

PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOLOGY

Boredom and the Beginning of Philosophy

by
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But there is one thing that this so clear and so venerable teaching does not contain; it does not contain the mystery of what the Exalted One himself experienced, he alone among hundreds of thousands.

Hermann Hesse: *Siddhartha*, 28

I

How do we begin to philosophize? Where is the beginning of philosophy and philosophization? Why do we philosophize?

In the *Meditations*, Descartes employs universal doubt to “demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundation.”¹ The establishment of the “unshakeable foundation of truth” residing in the *ego cogito* is the absolute beginning of philosophy. Husserl, agreeing with Descartes that whoever “seriously intends to become a philosopher, must ‘once in his life’ withdraw into himself and attempt, within himself, to overthrow everything and build anew all the sciences that up to then, he has been accepting.”² Both Descartes and Husserl believe that the founding of the Archimedean point, i.e., the absolute foundation of truth, is the origin in which philosophy as a rigorous science can be grounded. Both insist that the pursuit of philosophy is the business of the lonely person. “Philosophy—wisdom (*sagesse*)—is the philosophizer’s quiet personal affair. It must arise as *his* wisdom, as his self-acquired knowledge tending toward universality, a knowledge for which he can answer from the beginning, and at each step, by virtue of his own absolute insights.”³ The seeking of philosophy is the

¹ Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 12.

² Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 2.

³ Ibid.

sole responsibility of the philosophizing person. Yet both Descartes and Husserl have the idea of initiating the readers to philosophy or phenomenology through the meditations, which are meant to be propaedeutic in nature. Whoever follows the thinking processes demonstrated in the six meditations can learn how to philosophize.

Indeed, Kant at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, emphasizes on the importance of philosophization. Though he does not take doubt as the obvious starting point of philosophization, Kant nevertheless has a somewhat opposite direction of Descartes and Husserl. Instead of constructing a system of knowledge, Kant seeks to clarify the conditions of the possibility of this very knowledge by critically evaluating the faculty of reason. Kant says:

We can only learn to philosophize, that is, to exercise the talent of reason, in accordance with its universal principles, on certain actually existing attempts at philosophy, always, however, reserving the right of reason to investigate, to confirm, or to reject these principles in their very sources.⁴

Kant is not sure if the idea of philosophy as the “system of all philosophical knowledge” can be realized. We can only “endeavor to approximate” this idea because philosophy as such “nowhere exists *in concreto*.”

For Descartes, Kant and Husserl, the purpose of philosophization is the justification of scientific knowledge. But, why should I philosophize on an absolute system of philosophy? If rigorous scientific knowledge is not my concern, why should I bother about such meditations or critique? Of course, doubt is common in everyday life as there are numerous confusions, ambiguities, and uncertain things around. But *methodical* doubt as practiced by Descartes and Husserl is surely not an ordinary everyday activity. Only a professional philosopher or scientist would come to doubt the certainty and validity of scientific knowledge; and only those who determine to found philosophy as a systematic knowledge would critically reflect on the foundation of knowledge as such. To be sure, though the existence of the world is put into question, it is only seen from a purely theoretical perspective, as the world is empirically always there. Doubt is therefore, for a professional philosopher, the *epistemological* beginning of theoretical philosophy. Apparently, this doubting philosopher, who by no means is a skeptic or a nihilist, has already had a precise conception of philosophy, i.e., philosophy as a rigorous science, before entering into the methodical doubt.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A838 /B806.

II

Heidegger begins *Being and Time* with a citation of Plato's *Sophist*: "For manifestly, you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'being'. We however, who used to think we understand it, have now become perplexed (Verlegenheit)."⁵ Surely it is the Being-question (Seinsfrage) that is put forward as a challenge to the whole history of Western philosophy since Plato: not only does the Being-question remain unanswered, but the meaning of this question has not even been raised. Hence the task of the beginning of Heidegger's *magnum opus* is to "reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question."⁶ Unlike Descartes and Husserl, Heidegger from the very beginning does not regard philosophy either as science or as Weltanschauung but as thinking of Being. The perplexity of the Being-question serves not as a kind of doubt that leads to a reconstruction of philosophical knowledge but aims at a kind of bewilderment, confusion, or puzzlement. Unlike Descartes and Husserl, whose aim of philosophization is to search for an absolute grounding of sciences by an overthrow (Umsturz) of the hitherto philosophical theory of knowledge, Heidegger wants to reawaken the Being-question without knowing the ultimate result of this search. Though the subject matter of this Heideggerean philosophization is Being, there are different ways for the elucidation of the meaning of Being. All efforts are in the end only trail marks (Wegmarken) and sidetracks (Holzwege) of this search.

Hence perplexity differs in essence from methodical doubt. The perplexity is first of all to address the academic world at that time of the failure to understand the most fundamental problem for all sciences, philosophy included. The Being-question aims at "ascertaining the *a priori* conditions not only for possibility for the sciences ...but also the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations."⁷ Heidegger continues to assert the primal importance of his search: "Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task."⁸ This is indeed a very ambitious claim, even more so than that of Descartes

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31.

⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31.

and Husserl. However, notwithstanding the incompleteness of *Being and Time*, the promise to ground all sciences in the truth of Being remains unfulfilled. No concrete indication of how to relate or reconstruct mathematics, biology, historical sciences, or theology with the meaning of Being has been offered in the extant corpus of Heidegger.

On the other hand, the perplexity of the Being-question is directed to each of us. We are perplexed over the vague Understanding of Being (Seinsverständnis) in every human discourse and activity. We are somewhat aware of our own self, other people, and the world around us. But we do not know exactly why this is the case. “Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being.”⁹ For the ontical distinction between Dasein and all other beings lies in the ontological fact that “in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it.”¹⁰ This pre-ontological understanding of Being is only the possibility of all philosophization, because “‘Being-ontological’ is not yet tantamount to ‘developing an ontology’.”¹¹ However, this recognition of the pre-ontological understanding of Being in Dasein is paramount to the whole project of seeking the meaning of the Being-question. Without this Understanding of Being there is no ontology or phenomenology. *Being and Time* is a phenomenological elucidation of the Understanding of Being itself by an existential analytic of Dasein. At the end of the published version of *Being and Time*, Heidegger reiterates the aim which has been already stated at the method-paragraph 7: “that philosophy ‘is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it arises and to which it returns’.”¹²

However, Understanding of Being is constitutive for every Dasein. The change from the pre-reflective and pre-theoretical awareness of this understanding to a reflective and theoretical development of a phenomenological ontology is never a taken-for-granted process, as there is no guarantee for any philosophical reflection that can be inaugurated in every Dasein. Perplexity is only an initial stage of this process. Being perplexed leads perhaps only to bewilderment and puzzlement. Like Meno’s angry reaction to Socrates, who has brought him down from false certainty to perplexity, it

⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 38 and 487.

leads to the numbing both in mind and speech.¹³ The acknowledgment of one's ignorance and confusion does not necessarily bring forth the urge to philosophize.

It requires therefore another more existential entrance to philosophization. Heidegger clearly understands the difference between the author of *Being and Time* and the university professor as teacher of philosophy. The "rumor about Heidegger" so publicized in the twenties is succinctly described by Hannah Arendt:

Thinking has come to life again; the cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar, worn-out trivialities they had been presumed to say. There exists a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think.¹⁴

Indeed, the lecturer Heidegger provoked his students with perplexed questions. Hence the students have to think passionately in order to enter into philosophization that is our destiny as human *beings*. Heidegger says in the beginning of the lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* in 1929-30:

Philosophy—as we are presumably superficially aware—is not some arbitrary enterprise with which we pass our time as the fancy take us, not some mere gathering of knowledge that we can easily obtain for ourselves at any time from books, but (we know this *only obscurely*) something to do with the whole, something extreme, where an ultimate pronouncement and interlocution occurs on the part of human beings.¹⁵

Accordingly, philosophy cannot be learned by attending lectures or studying books. It must come from an internal urge to think. Hence Heidegger's task as teacher of philosophizing is to find the appropriate way of initiating students into philosophy itself, not by demonstrating philosophical scholarship in lectures but by

an "intro-duction" which leads into philosophy itself. One can never philosophize "in general," but rather every genuine philosophical problem is, in each case, a single specific problem. But, on the other

¹³ Plato, *Meno*, 80a to 80b.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Heidegger at Eighty," in Michael Murray, ed., *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978, 195.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 6. Emphasis added.

hand, no genuine philosophical problem is a so-called specialized problem. Every genuine problem is a fundamental problem.¹⁶

At the end of his Antrittsvorlesung 1929, Heidegger asserts once again this philosophical origin: “As long as human beings exist, philosophizing of some sort occurs. Philosophy – what we call philosophy – is the getting under way of metaphysics, in which it comes to itself and to its explicit tasks.”¹⁷

Here, in the Antrittsvorlesung *What is Metaphysics* and the subsequent lecture courses, Heidegger has changed the formulation of the Being-question in *Being and Time*. The guiding question is no longer to ask the meaning of Being, but to post the fundamental question of metaphysics: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? The shift is significant because it demonstrates that a direct, concrete, and existential philosophical articulation is preferable to the academic style in *Being and Time*. The questions posted in these lecture courses are to confront the listeners and readers with the purpose to awaken the metaphysical disposition within them to philosophize, i.e., to introduce the audience into philosophy.

III

How can we come to this fundamental question of metaphysics? Surely this is not an ordinary question. However, we cannot feel the impact of this question and be initiated into philosophization through reading or hearing it, or by attending a lecture. The profound meaning of this question can only be understood when we suddenly find ourselves in a definite situation, a “mood” or “attunement” (*Stimmung*). It may be in great despair or joy, in Angst or

¹⁶ Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundation of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 7. The following paragraph, concerning the teaching of academic philosophy, deserves notice from us philosophy teachers at today’s universities: “The widespread sterility of academic philosophy course is also caused by the attempt to instruct the students with the well known broad brushstrokes, in possibly one semester, about everything in the world, or about even more than that. One is supposed to learn to swim, but only goes meandering on the riverbank, converses about the murmuring of the stream, and talks about the cities and towns the river passes. This guarantees that the spark never flashes over to the individual student, kindling a light in him which can never be extinguished in his Dasein.”

¹⁷ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics,” in *Pathmarks*, 96.

in a spell of boredom, when we are equally distant from despair and joy, but when the stubborn ordinariness of beings lays open a wasteland in which it makes no difference to us whether beings are or are not—and then, in a distinctive form, the question resonates once again: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?¹⁸

The asking of this question obviously is not a logical result of the mood, i.e., there is no causal relationship between these diverse moods and the question. Yet these moods provide a peculiar situation in which we encounter our own self squarely with beings as a whole or Nothing. We are stunned by something uncanny: everything previously familiar suddenly turns into something unfamiliar. In great joy, everything seems to belong to us and we are immersed in the blessings of the whole world; in depression, when everything turns against us, the world become hostile; in despair, everything in the world loses its meaning and relevance. Heidegger analyses Angst in great detail in *Being and Time* as an extreme form of mood; it is also the focus of discussion in the Antrittsvorlesung. But a phenomenology of joy seems absent in all his works.¹⁹ Nevertheless, boredom is the main theme of the 1929/30 lecture course. Apparently no other philosopher has given such attention to this phenomenon in the history of philosophy.

Before this detailed phenomenological analysis of boredom in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger first discussed boredom in connection to everydayness in *The concept of Time* (1924), as a mode of inauthentic existence, in which only the present dictates our lives. We live by the clock. Heidegger elaborates:

Dasein as concernful present resides alongside whatever it is concerned with. It grows weary in the ‘what’, weary to fill up the day. Time suddenly becomes long for Dasein as being present, for this Dasein that never has time. Time becomes empty because Dasein, in asking about the “how much,” has in advance made time long, whereas its constantly coming back in running ahead towards the past never becomes boring. Dasein would like constantly to encounter new things in its own present.²⁰

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2.

¹⁹ In *What is Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes briefly about joy and even love in this connection. “Another possibility of such manifestation is concealed in our joy in the presence of the Dasein —and not simply of the person—of a human being whom we love.” *Pathmarks*, 87. Unfortunately, there is no phenomenology of joy or love developed in Heidegger’s thought.

²⁰ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 16.

Though boredom is not fully thematized here, the connection between boredom and time is significant for later analysis. In *What is Metaphysics*, boredom or profound boredom has already been discussed in a positive manner to indicate the revealing phenomenon of nothing. Heidegger says:

Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this ‘as a whole’ comes over us—for example in authentic boredom. Such boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on and on. It erupts when “one is bored.” Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses or our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests beings as a whole.²¹

Why boredom? Heidegger’s primary task in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is a phenomenological analysis of the three inter-connected concepts: “world, finitude and solitude.” But how do we get into a philosophical reflection on these concepts? Here the strategy is to find an opening, to awaken “a fundamental attunement in our philosophization.”²² Heidegger points out the important formulation of this statement: “I deliberately say: in *our* philosophizing, not in some arbitrary philosophizing nor even in philosophy in itself, for there is no such thing. It is a matter of awakening *a* fundamental attunement which is to sustain our philosophizing, and not *the* fundamental attunement.”²³ There is surely more than one fundamental attunement, e.g., Angst, despair, or joy. But what is this *our* philosophizing? This refers clearly to the concrete existential situation in Europe at the time of the lecture course, in which Heidegger had sensed the impending cultural degeneration. Hence the subject matter of philosophy, i.e., philosophization, must not be some abstract and empty universal problematic, but the contemporary cultural world in which we are immersed. The interpretation of the cultural situation by philosophers like Spengler or Nietzsche pointed to a cultural crisis. However, this crisis is nothing obvious, it remains hidden under the superficial glory of the time. Heidegger asks:

Yet who can speak in such way when world trade, technology, and the economy seize hold of man and keep him moving? And nevertheless we seek a *role for ourselves*. What is happening here? We ask anew.

²¹ Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics*, in *Pathmarks*, 87.

²² Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 59.

²³ Ibid.

Must we first make ourselves interesting to ourselves again? Why must we do this? Perhaps because we ourselves have become *bored* with ourselves? Is man himself now supposed to have become bored with himself? Why so? *Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?*²⁴

Heidegger's diagnosis of the cultural world in the late 1920s as a stagnant, lifeless, and boring world surely echoed Husserl's critique of the European sciences at the same time. However, while Husserl pointed out the increasing danger of the collapse of the scientific and philosophical standpoint that was responsible for the development of European civilization since the Greeks, and thereby proposed a reconstruction of the scientific knowledge through the phenomenological interpretation of the life-world with the aim of establishing a genuine, rational but humane world, Heidegger wanted to go deeper into the *Zeitgeist* of the time, i.e., to delve into the profound boredom lying asleep in the contemporary world. A reawakening of this fundamental attunement is therefore necessary in order to get back into an authentic philosophization on the primordial metaphysical concepts that are of utmost importance to Dasein: World, finitude, and solitude. Before any solution for the crisis of culture can be proposed, the question what man is must be raised again, not in terms of the Kantian problematic, but in order to go back to the origin, the beginning of philosophy. Heidegger says:

Our question: What is metaphysics? has transformed itself into the question: What is man? [...] We ask anew: What is man? A transition, a direction, a storm sweeping over our planet, a recurrence or a vexation for the gods? We do not know. Yet we have seen that in the essence of this mysterious being, philosophy happens.²⁵

Accordingly, philosophization begins with the awakening of the fundamental attunement, in which the three questions of world, finitude and individuation are developed.

So the question is how to reawaken boredom, an attunement which is already there. "Awakening means making something wakeful, *letting* what is sleeping *become wakeful*."²⁶ Heidegger names three forms of boredom. The first two are the more common forms in which we are being bored by

²⁴ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 77.

²⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 7.

²⁶ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 60.

and *with* something. In the first form we are bored by something. It seems to imply that what is boring is attached to an objective thing, Heidegger is quick to point out that the boring is neither subjective nor objective, but “like every attunement—is a hybrid, partly objective, partly subjective.”²⁷ The essential characteristic of this boredom is linked with time. Boredom, Lange-weile, in German literally means long-time. “What is at issue in boredom (Langeweile) is a while (Weile), tarrying a while (Vorweile), a peculiar remaining, enduring. And thus time, after all.”²⁸ When we are bored inside the railway station we are just stuck in a certain kind of emptiness without knowing what to do with ourselves or with the things surrounding us. Nothing seems interesting and the only thing that we wish is for the time to go faster. Hence the book or the station is not boring in itself. It is boring only because we find ourselves in an inescapable boring situation. We are dragged by the uncontrollable time, which leaves us empty. Heidegger explains:

The dragging of time as it were refuses the station the possibility of offering us anything. It forces it to leave us empty. The station refuses *itself*, because time refuses *it* something. It excludes it, and yet cannot eliminate it, with the result that now, precisely in this not yet offering anything, this self-refusal, in the fact that it lets us wait – precisely in this way the station becomes more obtrusive, more boring in its leaving us empty.²⁹

The second form, boredom as being bored with something, brings a structural change. Instead of being bored by something, we are bored *with* something, for example with the evening party. This case is unlike the first one as we are not bored by anything in particular, we cannot even identify what is boring us. We do not know what is boring but we are bored. Here time is not something we want to get rid of. In fact we have had quite an interesting time. Commenting on this phenomenon, Heidegger says:

the question is: What bores us in this being bored with [...] in which we can find no determinate thing? We do not know what bores us. Or to put it more incisively, we know quite clearly that what bores us is indeed this “I know not what,” this thing that is indeterminate and unfamiliar.³⁰

²⁷ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 88.

²⁸ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 96.

²⁹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 105.

³⁰ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 119.

Once again the key to understanding the second form is time. Here we take time standing. “We let the time we have taken for the evening [...] endure in such a way during the evening that in being there alongside and part of whatever is going on we take no note of its flow or its moment.”³¹ This boring moment has become a “single stretched ‘now’.” Surely it is the inauthentic temporality of Dasein that turns the boring time into a *standing ‘now’* without reference to the future and the past. We were in the boring evening party as if the situation is a cut-off time from our lives. Heidegger further explains:

We said that the time we take for ourselves is *our* time. This time in its standing—this is our sealed off having-been and our unbound future, i.e., our whole time of our Dasein in a peculiar transformation. In this transformed form our whole time is compressed into this *standing ‘now’* of the duration of the evening. This standing time—this is we ourselves; it is our self as that which has been left behind with respect to its provenance and future.³²

The two forms of boredom have their different relation to time. In the first one, we want to have no time but time is just there dragging along in the station; in the second case of boredom we just allow ourselves time, the suspended standing “now” floating in the party.

The third form, which Heidegger calls the profound boredom, is actually the fundamental attunement he wants to reawaken. Here, in “It is Boring for One” (es ist einem langweilig), what we are bored by is no longer this or that object, this or that particular situation, but something indeterminate, an unfamiliar third party. The boredom does not come from something subjective or objective. The most uncanny thing is that it is all the determinate and familiar suddenly become indeterminate and unfamiliar. Hence: It is boring for one. This “One” strips off all the relevance and relation from ourselves. Suddenly everything is irrelevant and meaningless. Heidegger gives an extremely vivid phenomenological description of this experience:

Yet we are familiar with this, after all, and familiar with it as belonging to the more profound form of boredom: *that which bores*. It—one’s own self that has been left standing, the self that everyone himself or herself is, and each with this particular history, of this particular standing and age, with this name and vocation and fate; the self, one’s own beloved ego of which we say *I myself*, you yourself, we ourselves are bored.

³¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 214.

³² Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 125.

Yet we are now no longer speaking of ourselves being bored with... but are saying: it is boring for one. It—for one—not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but *for one*. Name, standing, vocation, role, age and fate as mine and your disappear. To put it more clearly, precisely this ‘it is boring for one’ makes all these things disappear.³³

In this profound boredom we are being left empty from all the things in our familiar world. We are kept in a totally vague and empty void, in which nothing is meaningful and relevant.

Being left empty in this *third form* of boredom is *Dasein’s being delivered over to beings’ telling refusal of themselves as a whole*. In this ‘it is boring for one’ we find ourselves – as Dasein – somehow left entirely in the lurch, not only not occupied with this or that being, not only left standing by ourselves in this or that respect, but as a whole.³⁴

By the abandoning of the world from us in this profound boredom, we are left empty, but at the same time, the uncanniness of being as a whole falls on us. We are thrown into a particular state:

This attunement in which Dasein is everywhere and yet may be nowhere has its own peculiar feature of entrancement. What entrances is nothing other than the temporal horizon [...]. Entranced by time, Dasein cannot find its way to those beings that announce themselves in the telling refusal of themselves as a whole precisely within this horizon of entrancing time.³⁵

The purpose of Heidegger’s phenomenological description of boredom is to reawaken the listener’s freedom to philosophize. He does not consider this as scientific knowledge of boredom. Far from it, Heidegger says:

For this reason we may not take this interpretation to be a piece of knowledge that we now have at our disposal, with whose aid we can perhaps more or less skillfully answer the question of what boredom is, but must take it merely as preparation for the fact that the analysis of this attunement gives us the readiness to ask after a *particular* boredom of *our* Dasein. We are not to initiate any speculation about boredom, but must guide our interpretation of boredom hitherto into a readiness to see a profound boredom of our Dasein, or not to oppose it, in so far as it is.³⁶

³³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 135.

³⁴ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 139-140.

³⁵ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 147.

³⁶ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 155.

What Heidegger wants his listeners to do is clearly to follow the phenomenological seeing of the phenomenon, to guide them into the reflection of one's own experience of boredom. Hence the experience of this profound boredom leads to a genuine reawakening of a fundamental attunement in which philosophizing can begin. Because in encountering the profound boredom the question of what world is, what finitude is, and what I myself as an individual am, will readily come to the fore. Then, with the emptiness of boredom, arises the fundamental metaphysical question: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? When a person really poses this question from his or her own experience, he or she is philosophizing. And this is the beginning of philosophy.

IV

“*Philosophy is philosophizing.*”³⁷ Hence the beginning of philosophy is to begin philosophizing. It is clear that the “beginning” of philosophy discussed in this short paper does not refer to the history of philosophy. Nearly everybody would agree that ancient Greek philosophy was the beginning of Western philosophy. Of course, the interest here is to understand the beginning of one’s own philosophization.

“The sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin,”³⁸ Plato has Socrates say in the *Theatetus*. Aristotle reiterates the same idea in *Metaphysics*, “it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”³⁹ Wonder, *thaumazein*, has long been considered as the origin of philosophization. But wonder is also a kind of attunement that cannot be created but only be found by Dasein. Whoever finds him- or herself in wonder may experience some kind of sudden dramatic and mystical union between himself and the universe, or an unbridgeable gap between herself and all other beings. Precisely speaking, one has to discover a strangeness or a abyss between oneself and the world and is amazed by this strangeness in order to ask the very first philosophical question: who am I and why is there a world? But there is no guarantee of such enlightenment.

³⁷ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 4.

³⁸ Plato, *Theatetus*, 155d 2 ff.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 11 ff.

Boredom, wonder, doubt and anxiety are in fact all possible attunements in which philosophization can arise. There is a way and no way to initiate anyone into philosophization. It is because, echoing what Husserl has said at the beginning of this paper: philosophization is a very personal affair.

Before closing this paper, a Chan story may perhaps point to another way of enlightenment into thinking or philosophizing:

While they were out gathering rattan, Master Shui-liao asked Ma-tsú, “what is the real meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the west?” Ma-tsú replied, “come closer and I’ll tell you.” When Shui-liao was quite close, Ma-tsú kicked him in the chest, knocking him to the ground. In a daze, Shui-liao got up, clapping his hands and laughing loudly. Ma-tsú asked, “What insight did you have that has made you laugh?” Shui-liao said, “Hundred of thousands of teachings and immeasurable sublime meanings are on the tip of one hair; today I have completely understood their source.⁴⁰

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⁴⁰ Translated from Ta-hui’s recension of the story. Cited in Robert E. Buswell, “The ‘short-cut’ Approach of K’an-hua Meditation,” in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsi-dass Publishers, 1987, 337. The author of this paper thanks his colleague, Professor Yao Zhihua, for suggesting this Chan story to him.

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