

# HEIDEGGER'S ENCOUNTER WITH METAPHYSICS

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## Özet

### Heidegger'in Metafizikle Karşılaşması

Bu çalışmada, Heidegger'in metafiziğe ilişkin fikirlerini yorumluyoruz. Metafizik, Heidegger için, bir felsefe disiplini ve bir felsefe yapma biçimi olmadan önce, en temelde, bir varlık deneyimi ve algısıdır. Ancak o, herhangi bir varlık deneyimi değildir; Batı geleneğini ve Batının tarihsel hareketini, bir bütün olarak, belirlemiş olan bir varlık deneyimidir. Bu tarihsel hareketin vardığı nihai nokta nihilizmdir. Nihilizm, yolun sonudur: bugün yolun sonunda bulunmaktayız. Heidegger için insanlığın insanlık olarak geleceği bu nihilizmi aşım aşamayacağına bağlıdır. Nihilizmden kurtuluş varlığın kendi asli özüne uyan/uygun bir varlık algısının bizlerde inkişafı ile mümkündür. Ve bu ancak düşünmenin özsel alanında varlık sorusunu üstlenmek yoluyla gerçekleşebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Metafizik, Varlık, Nihilizm, Düşünme, Varlık Sorusu, Batı Geleneği.

## Abstract

### Heidegger's Encounter with Metaphysics

In this article, we interpret Heidegger's views concerning metaphysics. Metaphysics, for Heidegger, is, at bottom, an experience and an understanding of Being before it is a discipline or a form of philosophizing. But it is not an ordinary experience of Being; it is an experience of Being which has determined the Western tradition and its

historical movement as a whole. The eventual destination of this historical movement is a consummated nihilism. Nihilism is the end of the way: we today are standing at such an end. For Heidegger, the future of humanity depends on facing the threat of nihilism “appropriately”, i.e. appropriately to Being itself. Way out of nihilism is possible only through the flourishing of an understanding of Being in us that springs from and corresponds to the authentic essence of Being. And this can happen only by way of appropriating the question of Being in the essential realm of thinking.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics, Being, Nihilism, Thinking, Question of Being, Western Tradition.

## Kurte

### Pergîhevhatina Heîdegger bi Metafizîkê re

Em di vê xebatê de ramanên Heîdegger ên der heqê metafizîkê şîrove dikin. Metafizîk ji bo Heîdegger beriya ku bibe disîplîna felsefeyê û şeweya sazkirina felsefê, di esasê xwe de, tecrîbe û têgihaneke hebûnê ye. Lê ew ne tecrîbeyeke hebûnê ya ji rêzê ye; tecrîbeyeke hebûnê ye ku tevgera dîrokî ya Rojavayê bi tevahî diyar dike. Ciyê dawî ku ev tevgera dîrokî digihîjê, nihîlîzm e. Nihîlîzm dawîya rê ye; em îro li dawîya rêyê ne. Ji bo Heîdegger dahatûya mirovatîyê, wekî mirovahiya xwe, bi hîlbûna vê nihîlîzmê ve girêdaye. Xelasbûna ji nihîlîzmê bi geşedana têgihana hebûnê a li gorî eslê xwe ve mimkun e. Û ev tenê bi rêya li xwe girtina pîrsa hebûnê a li qada puxteyî a ramanê ve dikare bibe.

**Peyvên Sereke:** Metafizîk, Hebûn, Nihîlîzm, Ramîn, Pîrsa Hebûnê, Tradîsyona Rojava.

## چکیده

### نظر هیدگر در باره متافیزیک

در این نوشتار، سعی می‌کنیم نظریات هیدگر، در ارتباط با متافیزیک را توجیه کنیم. متافیزیک نزد هیدگر، قبل از اینکه یک الگو یا ساختار فلسفی باشد، در اصل یک امر مربوط به هستی (وجود) بوده و در ارتباط با ادراک انسانی است. ولی آن، یک امر تجربی در کل هستی نیست. بلکه یک امر تجربی در محدوده عرف و حرکت تاریخی تفکر غربی بوده است. و آخرین نقطه‌ای که این حرکت تاریخی منتهی شد، نیهیلیسم است. نیهیلیسم، آخر خط است. و ما امروز در آخر خط قرار گرفته‌ایم. از نظر

هیدگر، آینده انسان، در رسیدن به مقام انسان واقعی، بستگی دارد به اینکه، آیا بشر خواهد توانست فراتر از نیهیلیسم گام بگذارد یا نه؟ و راه نجات از نیهیلیسم، وقتی ممکن خواهد بود که، ادراک انسانها با اصل وجود مطابقت داشته باشند و این ادراک در وجود ما انکشاف پیدا کند. و این امر محقق نمی شود مگر اینکه در عرصه تفکر و در حلق اندیشه های ما، سوال «اصل وجود» متبلور گردد.

**کلمات کلیدی:** متافیزیک، هستی، نیهیلیزم، اندیشه، عرف غربی.

## الملخص

### افكار هيدجر حول الميتافيزيقيا

سنفسر في هذه الدراسة افكار هيدجر في الميتافيزيقيا. الميتافيزيقيا عند هيدجر قبل ان تكون الانضباط الفلسفية و صنع نموذج للفلسفة هي بشكل اساسي تجربة الوجود والإدراك. و مع ذلك فانها ليست كاي تجربة للوجود بل هي تجربة الوجود تعين التقليد الغربي و حركة التاريخية للغرب. فالنقطة الاخيرة التي وصلتها هذه الحركة التاريخية هي العدمية. العدمية هي نهاية الطريق : و اليوم نحن في نهاية الطريق. و بحسب هيدجر مستقبل البشرية متوقف على التغلب على العدمية. التحرير من العدمية لا يتحقق الا بوجود الإدراك وفقا لجوهر الموضوعية. ويمكن أن يحدث هذا من خلال التفكير تلنزم بشأن مسألة الوجود في مجال الاساسية.

**الكلمات الأساسية :** الميتافيزيقيا ، الوجود، العدمية، التفكير، مسألة الوجودية، تقاليد الغرب.

One of the most pervasive themes in Heidegger's ontological thinking is the question of nihilism which, in turn, has intrinsic interconnections with the question of metaphysics. Heidegger sees the western tradition as a tradition determined by metaphysics, entity-absorbed understanding of Being which underlies, what he calls, "the history of Being" as the locus of the progression of nihilism, the deep history of the West in which such metaphysical experience of Being has unfolded (and exhausted) its possibilities. Heidegger asserts that (1) "Das Wesen des Nihilismus ist die Geschichte, in der es mit dem Sein selbst nichts ist."<sup>1</sup> (Heidegger, 1999, p.206) (2) "Das Wesen des Nihilismus ist geschichtlich als die Metaphysik."<sup>2</sup> (Heidegger, 1999, p.210) (3) "Die Metaphysik als solche ist der eigentliche Nihilismus."<sup>3</sup> (Heidegger, 1999, p. 211, 216) (4) "Der Nihilismus ist,

<sup>1</sup> "The essence of nihilism is the history in which it is nothing with Being itself."

<sup>2</sup> "The essence of nihilism occurs historically as metaphysicp."

<sup>3</sup> "Metaphysics as such is the actual nihilism."

in seiner Wesen gedacht, ... die Grundbewegung der Geschichte des Abendlandes"<sup>4</sup> (Heidegger, 1977, p. 218). (5) "Das Wesen des Nihilismus nichts nihilistisches ist"<sup>5</sup> (Heidegger, 1976, p. 414). In what follows I offer some intuitive observations taking up the implications of these specific statements.

Metaphysics, Heidegger believes, is not understandable apart from the of forgottenness of Being inherent in it. As an understanding of Being, it has set the tone and manner of Western man's comportment towards entities (to himself, fellow human beings, nature, world, history and culture, philosophy and art) in ever increasing elision of Being. Further, we see that this underlies the everyday forgetfulness of Being (as his starting-point in *Being and Time*, in the discussions of forgetfulness of Being, fallenness upon or amidst entities, inauthenticity) which conditions and characterizes theory and science, among otherp. We see in *Being and Time* that theoretical attitude grows out of an evasion from man's radical finitude, *Nichtigkeit* as the constant threat of meaninglessness which stirs Dasein's essence as "a priori engagement with meaning". This evasion from finitude and temporality assumes a specific structure of thinking, comportment toward and understanding of Being, i.e metaphysics, which, Heidegger argues, has historically established in the late Greek age. Being a presence-centred, entity-absorbed vision, this experience of Being (metaphysics) misses "Nothing" (*Nichts*) at the core of Being, which is, like void in a jug, an essential dimension of Being. Rather "Nothing ... opens up an expanse in which Being as such is disclosed"<sup>6</sup> (Lin Ma, 2008, p. 179). As Agamben puts it "*Lichtung* is always already *Nichtung*." (Agamben, 2004, p.80). Metaphysics takes Nothing as a trivial abstraction, the negation of beingp. For Heidegger, nihilism correctly understood is the historically conditioned and rooted occurrence that signifies not only the exclusion of Being (the nil status of Being for thinking) but also of Nothing, from thoughtful consideration. In the technological age which finds the expression of its inner truth in the Nietzschean metaphysics of "will to power", it signifies an utterly inauthentic unconcealment of Being. Actually, we only witness the final (and therefore, extreme) repercussions of a movement which has onset long before, in the late Greek age. Heidegger's account implies that (1) the whole Western

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<sup>4</sup> "Nihilism thought in its essence is... the fundamental movement of the history of the West."

<sup>5</sup> "The essence of nihilism is nothing nihilistic."

<sup>6</sup> Lin Ma, in this study, explores interesting connections between Heideggerian and Taoist (or Daoist) Nothing, see chapters 6, 8 and 9.

history is at bottom, at its ontological heart, a movement of nihilism, and (2) becomes intelligible only when placed into such a focus. Being has lost all its richness for the western thought, once it is carelessly and readily taken simply as "presence", a position which proceeded from Being's gradual sinking into a usualness, after the overwhelming wonder (*thaumezein*) of the first beginning before the event of Being, which has come to language as a founding event of language (*logos*) and gifted Western humanity its ordinary and ground-breaking (*anfänglich*) experience and word for truth, *aletheia*. In the following 2400 years, this originary event, *aletheia*, has increasingly receded into oblivion in favor of an understanding of truth as correspondance (*homoiosis*, *adeaquatio*, accordance, rectitude, certitude, exactitude) between mind and being. To a view of Being as presence there corresponds a view of truth as correspondance. All in all, Being is thought in terms of beings (*Seiendheit*), not in its *own* term. Consequently, Being has been reduced to the uttermost generality, a pure abstraction, an absolutely flat and self-evident level, needed as such for the constancy of entitative vision (*theoria*). The ontological words that embody such metaphysical experience of Being Heidegger suggests, are *idea* and *ousia* (the fundamental and decisive concepts of Platonic thinking, as a thinking of Being, which has been consolidated in the metaphysics of Aristotle). The structure or mechanic of entitative vision (metaphysics) has unfolded as a drive of absolute (*unbedingt*) knowledge of beings which would serve an unfailing basis for the mastery over being. Metaphysics from the outset is determined by the truth of beings (*Seiendheit*), which is a techno-logical framework, a paradigm which while disclosing beings in technologically functional ways, as such and as a whole, left no room for the authentic disclosure (*Wesen*) of Being. If an understanding of Being is an ontological paradigm which, as something essential for our functioning as human beings, situates and guides all human practices (above all, thinking), then metaphysics is a nihilistic ontological paradigm which obscures the truth of Being (*aletheia*, *Lichtung*, *Anfang*, the essential happening of Being as Ereignis) in favor of an absorption in the truth of being.

Technology as the consummation of nihilism drives Being away from the human, and man in turn is bound to receive light from a dead star, be determined by the utterly inauthentic and the poorest disclosure (*Unwesen*) of Being, for to be human being means to receive the disclosure of Being, to have an understanding of what it means to be, to be determined by the giving of Being. Thus for a

human being, beings can only show up through the light of Being, which in turn needs an open site, a clearing, to radiate and light up things. Being (let us say, such light through which anything *is*, that is, presences) is actually a genuinely rich dimension, indeed an unexhaustable richness. Metaphysics is the loss of such richness, i.e. nihilism, in which it is reduced only to presence (*Anwesenheit*) fit to serve for the purposes of control and power.

Accordingly, this experience of being, metaphysics, refers to the supremacy of truth of beings (*Seiende*) to the exclusion and eclipse of the truth of Being as such (*Sein als solches*), *aletheia*. Heidegger argues that the *telos* of metaphysics (all science and knowledge of beings) is technology, the unconcealment of things under a technological projection (exclusively as “resource”—*Bestand*). Perhaps, a Huxleyan world is the ultimate end (say, u-topia) of such technological disclosure of beings: a well-functioning social system, maximum comfort, total security, economic prosperity, full reign of pleasures, and the like.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger finds this thoroughly uncanny. Such utopia requires a totally inauthentic man, a type of human being totally alienated to his own Being that is given to him in his radical finitude. Heidegger by contrast has in mind a man who lives on the earth as mortal. Hence Heidegger, in some key postwar essays, such as “The Thing” (1950), “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1951), and “... Poetically, Man Dwells...” (1951)<sup>8</sup>, refers to humans as “mortals”, one element of the fourfold structure of *Lichtung* (*Geviert*). The implication is clear: man can maintain his essence, that is, continue to be *Dasein*, “an a priori engagement with meaning”, only in so far as he remains, one way or another, a mortal awareness. Otherwise, man would lose touch with “meaning”, cease to be a temporal site required for the disclosure of Being, which is the very spectre of nihilism for Heidegger. Thus, in the *Der Spiegel* interview, the interviewer provokes Heidegger: “everything is functioning... we have peak production. Men are... well provided for. We live in prosperity. What is really missing here?” (Wolin, 1993, p.105). Heidegger retorts:

Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them... We don't need any atom

<sup>7</sup> See Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> These three writings can be found in Heidegger (1971).

bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on which man lives. (Wolin, 1993, pp. 105-106)

Heidegger in this interview complains of the widespread blindness of today's world concerning the danger inherent in the nihilism of global technology. Nihilism "the absence of the God in the time of decline" (Wolin, 1993, p.107) owes its rule to its hiddenness and inconspicuousness. Then such absence, before all else, is what needs to be realised. Indeed, in the consummated nihilism of the modern age, the defining fact is that Being happens in its default, has abandoned being. But such absence of Being, the most thought-provoking aspect of modern life, does never provoke any question at all. Therefore, this nihilistic condition of Western tradition which now in late modernity has reached its climax with the full hegemony of technology is a double-layered phenomenon, namely the abandonment of Being and the forgetfulness of Being which in turn, it seems, aggravate each other. As Joan Stambough succinctly puts "what Heidegger calls true nihilism has two aspects or factors: (1) that Being remains absent, and (2) that thinking leaves out, omits, neglects to pay heed to this remaining absent." (Stambough, 1991 p.144). Yet, one should also note that such elision of Being drives Being away from the realm of its truth, for Being and thinking in Heidegger are not two separate and isolated phenomena: so to speak, Being lives (*west*) in thinking, and thinking is the happening of disclosure of Being. (As is explicitly defended in *Was Heisst Denken*, it is not a human possession). However, thinking as a historically structured receptivity of the disclosure of Being remains almost bound to operate in the structure or realm the previous thinking (principally, Plato and Aristotle) has established. Ever since thinking has lost *aletheia*, ceased to be a thinking of Being, the essential togetherness and thus unity of both has disappeared as the "privation" of both, that privation which is the exact meaning of nihilism in Heidegger's sense. Then, 3 moments emerge: (1) the two phenomena Stambough notes (i.e the role of Being and the role of thinking) are primordially, that is, in the first beginning of the early Greek thinking, unitary and simultaneous, (2a) but later, they have gone separate and consequent: in the onset of metaphysics (Plato and Aristotle), the latter has given rise to the former, (2b) and in the ensuing history of Being (particularly, today), the former determines the latter. In any case, these thoughts invite the very difficult problem of freedom in Heidegger. Actually, the problem of freedom is one of the central difficulties in Heidegger's whole

philosophy. Sometimes Heidegger seems to say everything is ineluctably determined by Being (*Geschichte als Geschick*), thus in this history, nothing is human doing. And sometimes he emphasizes the human role as decisive in the emergence of nihilism and metaphysics. Nevertheless, the impression is hard to avoid that we are just *figurants* in the world theatre of Being. The questions, precisely what is our role in the relation of man and Being (in their “identity”)?, precisely where does the human freedom consist?, what kind and degree of freedom does thinking involve?, perhaps are questions that remain unsettled and deeply intriguing for Heidegger himself as well, even though Heidegger has written extensively on the issue of freedom. As a matter of fact, the problem of freedom in (later) Heidegger’s thought is a fairly complex one that exceeds the scope of the present study. At least, let it suffice to indicate that part of the trouble, presumably, lies in Heidegger’s firm conviction not to think of freedom in terms of human will and morality<sup>9</sup> (Heidegger, 1985 p.9). Thus Heidegger’s freedom is not the freedom of *an* individual, but rather a condition prior to it, namely the fundamental aspect of *Lichtung als das Freie*. One should even ask if there is any room in the thought of later Heidegger for the individuality of human being at all.

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*Mukaddime,*  
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Yet, nothing can be “certain” about the future of Being. In his late writings, Heidegger seems to think that appropriate human attitude can foster the growth of “that which saves” (*das Rettende*). Heidegger inspired from Meister Eckhart calls this thoughtful attitude toward Being *Gelassenheit*, perfect passivity of thinking (a whole of questioning-listening-waiting) as man’s perfect activity (the fulfilment of all human action) which thus fosters the growth of *das Rettende* in *Geringe*, in (little) things that as “rings” serve as souvenirs of Being, embody the nearness, re-call us our essence, our “belonging” to Being. *Gelassenheit* is a letting-be which clears the authentic space (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*) of ondom: it lets Being speak for itself, essentially happen (as the radical mystery of *a-letheia*); it lets beings be, step into radiance (as the beings *of* Being); and it lets oneself be (as one’s own self). *Gelassenheit* stands at the opposite pole of the absolute self-assertion of will (“will to will”), which Heidegger sees grow in each moment of metaphysics in its history, i.e in the history of Being. Once will is the ultimate principle of thinking whereby our fundamental understanding of Being is structured, then there is no “place” for

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<sup>9</sup> “Freedom not the property of man, but rather: man the property of freedom.” Exactly the same point can be found also in Heidegger, 1988, (p. 145).



Being itself to show up in its own character (*A-letheia*). All sorts of consciousness (e.g. Descartes' cogito, Hegel's absolute self-consciousness, Husserl's pure consciousness) are simply its variations. A willful engagement with the world (and this as consolidated and intensified over the ages) distracts human essence as the place (*Ortschaft*) or openness (*Offenheit*) for the disclosure of Being. It distracts attention from the essential (Being itself) to the derivative, to beings as "objects" of the self-assertion of will, thus to beings to be mastered. As Heidegger indicates: "As the will to will, this life demands in advance that all knowledge move in the manner of guaranteeing calculation and valuation" (Heidegger, 1973 p.109).

Man stands and dwells in such open (*Lichtung*) in which he receives the gift of Being, the unconcealment and presence of beings as such and as a whole (in terms of a unified pattern). In and through such open, such space of meaning (the field of intelligibility or vision), alone, man can encounter entities. But the open is opened first through and as the unconcealment of Being as such which reveals beings in such and such a way. We lose sight of such unconcealment and thus of *Lichtung* itself in favor of what is revealed in the light of it. *Lichtung* thus is the nearness of Being; man dwells in the nearness of Being; such nearness is man's primordial essence, its abode, its home. But if metaphysical attention is consumed by what is unconcealed (what is present), and out of a habit of thinking structured and hardened in a long tradition, forgets the event of unconcealment as such, then man through this history goes alienated to his home/ his ownmost (*Wesen*). Heidegger draws attention to the nihilistic essence of homelessness which he argues marks Western existence from the ground up and in particular modernity, since metaphysics entails a thorough-going alienation to home (the nearness of Being). Nihilism then shows itself as "the unhomely mind" of the Western humanity.

Accordingly, nihilism in its world-historical forms, and finally in the form of technology, is "the most uncanny (*unheimlichste*) guest", as Nietzsche (the philosopher of homelessness) cries out, renders man "unhomoely" (*unheimlich*), without an authentic dwelling, a home. In fact, the whole problematic of nihilism, in Heidegger's thought, arises from Heidegger's encounter with Nietzsche and is at bottom Nietzschean, but Heidegger appropriates and transforms it in a new light. Nietzsche's metaphysics of "will to power", contrary to Nietzsche's intentions, leaves Being in an extreme darkness, and concomitantly, the essential realm (home) of human essence in which man is related to Being. Search for home in our age, according to

Heidegger, then needs to take up a direct and decisive confrontation with the question of nihilism. Such confrontation should take place in the form of “thoughtful questioning”, viz. thoughtful submission to, and journeying in, the path opened by the question of Being (i.e. *Gelassenheit*), not driven for conclusive results or final answers, but a tentative open questioning that is least affected by will and most attuned to the willless reverberations of poetic saying stirred by the silent voice of Being. Even for that purpose, as we pointed out in our study, willful attempts like “overcoming nihilism or metaphysics” should be abandoned. One first of all needs to focus on the task of thinking as preparing proper openness (readiness) for the emergence of Being in its true essence. Besides, this cannot come about unless we take up a dialogue with the Western tradition, especially with the early Greek thinking which harbours in itself the remembrance of Being, the upsurge of wonder, as the event of the first beginning. Falling away from such remembrance, its fading away into metaphysics, is the source of the forgetfulness of Being, of the hidden history of nihilism as a destiny. Such a dialogue “in and for remembrance nourishes the possibility of a transformation of destiny.” (Heidegger, 1984 p.101) So *Gelassenheit* involves *An-denken* (recollective thinking) which needs to re-call (*er-innern*), appropriate (*er-eignen*) and shelter (*wahren*) the remembrance of Being (*Gedächtnis*) by embodying it in po(i)etic saying, which is the opposite of the forgetfulness of Being. Heidegger here has in mind Hölderlin, the poet-thinker of homecoming (*Heimkunft*).

*Gelassenheit* is hence what is left to humans as the only authentic option outside of the dominion of technology, in the age of technological nihilism: it is the submissive and listening attitude conducive to the flourishing of *Besinnung* (or *besinnliches Denken*, essential thinking) that is deeply attentive to language (“the house of Being” (Heidegger, 1998 p.239; 1982 p. 135) i.e. the primordial manner in which the truth, un-concealment, of Being “takes place”) and whereby responsive or response-able to Being. *Besinnung* is *Gelassenheit* as “Gelassenheit zum die Fragwürdigen” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 63), as that in which the question of Being submits itself to its matter and thereby gets underway, makes room and way for Ereignis. A way is the site of the event of Being (Ereignis). The way of thinking is the question of Being: to think means to be on this way, and thus to be underway. To be on a way (*unterwegs*), in Heidegger’s sense, is something adventurous, the matter of radical uncertainty: one cannot know beforehand what will happen. Being an adventurous venture, thinking, nonetheless, harbours in itself, that is, on its *own* path, the

advent of the essential happening of Being (*Wesen des Seyns*) which Heidegger calls with various names. Perhaps the principal one is Ereignis. Heidegger also identifies it with Hölderlin's *das Heilige* (Heidegger, 1994, p. 232)<sup>10</sup>, the last God "the totally other over against the gods who have been, especially the Christian God." (Heidegger, 1999, p. 283) In the *Der Spiegel* interview, he speaks of a God which alone can save us. (Wolin, 1993 p.107) We will, Heidegger seems to say, remain in the grip of nihilism up to the essentially uncertain but hoped-for advent of a God, (assuming that we undertake *Gelassenheit*). Such a God (as *Es*) would grant (*gibt*) us, mortals, a language, a world, a home within which we could re-call and discover ourselves as ecstatic dwellers of the ecstatic nearness, the inexhaustible richness and the radical mystery of Being.

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<sup>10</sup> Heidegger here asserts "Was sagt Hölderlin's Dichtung? Ihr Wort ist: das Heilige."

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