the time, most of the time we overlook them. We seem to be absorbed in some particular being with some specific concern. And yet, at the background of the particularity and specificity of our everyday compartments to beings, we always behave within some understanding of beings as a whole: “No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the ‘whole,’ if only in a shadowy way” (1998a: 87). Every basic disposition brings to the fore this background understanding of the whole, which, unnoticed, determines our attitudes towards beings.

¹ Recently, in 2017, the original version of Heidegger's inaugural lecture “What Is Metaphysics?” was discovered, which diverges from the published version in form and content. About this original version, see Heidegger (2018), Thomä (2018), and Moore (2019). In this paper, however, I quote from the published version.

When blinded by rage or having lost our mind by jealousy, some singular being, and some specific concern, captures all our attention. While the understanding of beings as a whole is operative, it is obscured by our rage or jealousy. Conspicuously experiencing this wholeness is what distinguishes a basic disposition from some other type of dispositions. This is not a moral distinction: basic dispositions are not morally better than other dispositions. The distinction is relevant from a phenomenological point of view: basic dispositions offer a far-reaching disclosure of the phenomenon of the world.

The notion of beings as a whole is intimately related to some sense of *indifference*. For instance, regarding to the fundamental disposition of boredom, Heidegger says: “Profound boredom [*tiefe Langeweile*], drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference [*merkwürdige Gleichgültigkeit*]. This boredom manifests beings as a whole” (1998a: 87).² Indifference can thus refer not only to a feeling almost everyone has experienced, but to the undifferentiated whole it enables us to perceive.

This sense of indifference occurs alongside (or is the outcome of) some indeterminacy at the core of the basic disposition. About the fundamental disposition of wonder, Heidegger writes in his 1937-38 lecture course: “The most usual, which arises in wonder as the unusual, is not this or that, something particular that has shown itself as objective and determinate in some specific activity or individual consideration. In wonder, what is most usual of all and in all, i.e., everything [*Alles*], becomes the most unusual” (Heidegger, 1994: 144). Although the meaning of these expressions “everything,” “of all in all,” “beings as whole,” are far from being clear, we know that we experience them through a sense of indifference and indeterminacy regarding particular objects and specific activities. But how can one, in wonder, pay attention and relate explicitly to the *everything* as the most usual, when that which is the most usual is what precisely remains unnoticed? How can that which is indifferent and indeterminate be glimpsed and explicitly heeded?

Similar, in “What Is Metaphysics?” Heidegger describes how the basic disposition of anxiety discloses beings as a whole, in an experience of indeterminateness in which Dasein sinks into indifference:³ “The indeterminateness (*Unbestimmtheit*) of that in the face of which [*wovor*] and

² These few sentences about boredom are nicely developed in almost a hundred pages in Heidegger (1995).

³ On anxiety and its differences to falling (*Verfallen*) and fear (*Furcht*), see also Heidegger (1962), 40, p. 228.

concerning which [*worum*] we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it” (1998a: 88). Like boredom and wonder, anxiety has no particular object. I can’t point out some singular being as the one making me anxious. Rather than the failure of our cognitive capacity, it is the excess of that in the face of which we become anxious that do not let itself be enclosed in the frame of an object.

Parallel to how anxiety has no object, the pole of the subject also appears uncannily indeterminate: “In anxiety, we say, ‘one feels uncanny’ [*es ist einem unheimlich*]. What is ‘it’ that makes ‘one’ feel uncanny? We cannot say what it is before which one feels uncanny. As a whole it is so for one. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference” (1998a: 88). My character and personality—that is, the story that I tell about myself—sinks into indifference. What is left is an uncanny “one,” who (or maybe “that”) correlates with the uncanny “it.” According to Heidegger, “In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering [*Schwebens*] where there is nothing to hold on to, pure Dasein is all that is still there” (1998a: 89). Pure Dasein is not a “you” nor an “I” but rather some indeterminate “one” that has nothing to hold on to in order to create and secure a story about itself that could provide a sense of “I.” Of course, since two indeterminations are involved—the indeterminate “one” in correlation to the indeterminate “it”—it is possible that the two are really just one. Indeed, this is precisely the insight that anxiety reveals in the context of *Being and Time*. It is the experience of anxiety that discloses the structure of Dasein as a being-in-the-world. The latter abstract formula has in anxiety its experienced testimony.

In anxiety there is nothing to hold on to, and yet, the sense of pure Dasein—which even though *mine* cannot be ascribed to the interiority of my ego as opposed to the exteriority of a world—is as obtrusive as ever. Attuned to anxiety and armed with the only tool that philosophy offers (that is, questioning), one can philosophize. Of course, the temptation to draw conclusions as soon as possible and to escape toward specific beings in order to reduce anxiety is strong and common.⁴

⁴ I see in Descartes’ *Meditations on first Philosophy* an example of this escape. At the verge of Descartes’s madness led by the hyperbolic doubt, the anxious “one feels uncanny” turns into the secure insight that distinguishes the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* it faces. The structure of subject and object comes to soothe the insight into the pure existence. The anxiety of the *sum* is tamed by the clear and distinct boundaries fashioned by the *cogito*. The ontological breakthrough made possible by Descartes’s meditation led by his doubting (questioning), was immediately closed up by the epistemological ground offered by the *cogito*, and the practical ground for domination offered by the *ego conquiro* (about the latter, see Enrique Dussel, 1994). The crack of the ontic prompted

1.2. *Releasing ourselves into the nothing*

“We release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols [*Götzen*] everyone has and to which they are wont to go cringing.”

According to Heidegger, in anxiety, when we allow space for the sense of indeterminacy and indifference that allows beings as a whole to become manifest to us, we may encounter what is still a pretty obscure notion—the nothing: “Anxiety makes manifest the nothing” (1998a: 88). Heidegger writes,

In anxiety beings as a whole become superfluous [*hinfällig*]. . . . Beings are not annihilated by anxiety, so that nothing is left. How could they be, when anxiety finds itself precisely in utter impotence with regard to beings as a whole. Rather, the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away [*entgleitenden*] of the whole (1998a: 90).

The “peculiar calm” (1998a: 88) that pervades Dasein in anxiety strips Dasein off from its familiar power to manipulate and control particular beings, and brings it before beings as a whole in an utter and unfamiliar impotence. Indeed, anxiety robs our speech: “All utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent in the face of the nothing” (1998a: 89). In this silent impotence there is no thing or supreme being that could rescue us—we undergo the twilight of the idols. “We ‘hover’ in anxiety,” and “we can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this ‘no hold on things’ comes over us and remains” (1998a: 88). This utter impotence with regard to beings as a whole is crucial. I am not interested, however, in some form of apology for weakness and impotence. At stake is the revelatory power that happens in anxiety. In short, this impotence helps us to see more.

Since in the second part of this paper I will explore and distinguish different meanings of the nothing, at this point, let me clarify one thing with respect to the nothing and beings as a whole. The nothing is not the outcome of a negation. Heidegger writes: “No kind of annihilation of the whole of beings in themselves takes place in anxiety; just as little do we

by the ontological thatness (pure Dasein, the pure *sum*), was immediately reconducted back to the ontic as the ground for science. If it is true that modern philosophy begins with Descartes, then, I claim, its force comes from this sudden breakthrough and its immediate closing off.

produce a negation of beings as a whole in order to attain the nothing for the first time” (1998a: 90). We must avoid imagining the nothing as a sort of vacuum attained after the vanishing of all—the nothing as the empty space left after a bomb have destroyed everything, as it were. Instead, the notion of the nothing tries to push our reflection further in the direction of the impossibility of objectivity and representation that happens in anxiety precisely in the midst (and not in the absence) of things and activities. Rather than turning away from anxiety’s indeterminacy, we have to explore it through the notion of the nothing. Of course, to try to clarify anxiety’s indeterminacy using the obscure notion of the nothing seems very problematic. The aim of the second part is precisely to illuminate this obscurity.

1.3. *Swinging back—the countermovement or recoil*

“We let the sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back into the fundamental question of metaphysics which the nothing itself compels: Why are there beings at all, and why not rather Nothing?”.

What can be said of the *sweep* about which Heidegger is speaking? So far, we know that in anxiety, when one feels uncanny and faces the nothing, the disclosure of beings as a whole happens. At stake is not this or that being (not even my own being) but rather everything—beings as a whole. But, what do I mean with the expression at stake? Did I not say that the disclosure of beings as a whole carries a sense of indifference and superfluity, which seems to contradict the idea that everything (the whole) is at stake?

Although in anxiety everything sinks into indifference, we are not indifferent about our indifference. Indeed, we care the most amid this anxious moment of indifference. Hence, it is crucial here not to miss the countermovement—that is, a difference that happens simultaneously at the moment of indifference, or “something” approaching us that happens simultaneously at the moment when all beings recede:

All things and we ourselves sink into indifference. This however, not in the sense of mere disappearance. Rather, in their very receding [*Wegrücken*], things turn toward us [*kehren sie sich uns zu*]. The receding of beings as a whole, closing in on us in anxiety, oppresses us. We can get no hold on things [*Es bleibt kein Halt*]. In the slipping away of beings [*Entgleiten des Seienden*] only this “no hold on things” comes over us and remains (1998a: 88).

To illuminate the “sweep” that Heidegger advises us to let run its course, it is helpful to distinguish between two movements (or moments of one movement) occurring in anxiety and the poles between which the sweep occurs. We have two movements: On the one hand, beings recede: “All things and we ourselves sink into indifference”; beings as a whole is attained at the same time that they become superfluous. On the other hand, in the very receding, beings turn toward us. There is here a sort of countermovement. Instead of feeling liberated or released from things due to their withdrawing, we feel the opposite: their withdrawal oppresses us because they are present while they withdraw. Heidegger describes this “oppression” in terms of beings turning around toward us. While in the first movement “we can get no hold on things,” in the countermovement this “no hold on things” itself holds us. But, while one pole in this span seems to be beings as a whole, it is not clear what the other one is.

When things sink and recede, how can they simultaneously turn toward us? Heidegger seems to very much like this counterintuitive “logic.” We find in his work, for instance, the absence of darkness becoming dark; the lack of need turning into a need; or the abandonment and refusal of beings by Being as Being’s mode of revelation. I gather these cases under the notion of a *negative logic of disclosure*. So far, it seems that this negative logic of disclosure happens at the core of our experience of anxiety. In the second part, I will argue that the notion of the nothing can illuminate this negative logic of disclosure. But now, let me clarify the countermovement further.

In anxiety we can get “no hold on things,” which in turn holds us up oppressively. Why does it oppress us? What happens when the receding beings turn toward us? To answer these questions, let us study in more detail how Heidegger describes the movement in anxiety:

In anxiety there occurs a shrinking back before . . . that is surely not any sort of flight but rather a kind of entranced calm. This ‘back before’ takes its departure from the nothing. The nothing itself does not attract; it is essentially repelling (*abweisend*). But this repulsion (*Abweisung*) is itself as such a parting gesture toward (*entgleitenlassende Verweisen*) beings that are submerging as a whole. This wholly repelling gesture (*abweisende Verweisung*) toward beings that are slipping away as a whole, which is the action of the nothing that closes in on Dasein in anxiety, is the essence of the nothing: nihilation (*die Nichtung*). It is neither an annihilation of beings nor

does it spring from a negation... The nothing itself nihilates (1998a: 90).

On the one hand, the oppressive “presence” of the nothing that makes us anxious dissipates the differences among beings. The nothing is encountered at one with beings as a whole which are slipping away. According to Heidegger, this slipping away or shrinking back before is a departure from the nothing. Therefore, the nothing functions essentially as repelling: “the nothing itself does not attract; it is essentially repelling (*abweisend*).” This repelling annihilates the differences among beings, so that it manifests beings as a whole in its withdrawing.

But, on the other hand, this repelling is also a kind of reference (*Verweisung*) that plays the most essential ontological-phenomenological function. It is crucial to pay attention to the recoiling or countermovement happening within the repelling. The possible access to the meaning of Being—that is, to experience the ontological thatness—is displayed in this recoil. Heidegger writes:

As the repelling gesture [*abweisende Verweisung*] toward the retreating whole of beings, it discloses these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to nothing (1998a: 90).⁵

Nihilation (*Die Nichtung*), as the essence of the nothing “acts” as a repelling gesture or parting gesture (*entgleitenlassende Verweisen*) from beings that are sinking as a whole toward the Being of beings. In other words, in anxiety we can experience the ontological difference. The repelling that manifests beings as a whole (the most usual) discloses beings in their concealed strangeness (the most unusual) as what is radically other with respect to nothing.⁶ But how does the most usual turn into the most unusual?

The clue is in the phrase “with respect to nothing.” Heidegger, in what may be the climax of his lecture, continues:

⁵ In Heidegger’s note from the fifth edition, he explains the *repelling gesture*: “repelling: beings by themselves; gesturing toward: the being of beings” (1998a: 90). Departing from *Being and Time*, I interpret that in “What Is Metaphysics?” the *repelling* of beings which are slipping away as a whole does not bring Dasein before its Being-in-the-world, but rather *gestures* Dasein towards Being as such.

⁶ About beings as the most usual, and the Being of beings as the most unusual, see Heidegger (1994).

In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing. But this ‘and not nothing’ we add in our talk is not some kind of appended clarification. Rather, it makes possible in advance the manifestness of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before beings as such” (1998a: 90).

Strictly speaking, there is no Da-sein before the “clear night of the nothing of anxiety.” Dasein becomes Da-sein in and through this experience. Before having been brought for the first time before beings as such, some person may be, for instance, a *homo religiosus* in an absolute relation to the absolute, a psychoanalytic subject constituted by its desire, an *animal rationale* enchanted by its calculative or instrumental rationality, or a *Mapuche* dwelling in *the mapu*,⁷ but not a Da-sein—that is, someone who is the *there* for Being, the place where Being can be said and experienced.

It is the double movement of nihilation that discloses beings in their strangeness as “what is radically other—with respect to nothing.” Regardless of the mode of being,⁸ and no matter how banal some being may be, when we see it with respect—or in contrast—to nothing, it turns into something strange. Everything—including oneself—is experienced as what is radically other—with respect to nothing.

Consequently, every being can be defined as “not-nothing.” Instead of calling this table in front of me a being, I can call it “not-nothing,” and I can call myself “not-nothing” too.⁹ Anxiety enables me to see that

⁷ *Mapuches* are the indigenous inhabitants of what is today south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina. *Mapu* means earth, land, soil; *Che* means people. I use this notion freely in order to denote a type of people that lives in a biune shared space, in which its polar co-subject is the earth (land, soil, *physis*). In this context, a *Mapuche* would be the one who is still awake to the emergent coming forth to presence within the rhythm of “nature,” who is sensitive for the bursting forth of life out from earth. About biunity see Peter Sloterdijk (2011).

⁸ In *Being and Time*, for instance, Heidegger describes three different modes of beings: present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, and Dasein; in his lecture “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he adds the modes of being of the work of Art, of the world, and of the earth.

⁹ Someone might dismiss this moment of strangeness as just some gross abstraction. How is it possible, and if possible, what value can it have to reduce all the richness of the endless number of types of things and phenomena into just one formula: not nothing? While to assess the value of this experience is beyond the limits of this paper, it may be relevant to know that such experiences are not exclusive to ontology. For instance, someone who is a *homo religiosus* understands well such type of experiences. For instance, let us recall here the powerful insight of the Dominican monk Meister Eckhart: “So therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of God, and that we may

the most obvious and familiar insight, namely, that beings are, is worth affirming as what is evident but not at all obvious: they are beings—and not nothing. At this point, anxiety turns into wonder:

Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: *that beings are* (Heidegger, 1998b: 234).

By encountering everything with respect to nothing, the anxious guiding question of philosophy, namely, “why are there beings at all, and why not rather Nothing?” turns into the affirmation that inspires wonder: they are beings—and not nothing. Hence, we hover in a sweep that moves from anxiety to wonder. In order that anxiety may disclose the wonder of all wonders, Heidegger advises us to “let the sweep of our suspense take its full course.”¹⁰

To sum up, first, anxiety manifests the nothing. Secondly, the nothing has a form of “acting” that Heidegger calls nihilation. Thirdly, in nihilation we can distinguish a double movement: the *repelling* of beings that manifests beings as a whole, and the movement that *refers* us to Being. Fourthly, within the double movement of nihilation, it is the recoil or countermovement that discloses Being as such; with respect to nothing, the meaning of Being arises as what is radically other than nothing; a being can be defined as not nothing. Fifthly, the “clear night

apprehend and rejoice in that everlasting truth in which the highest angel and the fly and the soul are equal” (Eckhart, 1981: 200). Similarly, everything is equal regarding the nothing: namely, each thing is equally not-nothing. Here I am trying to clarify this strange “democratic” experience.

¹⁰ The turning from anxiety to wonder is mysterious. First, the occurrence of this turning does not depend on us. It seems that when we remain in the experience of anxiety and avoid fleeing from it into the security and comfort of beings, the possibility of experiencing ontological wonder somehow increases. Thus, Heidegger advises us to “let the sweep of our suspense take its full course.” Second, *questioning* is essential to trigger and support ontological wonder. Although questioning does not assure the disclosure of the thatness of beings, it makes the disclosure possible. Accordingly, my own writing about anxiety, the nothing, and the possible outcome in wonder aims to create the hermeneutical context that promotes this questioning and welcomes these experiences. I offer a meaningful narrative of anxiety (without any pathological connotations), so that once we find ourselves anxious, we may value this experience differently—thus delaying our fleeing and letting ourselves experience what anxiety may disclose. Third, the goal to study the notion of the nothing (in the second part) is to clarify the “not-nothing,” which—at the core of this turning—divests the taken-for-grantedness of the meaning of Being. It is the negative mode of revelation that I want to clarify by the logic of the nothing, which may illuminate this mysterious turning from anxiety to wonder.

of the nothing of anxiety” turns into the wonder *that* beings *are*; there is a sweep that moves from anxiety to wonder.¹¹ Sixthly, the nothing has an ontological function—i.e., the mode of access for experiencing Being as such seems to require us to cross the night of the nothing.

2. The logic of the nothing

We have slowly worked our way to the theme of the nothing. Since we are approaching this obscure theme from some specific question, we don't have to fear drowning in the vast ocean of the nothing.¹² The clue is that the nothing may illuminate the counterintuitive negative logic that happens at the core of the movement or sweep of anxiety (and which Heidegger replicates often in different contexts). We must answer the question of how is it possible that the *receding* of beings may *refer* to Being?

I divide this part into three sections; while they relate to the sections of the first part, they do not fully correspond to each other: (2.1.) nihilation, (2.2.) beings as what are radically other with respect to nothing, and (2.3.) Being as nothing. I begin by studying how the nothing is insinuated in the receding of being as a whole. Then, I focus on the nothing as the opposite of beings. Finally, I show that the opposition of nothing and beings implies the sameness of Being and the nothing.

What is difficult is that in these three moments the meaning of the nothing changes. More precise, these three moments articulate two different meanings of the notion of the nothing. First, there is the revelatory function of the nothing: in anxiety, we confront the *nihil negativum*, in contrast to which the meaning of Being loses its familiarity. Secondly, there is the nothing as the proper name of Being (i.e., Being *as* nothing): since from the perspective of beings, Being is experienced as nothing, Being and the nothing are the same. While the first meaning of the nothing helps to clarify the experience of anxiety and ontological

¹¹ So far, I have tried to clarify the work of anxiety and the nothing (and the possible outcome in wonder), in regard to both their mysterious arising and our possible response to them by letting them take their full course. Although anxiety do not monopolize the tone in which Being reveals itself, I do consider it as having a privileged role to play in our modern times. It seems that it is equipped to disclose Being precisely when Being has become irrelevant due to its familiarity.

¹² On the notion of the nothing in Heidegger, see, Ian Moore (2019), Richard Polt (2001), Fuchun Peng (1998), Priscilla N Cohn (1975), Ernst Tugendhat (1970).

wonder, the second meaning of the nothing elucidates the inverted logic of Being that resides at the core of the sweep of anxiety and at the negative mode of revelation in general. Decisive for my analysis is not to confuse these two different senses of the nothing. Moreover, I claim that this change in the meaning of the nothing is not arbitrarily imposed by my analysis but happens in “the clear night of the nothing of anxiety” itself as the night advances, or better, as we (the reader or myself while experiencing anxiety) let the sweep of our suspense take its full course.

2.1. Nihilation (*Die Nichtung*)

As we saw in the first part, Heidegger calls the action of the nothing nihilation. For him, nihilation is the essence of the nothing. Now, for analytical purposes, I give the name nihilation specifically to the first movement within anxiety, in which “we allow space for beings as a whole.”¹³ Thus, nihilation refers to the slipping away of beings as a whole that occurs when we experience anxiety.

All things, including ourselves, sink into indifference; everything becomes superfluous. We may be amid the madding crowd, but beings no longer speak to us. They do not disappear but, rather, ordinary things start to look different—as if we do not really know what they are. We recognize things and persons around us, and we still recognize ourselves, but the story that we tell about things, persons, and ourselves, starts to become strange.¹⁴ A crisis slowly arises in the referential context of

¹³ See above section 1.1.

¹⁴ This can happen, for example, in mourning or depression. Moreover, it is not rare that children report having experienced moments of estrangement in which the world appears mysterious or absurd (e.g., that their life seems like the dream of someone else). For a poetical version of children’s estrangement, let me quote Peter Handke’s “Song of Childhood,” from Wim Wenders’ film “Wings of Desire” (*Der Himmel über Berlin*): “When the child was a child, / It was the time for these questions: / Why am I me, and why not you? / Why am I here, and why not there? / When did time begin, and where does space end? / Is life under the sun not just a dream? / Is what I see and hear and smell / not just an illusion of a world before the world? / Given the facts of evil and people, / does evil really exist? / How can it be that I, who I am, / didn’t exist before I came to be, / and that, someday, I, who I am, / will no longer be who I am?” I claim that while these experiences of the *unheimlich* (that is., when the most usual becomes unusual) are common, they do not always find a discourse that could value them and give them a sense. In western culture, often it is the discourse of psychoanalysis and psychiatry that offers some hermeneutical ground to make sense of these experiences. Indeed, when these experiences cannot be integrated, they can yield psychotic disorders. Thus, this paper on the notion of the nothing aims to create—following Heidegger—a hermeneutical ground for these experiences outside that of psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

significance. There is no way to escape because there is no place to be saved from the fading away of meaning. Everything turns uncanny. Through this movement of nihilation, beings as a whole are disclosed precisely in the moment when the whole is in crisis.

There is *nowhere* to go, and there is *nothing* that explains this fading away of our net of references and assignments. In these expressions, the nothing may be intuited, but we (who are experiencing anxiety) have not yet encountered it. If anxiety can be described as swinging or oscillating, this first movement of nihilation has not yet reached its entire span.

2.2. *Beings as what is radically Other—with respect to the nothing*

When anxiety oscillates in its whole span and “we release ourselves into the nothing,” then anxiety itself refutes the nothing.¹⁵ Let us place ourselves again in the first movement of the oscillation of anxiety. Beings no longer speak to us; their singularity slips away, and they fall—and we with them—into what seems to be the abyss of nothing. This indifference does not make things disappear; rather, in the very slipping away, things turn toward us. In this turning, the most usual and familiar fact of their presence becomes totally strange. But—and here is the crux of the issue—together with this strangeness comes an insight: the nothing is not; they *are* beings and precisely not nothing. *The anxious experience of the nothing cancels out the nothing of the experience.* The strangeness becomes ontological; the heretofore concealed meaning of Being is manifested in the refutation of the nothing.¹⁶

¹⁵ See above 1.2. and 1.3.

¹⁶ Often the ontological role of the nothing is not even noticed in the vast secondary literature on Heidegger, and when it is noticed, it is not always accepted. As I mentioned in the beginning, Marion treats explicitly the revelatory function of the nothing in Heidegger, just to dismiss it because of the essential ambiguity of the nothing that makes it fail to reveal Being as such. In *Reduction and Givenness*, he writes: “The entrance of the Nothing into phenomenality is in no way sufficient for the manifestation of the ‘phenomenon of Being,’ since the Nothing itself still remains equivocal.” (Marion, 1998: 176). According to Marion, Heidegger reduces nothingness by force to Being, as if “Heidegger himself was tempted to turn away from nothingness as soon as possible, as if he had been afraid of facing it too long” (Marion, 1996: 185). Sadly, I don’t have space here to treat Marion’s own non-ontological or theological version of the nothing that he develops in this article. My effort in describing the movement within anxiety and the focus on the negative mode of disclosure, however, is my way of defending the “referential” capacity of the meaning of the nothing. Of course, the nothing is not, but precisely the meaning of this “not” can “refer” to the thatness of beings.

While things seem to be sinking into the abyss of the nothing, our own experiencing of the sinking cancels out the nothing: the sinking and the abyss are precisely *not nothing*. Everything becomes an instance of not nothing. The seemingly empty and indeterminate expression “being” acquires its concealed meaning: not nothing.

The repelling (first movement) becomes a gesturing (countermovement, recoil) towards the Being of beings. The countermovement discloses the receding beings (of the first movement) in “their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to nothing” (1998a: 90). While I call the first movement “nihilation,” I call the countermovement “original nihilation.” There are not two movements; rather, it is the same oscillation of anxiety that, by reaching its entire span, may reveal for the first time what it means to be. “The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before beings as such” (1998a: 90).

The fact that they are beings and not nothing may be evident but not obvious at all. This revelation implies two things: (1) that the meaning of the nothing is clear and can be used to clarify the meaning of Being, and (2) that the meaning of Being is obscure and requires clarification. Contrary to our common sense, it seems that we know what the nothing means, and we do not know what Being means. Recognizing our knowledge of the nothing and our ignorance of Being is a crucial insight.

Now, the respective “clarity” and “obscurity” of the meaning of nothing and Being are counterintuitive. While the obscurity of Being is due to our familiarity with it, the clarity of the nothing is in itself something obscure. The revelatory strategy is to use the “clear obscurity” of the nothing in order to break through our familiarity with Being—a familiarity that pushes Being’s meaning into oblivion. How can the obscurity of the nothing be clear?

Here I depart from Heidegger’s explicit narrative in “What Is Metaphysics?” Or better, my interpretation is trying to fill in what Heidegger merely insinuates, by using the notion of nothing as *nihil negativum*¹⁷—that is, the absolute and radical nothing, which Heidegger often dismisses.¹⁸ It is the nothing as the *nihil negativum* that strikes us at

¹⁷ About the *nihil negativum* (in comparison to *nihil privativum*, *ens rationis*, and *ens imaginarium*) see Kant’s general classification of different kinds of nothings understood as *non-objects* of experience (2000: B 347–B 349).

¹⁸ Most of the time when Heidegger writes explicitly about the nothing, he tries to separate his own version of the nothing (that is, Being as nothing, which I study briefly in the next section) from the nothing as *nihil negativum*. Thus, he usually accompanies his use of the nothing with some clarification that he is not referring to a “totally nothing”

the moment when we let the sweep of our suspense in anxiety take its full course. There is no logically possible discourse about the *nihil negativum*; to merely mention it turns it into the opposite, namely, a being. The *nihil negativum* is an offense to our common sense and logic.

Thus, it seems even less possible that we may have an understanding of the *nihil negativum* that we could contrast it to beings. How could we understand the *nihil negativum* when it can never in principle appear? And yet, the *nihil negativum* is a proper signifier even though it has no signified: the signifier cancels out any possible signified. We may utter and understand the meaning of the word nothing even though its meaning prevents any possible denotation. The nothing can never be, and yet we keep its signification or meaning within us. We know what it would mean if nothing at all had ever existed. It is this impossible meaning that somehow dwells in us that functions as contrast to illuminate the heretofore concealed meaning of beings. The *nihil negativum* does not “appear” as in a mere thought experiment, but rather it appears in our concern in the midst of the swaying of nihilation (that is, the first movement of anxiety where everything is sinking into indifference). The *nihil negativum* casts its shadow over beings: with respect to nothing, the fact of existence has finally lost its taken-for-grantedness.¹⁹

(*nihil negativum*). For instance, “that in the face of which anxiety is anxious is nothing ready-to-hand within-the-world. But this ‘nothing ready-to-hand,’ which only our everyday circumspective discourse understands, is not totally nothing [*totales Nichts*]. The ‘nothing’ of readiness-to-hand is grounded in the most primordial ‘something’—in the *world*” (Heidegger, 1962: 231–232). Although Heidegger may dismiss the *nihil negativum*, he implicitly uses it at most crucial moments of his writings. For instance, the nothing as *nihil negativum* appears in the guiding question of metaphysics: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger, commenting about the scope of this question, writes: “The domain of this question is limited only by what simply is not and never is: by Nothing. All that is not Nothing comes into the question, and in the end even Nothing itself—not, as it were, because it is something, a being, for after all we are talking about it, but because it ‘is’ Nothing” (2000: 2). Heidegger also speaks of some recoil (*Rückstoß*) that happens in this question: “But if this question is posed, and provided that it is actually carried out, then this questioning necessarily recoils back from what is asked and what is interrogated, back upon itself” (2000: 6). As we saw, the idea of a recoil is relevant for the notion of the nothing as *nihil negativum* that I explore (see 1.3 above).

¹⁹ The manifestation of the concealed meaning of Being can be attuned to different moods, can be triggered by multiple circumstances, and can have various consequences. Hence, I do not claim that my description (focused on the meaning of the *nihil negativum*) is unique, nor that it is the model for every other one. For instance, rather than in anxiety and wonder, Sartre’s protagonist is attuned by nausea at the moment of the unveiling of existence: “And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence has suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather

In the “clear night of the nothing of anxiety,” the meaning of the *nihil negativum* comes to the fore, and the experience of it precisely refutes the nothing—the experience of the nothing is precisely not the *nihil negativum*. Anxiety turns into wonder: rather than the *nihil negativum*, beings are. We welcome in wonder the fact that there is no ground to sustain the fact of existence; you may signal any ground for existence, and that ground would have still to account for its own existence. The anxiety of realizing that this groundless existence could have been nothing turns into wonder when we realize that nonetheless things are and precisely not nothing.²⁰

It is the fact of existence—when experienced in its bare radicality and enlightened absurdity (that is, everything could have been nothing and there is no ground to explain why it is not nothing)—that shakes the referential context of significance. Attuned by the nothing-that-is-not, things turn strange. Things are uncanny not in regard to what they are, or how they work, but rather in regard to *that* they are. Their thatness has lost its familiarity, and something from the uncanniness of thatness also permeates the *what* and *how* of things. The table is still in front of me, but seeing it as not-nothing makes me see it for the first time. Indeed, while I see the table, at the same time I don’t see “it,” because what is in front of me can no longer be called merely “a table” (its thatness cannot be

the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder—naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness” (1959: 172). Similar to Sartre, the attunement in Edvard Munch’s experience that inspired *The Scream* is sad rather than wonderful. In his literary sketch of *The Scream*, he writes: “I was walking along a road with two friends— / when the sun went down / The Sky suddenly / turned to blood / —and I felt a wave of sadness — / I paused — leaned / against the fence tired to death / above the blue-black fjord and city / clouds hovered dripping / steaming blood / My friends walked on and / I stayed behind trembling with an open wound / in my breast — / and I felt as though a vast / endless scream passed through nature.” Available at https://www.emunch.no/TRANS_HYBRIDMM_N0615.xhtml (last access: 23 February, 2021).

²⁰ Allow me here a qualification: we fall into the abyss of nothing, but since we realize that the nothing is not, we understand, on the one hand, that there is no annihilation (becoming nothing). But, on the other hand, since the Being of beings is revealed as what is radically other to any being, we also understand that there is no stop to the falling. There is no being (ground) to hold us—to exist is to fall. With this insight, the abyss is neither tamed nor explained away, but our relation to it can change. The turn from anxiety to wonder does not negate the abyss, rather it signals a different way of falling. While the *nihil negativum* helps for the first insight (the nothing is not), it is useless for the second insight (existence is groundless). I come back to this in the last section.

tamed within the boundaries of any definition). Everything turns mysterious.²¹

We may have thought that the nothing was producing the sinking into indifference which we feel at the moment of nihilation. And yet, it is the opposite. Rather than the nothing, it is Being as such (the insight into the thatness) that insinuates itself in nihilation, which shatters our world of clear and distinct significance. From our point of view, however, Being as such is felt as nothing.²²

2.3. *Being as nothing*

At the same time that Heidegger wrote his lecture “What Is Metaphysics?” (1928), he wrote the treatise *On the Essence of Ground*. In the preface to the third edition (1949) of this treatise, Heidegger writes:

The nothing is the “not” of beings, and is thus being [*Sein*], experienced from the perspective of beings. The ontological difference is the “not” between beings and being. Yet just as being, as the “not” in relation to beings, is by no means a nothing in the sense of a *nihil negativum*, so too the difference, as the “not” between beings and being, is in no way merely the figment of a distinction made by our understanding (*ens rationis*). (Heidegger, 1998c: 97)

²¹ These experiences are also expressed in art. The French painter René Magritte writes: “What I constantly think about is the mystery of life. It’s something that cannot be represented, it can only be evoked. So in the last 40 years, I’ve only tried to evoke the mystery. I see it everywhere—in what you call the common-place. Is not the sky a mystery? (...) life and death, sun and moon, fire and water, all this is not a mystery? (...) I am not talking about God: this is a word that I don’t understand well. I’m talking about life: eating, sleeping, growing up, playing, dying. This is why I’m interested in everything, even banality, and that is why I find a union between the sky, a room, a coffer, a bed and a trumpet. I do not juxtapose strange objects with the purpose of impressing. I describe my thoughts about the mystery, which is the union of everything and everything we know (...) It is not history, nor the ephemeral geography of my time that impresses me: it is the fact of existing ... I do not get used to it easily” (René Magritte, in *Tutti gli Scritti da René Magritte*, edited by André Blavier, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979, quoted from Pulido (2016: 169).

²² While the ontological difference is usually understood as the difference between beings and Being, the problem is that most of the time we don’t know what each of these terms mean. We can pretend to understand this difference and take it as a mere logical distinction between species and its genre, or between elements and its set, or between that which is grounded and its ground. But in these logical representations the leap into the ontological has not happened. In order to understand the ontological difference, we have to encounter the difference between beings and the nothing. The latter reveals the former difference. Beings are that which is radically other with respect to nothing. By holding on to this insight that the ontological difference starts to dawn.

So far, we have studied the nothing as the radically other of beings. But, since the Being of beings is not a being among others, Being as such is also the radically other of beings. From the point of view of beings, Being is a not-being—it is a no-thing. Being as such is experienced from our perspective as a “not” that occurs in our world. Being can be defined as the “not” in relation to beings. Therefore, the nothing and Being—both as the “not” of beings—seem to be the same.²³

To avoid misunderstandings, we must carefully separate the meaning of the *nihil negativum* from the nothing as Being. According to the latter, since Being as such is not a being among others—it is a “not” in relation to beings—it is properly experienced by us as a nothing. The sense of the nothing as Being is essential to elucidating the negative mode of revelation that we have encountered so far. In short, since Being is like nothing, it reveals itself precisely as absence.

Let me conclude by focusing on the logic of the nothing and the thesis that this logic resides at the core of the negative mode of revelation.

From the point of view of our common sense, the logic of the nothing is totally upside-down: by not knowing it—we know it. The nothing “is” when it is not.²⁴ As we saw in “What Is Metaphysics?,” the

²³ About the sameness of Being and nothing in Heidegger’s oeuvre, see: Heidegger (2012: 80): “belonging of nothingness to being” (*die Zugehörigkeit des Nichts zum Sein*); Heidegger (1998d: 169): “Being is Nothing / The Nothing nihilates / Nihilation refuses [*verweigert*] every explanation of beings on the basis of beings / But refusal provides the clearing within which beings can go in and out, can be revealed and concealed as beings”; and in Heidegger (2003: 58), he formulates the guiding statement for the seminar: “Being: Nothing: The Same.” Moreover, in “What Is Metaphysics?” Heidegger agrees with Hegel about the sameness of Being and the nothing, but for different reasons: “‘Pure Being and pure Nothing are therefore the same.’ This proposition of Hegel’s (*Science of Logic*, 1.3:74) is correct. Being and the nothing do belong together, not because both—from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought—agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because being [*Sein*] itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of a Dasein that is held out into the nothing” (1998a: 94–95). It is hard to understand how the predicate of finitude or infinitude may be applied to Being (to the thatness of beings). While beings may be finite or infinite, the Being of beings seems not be finite nor infinite. I interpret Heidegger’s expression the “finitude of Being” as underscoring the fact that Being uses (*braucht*) Dasein in order to be revealed: Being “manifests itself only in the transcendence of a Dasein.” Since Being and Dasein need each other to be *revealed* (the former) and to *be* (the latter), Being itself is essentially finite—it depends on Dasein.

²⁴ Jean-Luc Marion acknowledges this paradox of the nothing: “This paradox—to deny nothingness means to recognize nothingness—ought not to be dismissed. We ought to face it.” But interestingly, he relates it to the divine: “Nothingness looks like a strange

nothing does not attract, but rather it pushes (repels) us into beings. We are held out into the nothing when the nothing remains hidden. Thus, in the midst of beings, when there is nothing of the nothing, the nothing is precisely there. The nothing is inconspicuously operative when it is covered up by beings. It “is” when there is not. Thus, when there are only beings left, precisely there the nothing is smoothly given to us. To negate the nothing—as when science “wishes to know nothing of the nothing” (1998a: 84)—is a mode of “affirming” it. In short, when the nothing is not appearing, it appears. Conversely, every discourse or explicit affirmation of it, reifies and makes it into an idol—thus turning the nothing into precisely what is not, namely, a being. The nothing is not when there “is.” In short, if the nothing appears, it is not appearing.

I claim that when Being is understood as nothing (from the point of view of beings), it means that Being discloses itself according to the logic of the nothing. Accordingly, I claim that the negative logic of disclosure that I mentioned in the first part displays the logic of the nothing. Or, better, this mode of revelation is logical because Being is properly understood as nothing. Their negative form of manifestation is an effect of the ontological difference. Since the fact of the existence of beings (their thatness) is not itself a being among beings, this fact comes to the fore following the logic of the nothing.

Since Being is like nothing from our point of view, the withdrawal of Being is its mode of giving itself to us. Being hides itself so that beings can be. Since Being is not a being among others, it cannot conspicuously appear next to other beings, but rather it is always already “appearing” as nothing—in the mode of inconspicuousness, unobtrusiveness, and non-obstinacy. When the knowledge about the Being of beings remains covered up by the multitude of beings, then Being is preserved: it gives itself and lets beings be thanks to this covering up.

Conclusion

By distinguishing two meanings of the nothing, this paper has shown the nothing’s crucial philosophical role: on the one hand, there is the revelatory ontological function of the absolute nothing. Confronted by

counterpart of God: both take advantage of an ontological argument. God is supposed to exist merely in consequence of the perfection of his essence, and nothingness claims to be thanks to the absolute imperfection of its essence. In both cases we are compelled to admit an item as given simply because we think of it.” “Exactly as God, to achieve existence, only needs to be possible, nothingness only needs to be impossible (as it is) to claim a quasi-existence” (1996: 183, 184).

the insight that the nothing is not, Being's familiarity vanishes into strangeness and, thus, reveals its meaning to the human—who now, for a while, wanders in a wonderful madness of knowing *that* things are, and precisely not nothing. On the other hand, since from our point of view Being is felt as nothing, we may have to learn to discern and appreciate Being's negative logic of disclosure: its refusal is its mode of giving. While with this second meaning one dwells in the realm of the ontological, it is the first meaning that secures our access to it.

These two meanings complement each other, and they are both required in order to gain the ontological perspective, that is, to encounter beings from the point of view of their thatness. On the one hand, the absolute nothing opens access to the uncanny thatness of beings, thus preventing us from confusing it with other famous denotations of the nothing.²⁵ Disappointedly for the *homo religiosus*, the mystic, the magician, or the kabbalist, the *nihil negativum* will not make one face God, the One, matter, Ein Sof and Keter. Moreover, failing to acknowledge the role of

²⁵ These two meanings of the nothing that I have described in this paper can mistakenly be confused with the distinction—made, for instance, by the Kyoto school—between relative and absolute nothing. The nothing is relative insofar as it remains subordinate to being. The (relative) nothing, understood as “absence” or “emptiness” of something, remains subordinated precisely to the horizon of the presence of that absent something. Absolute nothing, in contrast, signals a “primordial” nothing that is released from any correlation to beings. The Heidegger scholar Ian Moore maps this distinction between relative and absolute nothing upon Heidegger's ambiguous language on Being. According to Moore, in Heidegger's oeuvre one can find a threefold distinction between: “1. beings (*das Seiende*), 2. the beingness of those beings (*die Seiendheit*), 3. Being as that which makes the beingness of beings possible (*das Sein* or *Seyn*);” the third level “would be the ground of the first and the second, as well as the condition for the possibility and intelligibility of how they relate” (Moore 2019: 25). Based on the distinction between relative and absolute nothing, Moore explains some of the disparities between the original version of “What Is Metaphysics?” and its print version: while in the former version of the lecture Heidegger attempts to address “absolute nothing” as a way of thinking Being as such (or what he calls, in the mid-1930s, *Seyn*), in the print version he seems to relapse into the (relative) nothing that discloses the beingness of beings. Be that as it may, the distinction between relative and absolute nothing is not the same as the one between *nihil negativum* and the nothing as Being. The latter distinction does not seek to find a deeper or more primordial ground; rather the thatness of beings, revealed by the insight that beings are precisely not the *nihil negativum*, reveals Being precisely as other than ground. While agreeing with Moore that in Heidegger's oeuvre we find this threefold distinction, I disagree that the third level must be understood as a “ground” or the condition of possibility for the other two levels. Confronted by the mystery of the thatness of beings, the fascination with grounding collapses. At stake in this paper is not to get beyond Being, but rather to be awakened to its meaning. Confronted by the impossible and yet meaningful sense of the nothing, the hidden—because too familiar—meaning of Being comes to the fore.

the absolute nothing, we may mistake realms, and supposedly affirm or dismiss the ontological while abiding the ontic realms of grounds, hierarchies, causes, gods and its various surrogates.²⁶

On the other hand, by speaking about a revelation of the Being of beings, this expression may suggest the total exposition of what is revealed through the absolute nothing. Indeed, it seems to imply some clear and distinct “what.” The second meaning of the nothing, however, makes us confront the revealed mystery as mystery. In other words, the unconcealment does not explain away the concealed; the revelation of the mystery of the meaning of Being is the revelation of Being’s concealed obscurity. In short, since that which is concealed within unconcealment is not a being, we may say, then, that in the disclosure of the Being of beings nothing is revealed.

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²⁶ While in the search for God, for instance, Being may become an obstacle, so that this path requires to think God without Being (see Marion, 1991); I claim that the opposite is also true: the path for the disclosure of the meaning of the Being of beings requires the insight of Being without God. The often-dismissed *nihil negativum*, as the possible gift within the night of anxiety, may clear up this more modest path for us.

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