

Cezary Woźniak*

HEIDEGGER AND BUDDHISM. ON NON-NIHLISTIC EXPERIENCE OF GROUNDLESSNESS

Human existence is temporal. In a wider, over-individual dimension, we use the term 'history'. We usually think about history in the context of historical events, wars, or scientific discoveries that have a strong impact both on the life of societies and the existence of individuals. We try to think over history, to point out what makes one fragment different from another, and to distinguish periods which we can define by emphasising their typical features. The aim of such procedures is to understand history. There can be different perspectives on such an understanding. According to Martin Heidegger, the widest, most fundamental dimension of history seems to be the history of being, i.e. the history of the very understanding of the word 'is'.

The past brings pre-formed concepts and meanings, through which we understand ourselves and the world. These shapes of thought last in time – alone, subject to interpretations, or in new forms. By understanding this history, we can comprehend the present time, and this seems to be of some importance. As hermeneutics teaches, being and its understanding belong to each other; "understanding is the original character of the being of human life itself"¹. If we exist, understanding is always a part of our existence, and we always somehow understand the world and ourselves.

What can be said about the contemporary situation of human beings, about their understanding of themselves, about how they understand the world today? How can we understand our present time, while also taking into consideration the historical aspect of this understanding? If we accept the thesis on the occidentalisation and globalisation of the contemporary world, these questions become even more universal.

Generally, two sources of Western culture have been distinguished: ancient Greek thought and Christianity. It was the culture of ancient Greece that developed most of the toposes that have shaped our understanding of the world and ourselves until now, such as: universe, being, truth, and human being, to enumerate only a few. In the opinion of Alfred North Whitehead, all Western philosophy is merely a 'footnote' to Plato. Martin Heidegger, who was probably the one who most keenly reflected on the Western tradition,

* Dr, Wydział Sztuki Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, cwozniak@op.pl.

¹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation ed. by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, London 1993, p. 230.

said that the history of thought in the West had been decided in ancient Greece, in the works of its greatest philosophers.

What was decided then? In 1927 Heidegger published his book titled *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), which became one of the most important philosophical works of the twentieth century. The intention of this treatise was to once again pose the question of the meaning of being. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger states that the question of being had been forgotten already in ancient Greece². Generally speaking, it happened when metaphysicians stopped thinking about being from its own perspective, but through it. This forgetting of being is rooted in the ambivalence of the very concept of 'being', which as a present participle of the verb εἶναι can be understood as a noun (something that is, *Seiendes*), or as a verb (being, *Sein*). Heidegger calls the difference between *Seiendes* and *Sein* the ontological difference.

Metaphysics, which forgets the ontological difference, presents being only as *Seiendes*, and does not reflect upon the process thanks to which being can become being (*Sein*). Heidegger points out the figure of Aristotle, whose system of 'first philosophy' with its question of the very essence of being was to make a crucial contribution to the identification of *Sein* and *Seiendes*. Greek philosophy (or more specifically, the pre-Socratic philosophers) at the moment of its birth and shaping of its concepts still had access to the source-experience of being (*Sein*). Later, influenced by the philosophy of Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, it ossified into a tradition which (in absence of reflection upon it) has existed in various forms in the history of Western philosophy.

The problem of truth is closely related to the question of forgetting. Parmenides assumes that "something that does not exist one can neither cognise, nor express in words"³. Thus, cognition of non-being is impossible, whereas what *is* possible is cognition of being, but here it is understood in a specific way, which will be of great importance for the further history of Western thought. Namely, Parmenides identifies cognition of being with thinking and expressing in words. In other words, what happens here is a boundary between being & truth, and non-being & falsity. Reality in Parmenides's thought becomes somehow limited to a constantly present being. This moment can be understood as a germ of conceptual, discursive cognition of reality, which has become a determinant of the tradition of the West.

The classic definition of truth *adaequatio intellectus et rei* is thus placed on metaphysical foundations: reality is a being available to the human intellect.

"Parmenides asks: What kind of beginning of being could you seek? How and where from could it take its growth? I will not allow you to speak or think that it emerged from something that does not exist. It can be neither thought nor said that it does not exist. What necessity could force it to emerge and grow sooner or later, starting with something that does not exist? Thus it must necessary exist, or does not exist at all"⁴.

² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford 1990, p. 2.

³ Quoted after: *Filozofia starożytna Grecji i Rzymu*, ed. J. Legowicz, Warsaw 1968, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 86–87.

Thus only being is cognisable, and harmony between it and the intellect is possible. This conceptual correspondence is called ‘truth’.

This identification of *Sein* and *Seiendes* as the same being, together with striving for discovering the truth in being, have crucially shaped Western thought. Being – or something that we commonly call reality – will be now in the first place presented as existence, some *beingness*, constant presence, which a human can understand intellectually, *via idea*. This metaphysical modus of approach to reality refers us further to other solutions. One of them can be the question of metaphysics as ontotheology, which seeks the first principle, the foundation, or the cause of emerging of all being. Even in ancient times Aristotle identified God as the First, Immovable Mover of being. Another solution is provided by Platonism, differentiating between ‘two worlds’, or two aspects of reality: the real non-sensual one, and the false world of the senses. In brief: the three-fold understanding of being – God, world, and human – has emerged in Western thought.

We find this concept also in the thought of Rene Descartes, which begins the modern age in philosophy. Descartes turns towards subjectivism or philosophy of subject, which will leave its stamp on the further history of modern philosophy. This subjectivism is to be understood as a modern form of metaphysics. Seeking the foundation of ‘sure knowledge’, Descartes finds it in *res cogitans*, a thinking subject. *Cogito ergo sum*. He provides also another guarantee of validity of this knowledge, namely: God, and he offers proof of His existence. There is also another aspect of Descartes’s subjectivism. A subject presents to itself an object, *res cogitans* thinks *res extensa*, nature – here is the essence of a psycho-physical dualism. At the same time, man, presenting being to himself, becomes a measure of this being, defines what is being and what is not. Being is something to be controlled, and it is controlled by man. Seeking ‘sure knowledge’ – for Descartes, mathematics was a model of it – soon resulted in the form of modern science and technology.

Subjectivism initiated by the philosophy of Descartes will find its prominent continuation in Immanuel Kant. His transcendental philosophy can be perceived as a further deepening of the subjective orientation of Western thought. Kant’s subject, with its a *priori* structure, not only presents an object to itself, but (thanks to transcendental synthesis) establishes it, makes it possible. An object’s being is now defined only by its relation to a subject. The world has its foundation in a subject’s activity, in its acts of transcendental apercption.

“Philosophy that came from Kant, as Roman Ingarden notices... believed that the only possibility of responsible cultivation of philosophy was a *priori* philosophy (in Kant’s sense), while this a *priori* was related to Kant’s theory of a *priori* forms of evidence and categories. Unfortunately it led Kant to establish a wall between us and reality, a wall of categories and forms of evidence, and a thing in itself was actually unattainable”⁵.

⁵ R. Ingarden, *Wstęp do fenomenologii Husserla. Wykłady wygłoszone na Uniwersytecie w Oslo (15 wrzesień –17 listopada 1967)*, Warsaw 1974, p. 48.

At the same time, the question of the existence or non-existence of God becomes suspended, and within transcendental dialectics replaced by an understanding of God as a regulative idea. In this sense, Kant's subject can do without God as its foundation and foundation of the world.

In Georg Hegel's thought, subjectivism, initiated two centuries before by Descartes, takes an absolute form as an absolute subjectivity, self-knowledge. In this sense, according to Heidegger, Hegel's philosophy is the climax of subjectivism. It finds its limits in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. If we consider subjectivism as a form metaphysics, Nietzsche's thought will also define the end of metaphysics.

In what way does Nietzsche's thought define the end of subjectivism, i.e. metaphysics? Nietzsche perceived the history of European philosophy as a gradual domination of nihilism, understood as the decline of values rooted in the 'real', extrasensory world of metaphysics. In this sense, nihilism is for Nietzsche a consequence, fulfilment, and the end of metaphysics. The domination of nihilism is expressed in Nietzsche's well-known saying: "God is dead". It announces the beginning of a new era, in which human thought is no longer focused on God, and there is no longer Plato's dichotomy of 'two worlds'. The only world now is the sensory one. Transitoriness and temporality are accepted. The answer to the nihilism of metaphysics is the reappraisal of all values and the breeding of a superman, who experiences the passage of time as an eternal return of the same. While Nietzsche's philosophy is aimed against metaphysics as nihilism, a superman establishing values and shaping existence appears to be an external continuation of modern subjectivism. At the same time Nietzsche replaces the classic model of truth with an interpretative one. Reality can be interpreted in many ways, and one interpretation refers to the next. Philosophy becomes a philosophy of interpretations. This aspect allows us to perceive Nietzsche as a precursor of postmodernism.

The present time is undoubtedly the age of postmodernism, yet postmodernism is not a homogenous philosophical current. It combines various elements, starting from the philosophy of Nietzsche, Heidegger, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and feminism. Questioning the metaphysics of presence can be regarded as the most important feature of postmodernist thinking. Here the philosophy of Jacques Derrida should be mentioned first.

His philosophy of deconstruction is thought to be a further radicalisation of the destruction of metaphysics undertaken by Heidegger; Derrida can also be regarded as a critical continuator of Emanuel Lévinas's philosophy. According to Derrida, the history of philosophy is characterised by a 'logocentric gesture' in which reality is subject to the logos as a constantly present, given being. Reason produces the myth of presence in which what exists is to be presented to us as always present, directly given. In the name of this presence, reason imposes its dictate on That, which is different, as it wants to make it the same. In Derrida's opinion, nothing is present, everything is subject to 'the law of *différance*', the game of delaying and anticipating meanings. *Différance* is the main operational concept of Derrida, which, according to his critics, replaces traditional categories of

metaphysics: truth, identity, source, although – according to the philosopher – *différance* “is neither a concept, nor a word”.⁶ It keeps:

“happening of the difference between the meaningful; as irreducible (there is no ‘first meaning’) *différance* cannot be made present, thus cannot be abolished in dialectic movement, in which it would be only a means of logocentric construction of The-same and its return to own identity.... *Différance* is a play of presence and non-presence, a work of non-presence in the heart of every presence and identity: presence, assuming its active and irreducible correlate, is a presence forever postponed, non-present”⁷.

As Derrida says, *différance* is something that “is not, does not exist, is no being... has neither existence, nor essence”⁸.

Derrida’s philosophy, or, more broadly speaking, postmodernism, is sometimes referred to as philosophy of the “end of philosophy”. On one hand, deconstruction is still regarded as philosophy, if it plays the role of unmasker of non-critical and dogmatic metaphysics of presence, reveals the structure of oppositions that metaphysics is founded on, reveals the anti-logocentrism of writing, and even points out its own entanglement in metaphysics. On the other hand, it is already regarded as the end of philosophy, since deconstruction undermines and rejects the very possibility of philosophical discourse based on a metaphysical, logocentric foundation. Let us notice that at the same time all meanings founded on metaphysics of presence are destroyed, and such deconstructed concepts as subject, person, truth, and culture, become obliterated and fall into baseless limbo. In this context, Derrida makes use of the metaphor of the desert⁹.

If we recognise that philosophy, and all of Western culture uses the same metaphysical language, the consequences of ‘discoveries’ made by postmodernism cannot be limited only to philosophy as an academic discipline. Actually, postmodernist thinking goes beyond the field of philosophical dispute. Postmodern literature, postmodern architecture, and postmodern film have been present in culture for a long time, and we can find postmodern art in museums and galleries. The issue of postmodernism also appears in political and social debates. Postmodernism seems to be a *zeitgeist* of our era.

If postmodernism defines our times, then – because of the correspondence of understanding and existence – it is also supposed to define our contemporary condition. Are we sentenced to understanding our time by means of Derrida’s metaphors of a desert or *différance* that proliferates meaning? Critics of postmodernism identify it with nihilism, but are they right?¹⁰

⁶ J. Derrida, *Positions*, Paris 1972, p. 54.

⁷ P. Pieniążek, *U kresu obecności. Derrida a Lévinas* [w:] *Derridiana*, selected and edited by B. Banasiak, Krakow 1994, p. 160.

⁸ J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris 1972, p. 6.

⁹ J. Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge* [in:] J. Derrida, G. Vattimo, *Religion*, transl. D. Webb and Others, Stanford 1998

¹⁰ H. Coward, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, New York 1990.

Let us repeat Heidegger's diagnosis: the history of being in metaphysics is a history of its gradual oblivion. Being, presence, ontotheology, subject – these have all been deconstructed by postmodernism because they were dogmatic and uncritically founded on metaphysics. To sum up: postmodernism reveals the fictions of metaphysics. In this sense it is not nihilism, and it even fulfils the therapeutic vocation of philosophy, so often discussed by Wittgenstein. However, postmodernism seen from the perspective of metaphysics can be perceived, just like Nietzsche's philosophy, as a kind of nihilism that destroys thinking by values. Yet what is left after this postmodern therapeutic procedure?

In a sense, postmodernism can be considered a continuation of metaphysical forgetting of being. The issue is that with its contribution to the destruction of logocentric metaphysics, postmodernism itself is still entangled in metaphysics, at least by the fact that its opinions have to be formulated in a certain language, namely: the language of metaphysics. This problem equally concerns other critics of metaphysics, just to mention Heidegger or Lévinas. Thus, the therapeutic procedure of postmodernism is a procedure sentenced to a logocentric perspective. Even if logocentrism is unmasked, postmodern philosophy is necessarily based on linguistic media, on a discourse. In this aspect it does not differ from modernism, or even earlier schools of European philosophy. Despite the openness of postmodernism to extra-philosophical issues, its horizon is determined by conceptualism. Thus, discussing the absence of subject is only 'some sort of speaking', 'some kind of theorising', another moment of discourse. Experience of this absence seems to be something different. Actually, this accusation can be brought against almost all Western philosophy, with the possible exception for, to some extent, phenomenology and existentialism. Only to some extent, since, for example, Edmund Husserl's transcendental ego is probably more a theoretical concept than something that can be directly experienced.

The situation of the contemporary human being seems to be shaped overwhelmingly by a certain state of affairs: since the moment subjectivism appeared in the history of European philosophy, subjectivity has been understood as a thinking 'ego' (Descartes), a certain mental process, or stream of consciousness, that next became fragmented and relativised, until finally the death of the subject could be announced. However, these ascertainment of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and structuralism are in contradiction with our everyday, common experience. If 'ego' is a kind of stream of consciousness, or even a certain illusion, the lack of concrete experience of it causes us to live in a world which is only a set of some concepts of who or what we are, concepts impossible to be empirically verified. This last critical establishment concerns also that which in philosophy or psychology is defined as 'introspection'.

Can science be a reliable remedy for this relativism of human subjectivity? In the contemporary world a growing tension between the world of our everyday experience and science can be observed. The world of science seems to tell us more and more about us and the surrounding world, through research concerning human genotype and genome, among other things. Science provides us with objective knowledge, yet it is developed by reducing the cognitive procedures it is based on. It is very difficult to relate this model of cognition to the phenomenon of our subjectivity. As John R. Searle states:

“... it is simple to say that the standard model of observation simply doesn’t work for conscious subjectivity. It doesn’t work for other people’s consciousness, and it doesn’t work for one’s own”¹¹.

The influence of science and technology is so enormous that they begin to supersede or even challenge the world of our everyday experience. A good example is the decline of the border between the world of our common experience and so-called virtual reality, cyberspace, which relativises our feeling of subjectivity and our settling in the world even more.

Summing up, after the destruction (or deconstruction) of metaphysics, the philosophical thought of the West has reached the idea of the baselessness of reality. As Hilary Putnam observes:

Science is wonderful at destroying metaphysical answers, but incapable of providing substitute ones. Science takes away foundations without providing a replacement. Whether we want to be there or not, science has put us in the position of having to live without foundations. It was shocking when Nietzsche said this, but today it is commonplace; *our* historical position – and no end to it is in sight – is that of having to philosophise without “foundations”¹².

So we have to “philosophise without foundations”. We have to learn how to live without foundations. From the perspective of the Western logocentric tradition of thought, this lack of foundations may actually define the end of philosophy, as Derrida says, or, in Rorty’s opinion, the task of philosophy will be reduced to “continuation of the discourse of the West”¹³. Let us stress: a discourse. Baselessness here equals nihilism. A dualistic consciousness, polarised between subject and object (even despite its discursive deconstruction or decentralisation), has to deal with this experience.

Keji Nishitani, a Japanese student of Heidegger, points out that Western nihilism in a way stops at this point, failing to expound on the philosophical and experiential consequences of discovering that groundlessness¹⁴. For there exists yet another, non-nihilistic possibility of experiencing the above-mentioned lack of foundation.

However, this option requires moving beyond the Western perspective. On the whole, the West lacks a tradition of cognitive work based on tangible and concrete experience. Certain trends in Christian mysticism might be looked upon as possible exceptions in this context, whereas psychology and psychoanalysis are not able to profoundly transform our consciousness.

Without a doubt, a cognitive tradition which relies on concrete, direct experience exists in Asia, for example in classical Indian yoga, Taoism, or particularly Buddhism, whose

¹¹ J.R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 1992, p. 97.

¹² H. Putnam, *The Faces of Realism*, Open Court LaSalle, Illinois 1987, [quoted after:] F.J. Varela, E. Thompson, E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge–London 1999, p. 218.

¹³ R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton 1979, p. 394.

¹⁴ K. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, Berkeley 1982.

intellectual achievements make it a match for the Western intellectual tradition, at the same time protecting it from the possibility of being labelled, pejoratively understood, 'Eastern mysticism'.

Taking into consideration the shortcomings of our own tradition, we have to reach out consciously for such methods of work that have existed for ages in Asia, which go beyond the dualism of subject and object, and move farther, towards the experience of something situated beyond the horizon of this dualism. Our own philosophical tradition should be challenged by the achievements of that thought.

Such attempts have been made in the past. It is supposed that Plato, or even earlier Greek philosophers, had contact with ancient Indian thought. The *Milinda Pañha*, a famous work of Buddhist literature, presents a dialogue between King Menander, the ruler of a Hellenistic state in the second century BC, with a Buddhist monk Nagasena. Gottfried Leibnitz (1646–1716) was interested in philosophy of Confucius and the Chinese classic text I *Ching* (*The Book of Changes*). It is probably the first example of a more serious interest in Oriental thought in modern Europe. Hegel considered Eastern thought to be somehow immature, although he esteemed some of its aspects. Vivid interest in Oriental thought was shown by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). He compared the discovery of Sanskrit and the *Upanishadas* by nineteenth-century Europe to the discovery of ancient tradition in the Renaissance. Also, Nietzsche was interested in Buddhism, but his attitude towards it was ambiguous.

In his essay titled *Crisis and Revival* Mircea Eliade calls the nineteenth-century reception of Oriental thought "The Second Renaissance"; the Renaissance that however turned out to be bankruptcy¹⁵. Why did it happen? Eliade notices that in the case of 'The First Renaissance' there was a wide and serious adoption of ancient tradition by philologists, philosophers, theologians and writers. The bankruptcy of 'The Second Renaissance' consists in the fact that opening up to Eastern thought was limited to a narrow circle of philologists, orientalists, and historians, and that it was focused more on linguistic than meritorious questions. There were some attempts to valorise Eastern thought, to compare the achievements of Eastern and Western culture, but they were sparse and of minor importance. For example, Paul Deussen, who at the end of the nineteenth century published some books on the *Upanishadas* and *Vedas*, tried to prove in them that some of the ideas of Kant and Hegel can be found in germinal form in the thought of ancient India.

A change in the attitude towards the heritage of Asian thought was brought about by the philosophies of Max Scheler and Karl Jaspers. In his later works, Scheler withdraws from his earlier project of making the paradigm of humanity out of the Greek-European spirit, and talks about (not very precisely stated) a "balance between the philosophical culture of Asia and Europe"¹⁶. In Jaspers's thought, abandoning Eurocentrism was combined with the concept of axial time. He claimed that the birth of three centres of philosophical

¹⁵ See: M. Eliade, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung*, Frankfurt a. Main, pp. 81–104.

¹⁶ M. Scheler, *Der Genius des Kreiges und der deutsche Krieg* (1915) [in:] *idem*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 4, p. 154.

thought, in China, India and Greece, happened simultaneously about the sixth century BC¹⁷. Jaspers considered the establishment of something that he called the “philosophy of the world” as an unavoidable task of the twentieth century¹⁸. Husserl, in his text titled *On the Speeches of Gautama Buddha*, published in 1923, wrote that it is a necessity “to understand [Asian philosophy, culture, and religion] and to experience their vital impact from this understanding”¹⁹.

Martin Heidegger was a thinker who took a dialogue with Asian thought more seriously than any other philosopher. In 1969 the University of Hawaii organised an international conference named “Heidegger and Asian Thought” to commemorate the eightieth birthday of the philosopher. In a letter sent to the organisers, Heidegger wrote: “Establishing a dialogue with thinkers of the Eastern world still seemed to me extremely urgent”²⁰. Heidegger’s thought, dealing with being and seeking to leave the field of metaphysics, in many moments enters into a dialogue with Eastern thought²¹. Some of his works were even better received and understood in Asia than in Europe. Even the early philosophy of Heidegger, from the *Sein und Zeit* period, despite its subjectivist features, included some aspects which established an opportunity for the reception of this philosophy in the East. Heidegger’s concept of ‘being-there’ (*Dasein*), timing towards death, discovers deeper, more fundamental dimensions of existence. In his lecture titled *Was ist Metaphysik? (What Is Metaphysics?)*, 1929) Heidegger takes, among other things, the question of nothingness, opposing its pejorative understanding in metaphysics:

“Nothingness is a condition that enables disclosure of beings as such to human being (*Dasein*). Nothingness does not make just a concept opposite to being, but lies at the source of the very essence. In being of the beings nihilating of nothingness takes place” (*das Nichten des Nichts*)²².

One can notice a certain similarity to a famous formula from the Buddhist *Prajñāpāramitā Hridaya Sūtra (Heart [of Perfect Wisdom] Sutra)*: “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form”. In his letter to Takehiko Kojimo, Heidegger complains that while a Japanese translation of *Was ist Metaphysik?*, published in 1930, was accepted and understood in Japan, in Europe the dissertation was associated with nihilism²³. We are not going to analyse deeply Heidegger’s understanding of nothingness. By the end of his life, at the

¹⁷ K. Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*, München 1983, p. 76.

¹⁸ H. Saner, *Jaspers*, Hamburg 1970, p. 105.

¹⁹ E. Husserl, *Über die Gotamo Buddhos*, Zeitschrift für Kunst und Literatur, 2, Jg., 1. Heft, München 1923, p. 18.

²⁰ Quoted after: *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. G. Parkes, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1987, p. 7.

²¹ Cf. C. Woźniak, *Martina Heideggera dialog ze Wschodem*, Kwartalnik Filozoficzny, T. XXII, Z. 1–2, 1994, pp. 93–123.

²² M. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, Frankfurt am Main 1986, p. 35.

²³ *A Letter of Martin Heidegger to Takehiko Kojimo of August 2nd, 1963* [in:] *Japan und Heidegger*, Hrsg., H. Von Büchner, Sigmaringen 1989, pp. 173–181.

seminar in Le Thor, he said: “Nothingness is a definition of being”²⁴. “Being: Nothingness: The Same”²⁵. Nishida Kitarô (1870–1945), a founder of the Japanese philosophical Kyoto School, said: “Being is nothingness, nothingness is being”²⁶.

In 1958 Heidegger met a Japanese Zen master and a philosopher of the Kyoto School, Hisamatsu Shinichi. They together led a colloquium. Here is a fragment of it:

“Hisamatsu: Source is in the West a certain being, something that has a certain form. In Zen Buddhism the source is something formless, a non-being. Yet this ‘non’ is not a pure negation. This nothingness is free from all forms, and – as totally formless – it can move freely, always and everywhere.

Heidegger: This emptiness is not a negative nothingness. If we understand emptiness as a concept referring to space, then we must say that emptiness of this space is just this that contains and gathers all things”²⁷.

Being, nothingness, emptiness, groundlessness, source – Heidegger and Hisamatsu seem to understand these terms in a similar way. It may be an example that even in the West the philosophical consequences of discovering groundlessness (and Heidegger’s thinking may be an example of this) do not have to lead towards nihilism. Let us think now about the possibility of a non-nihilistic experience of groundlessness, taking into consideration the limited length of this article and the complexity of the issue.

Once again let Heidegger be our starting point. His thinking from the beginning is marked by a movement from the existential analysis of *Dasein* from his early work *Sein und Zeit* towards reflection on ‘unconcealment’ (*Unverborgenheit*, Greek *aletheia*), ‘essence of Being’ (*Seyn*), ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*), ‘openness’ (*Offene*), or ‘enowning’ (*Ereignis*), to mention the most important of Heidegger’s toposes. With some simplification it can be said that his philosophy is a project of description/reflection upon a broadly understood area, field, or space of all appearance including also the presence of subjectivity understood in one way or another (innovation of this project is combined with innovation of language the thought is expressed in, because it is to be a language different from “the presenting language of metaphysics”). Reception of Heidegger’s intention differs, depending on the philosophical option. Representatives of analytical philosophy criticise him, but others express positive opinions, for example Walter Stolz, who described Heidegger as a ‘meditative thinker’ (*meditativer Denker*), or John D. Caputo and Otto Pöggeler, who wrote about the presence of mystical elements in his thought²⁸. Heidegger

²⁴ M. Heidegger, *Seminar in Le Thor*, 1969, Frankfurt a. Main 1977, p. 366.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 363, 364.

²⁶ K. Nishida, *Die morgenländischen und abendländischen Kulturformen in alter Zeit vom metaphysischen Standpunktaus gesehen*, Berlin 1939, Bd. 19, p. 12.

²⁷ *Japan und Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 213.

²⁸ W. Stolz, *Heidegger als meditativer Denker*, St. Gallen 1974; J.D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, Ohio 1978; O. Pöggeler, *Mystische Elemente im Denken Heideggers und Dichten Celans* [in:] *Neue Wege mit Heidegger*, Freiburg-München 1992, pp. 426–464.

himself was probably aware that his way of thinking somehow transgressed the hitherto tradition of philosophy in the West, and during his seminar in Le Thor, mentioned above, he said that “in enowning (*Ereignis*) there was none of Greek thinking”²⁹. As he explains, there is nothing from which the enowning “could be derived, even less in whose terms it could be explained”³⁰. In his late text *Zeit und Sein* (*On Time and Being*, 1962) Heidegger, explaining his understanding of enowning, says that it is something that defines both time and being. Precisely, enowning not ‘is’, but ‘gives’, ‘enows’ time and being. “Being disappears in enowning”³¹ says Heidegger, and this could be understood as constant appearances of phenomena, or presence (however, it must be stressed, *not* a metaphysically understood presence).

This idea means pointing out this most primal dimension (defined by him in several ways), reflecting on it, as well as some sort of appeal for opening to it, or even a sort of existential experiencing of it, that is expressed in such Heidegger’s formulas as ‘liberation’ (*Gelassenheit*), or ‘standing in a clearing’ (*in der Lichtung stehen*)³².

If in this late philosophy of Heidegger “nothing Greek was thought”, then *what* could be thought? A famous German buddhologist, Herbert V. Guenther, uses Heidegger’s term *Sein* when he attempts to translate into the language of Western culture the term *gzhi* (‘foundation’, ‘ground’), so important in Tibetan Buddhism. He justifies it in this way:

We will “translate” this most elusive and most important term (*gzhi*) as Being, thereby indicating the similarity in philosophical understanding between the rDzogs-chen view of Reality’s dynamic holistic *ground* and that of Martin Heidegger’s view of Reality’s nonreductive, essentially open character termed “das Sein”³³.

Foundation (*gzhi*), mentioned above, is understood in some schools of Tibetan Buddhism as a container, and at the same time a source of all phenomena, and in relation to an individual, as its primal state. Dzogchen is a philosophical meditative system of both Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan, pre-Buddhist religion Bön. Dzogchen practice leads to experiencing the primal state of an individual. Some words of explanation may be necessary here, to allow us to understand better Guenther’s proposition.

There are four main traditions, or schools, in Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingma, Gelug, Sakya and Kagyu. The oldest is Nyingma, named also the ‘school of ancient translations’. It has preserved the oldest traditions of Mahayana Buddhism, as its practice is based on the first translations of Buddhist scriptures (including tantras) from Sanskrit into Tibetan,

²⁹ M. Heidegger, *Seminare, GA 15*, Bd. 2, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, p. 366.

³⁰ M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Pfullingen 1979, p. 258.

³¹ Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen 1976, p. 20.

³² M. Heidegger, *Discourse On Thinking*, trans. by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York 1966; M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi [in:] M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. by William McNeill, Cambridge 1998.

³³ H.V. Guenther, *Matrix of Mystery. Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogs-chen Thought*, Boulder-London 1984, p. 5.

made between the seventh and ninth century CE. The school was founded in the eighth century by a tantric master named Guru Padmasambhava, who came from the land of Uddiyana (located in the area of contemporary Kashmir), an Indian monk named Shantarakshita, and a Tibetan king named Trisong Detsen³⁴. In the Nyingma school, Dzogchen teachings are considered the quintessence of Buddha's teachings. The term 'dzogchen' (*rdzogs chen* in Tibetan, *maha sandhi* in Sanskrit) is sometimes translated as 'Great Perfection'. These teachings are called thus because they are complete and perfect, and there is nothing above them. They are also thought to be a culmination of all paths, or vehicles (*theng pa* in Tibetan, *yana* in Sanskrit) of Buddhism, practising of which leads to enlightenment, or to recognising and experiencing the true nature of mind (*byang chub* in Tibetan, *bodhi* in Sanskrit).

All schools of Tibetan Buddhism agree on a basic threefold division of Buddhist teachings, including three paths leading to enlightenment. The three are: Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. The Nyingma school also developed its own, more elaborate system of classification of the teachings, consisting of nine levels³⁵. Within this system, Hinayana (Sanskrit for 'inferior vehicle')³⁶ consists of two vehicles, Sravakayana (Sanskrit for 'a vehicle of hearers [i.e. disciples]')³⁷, and Pratyekayana (Sanskrit for 'a solitary vehicle', i.e. a path of solitary Buddhas who achieve liberation, but do not teach other beings)³⁸. These paths are based on sutras, the teachings given by the Buddha, and on the rules of conduct organising monastic life, codified in a collection called *Vinaya*. Threefold training in morality, meditation and wisdom leads here to attaining the state of Arhat (Sanskrit for 'foe destroyer')³⁹, or a perfect sainthood in which one has rid oneself of all unclean passions.

In Nyingma classification, Mahayana (Sanskrit for 'greater Vehicle')⁴⁰, is thought to be the third vehicle, and called Bodhisattvayana. A practitioner is called here a Bodhisattva (Sanskrit for 'awakened being')⁴¹, because he strives to enlightenment not for his own liberation, but for the benefit of all other beings. The aim of Bodhisattva is not the individual enlightenment of an Arhat, but the total enlightenment of the Buddha, because only Buddha can effectively lead beings to enlightenment. Bodhisattvayana is based on the teachings of the Sakyamuni Buddha on emptiness, or lack of the independent, inherent existence of all phenomena, and on the Buddhahood, or Nature of Buddha (*tathagatagarbha* in Sanskrit; *sangye kyi nyingpo* in Tibetan), which is characteristic of all beings. In

³⁴ *The Golden Letters*, translations, introduction and commentaries by J.M. Reynolds, foreword by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, Ithaca, New York 1996, p. 21.

³⁵ Quoted after: *The Golden Letters... op. cit.*, p. 24 and passim.

³⁶ *Theg dman* in Tibetan.

³⁷ *Nyan thos kyi theg pa* in Tibetan.

³⁸ *Rang sang rgyas kyi theg pa* in Tibetan.

³⁹ *Dgra bcom pa* in Tibetan.

⁴⁰ *Theg pa chen po* in Tibetan.

⁴¹ *Byang chub sems dpa* in Tibetan.

Mahayana, training is based on the practice of six *paramitas* (Sanskrit for ‘perfections’)⁴², thus it is sometimes called also Paramitayana. This training lasts for many lifetimes. The aim, or fruit of the Mahayana practice are two bodies (*kaya* in Sanskrit; *sku* in Tibetan) of the Buddha: form body (*rupa-kaya* in Sanskrit; *gzugs sku* in Tibetan) – including: *sambhoga-kaya*⁴³, and *nirmana-kaya*⁴⁴ – and formless body, *dharmakaya*⁴⁵. Because in sutras it is said that enlightenment has a cause, its germ or seed (*gyu* in Tibetan, *hetu* in Sanskrit), Mahayana is also called the Causal Vehicle, as this cause precedes enlightenment, which is its result.

Vajrayana (Sanskrit for ‘diamond Vehicle’)⁴⁶, is in Nyingma classification divided into six classes of tantra, each of them being an independent and complete vehicle enabling the practitioner to attain the enlightenment. This vehicle is called a diamond one, because the primal nature of individual is described here as unchangeable, indestructible, and transparent. The Vajrayana teachings are based on esoteric texts known as tantras. The rule of tantra is action on the level of energy, and visualisation is its essential method. While the Sanskrit term ‘tantra’ and its Tibetan counterpart, *rgyud*, “has come to be used to denote a type of text that contains a tantric teaching, the true meaning of the word is ‘continuation’, in the sense that although all phenomena are void, nevertheless phenomena continue to manifest”⁴⁷.

Systems of sutra and tantra are not contradictory. Both sutra and tantra claim that all phenomena are empty, and thus agree on what in Buddhism is called ‘ultimate truth’ (*paramarthasatya* in Sanskrit; *don dam bden pa* in Tibetan), but their the phenomena are interpreted in a different way, or, in other words, they understand in a different way something that is called a ‘conventional truth’ (*samvrtisatya* in Sanskrit; *kun rdzob bden pa* in Tibetan). In tantra, phenomena are not understood only as illusions that should be renounced. The world and being are perceived as Buddhas and their fields, but this kind of perception demands previous tantric training, essential elements of which are practices of purification and transformation. Yet it is thought that the system of tantras includes the system of sutras. Superiority of the tantra system over the sutra system is also pointed out, because in tantra there are many methods of practice suitable for particular individuals, and also because this path is very fast, since it allows the attainment of enlightenment even within one lifetime.

The Nyingma tradition distinguishes three lower and three higher tantras, also called external and internal tantras. The lower tantras include: Kryia-tantra, Charya-tantra, and Yoga-tantra, and the higher tantras include tantras of Maha-yoga, Anu-yoga and Ati-yoga.

⁴² *Pha rol tu phyin pa* in Tibetan.

⁴³ Sanskrit for ‘body of joy’; *long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku* in Tibetan.

⁴⁴ Sanskrit for ‘body of emanation’; *sprul sku* in Tibetan.

⁴⁵ Sanskrit for ‘truth body’; *chos sku* in Tibetan.

⁴⁶ *Rdo rje theg pa* in Tibetan.

⁴⁷ N. Norbu, *The Crystal and The Way of Light. Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen*, Arkana Penguin Books, 1993, p. 30.

External tantras use in the first place methods of purification, the internal ones the practices of transformation, and their first two levels “principally use inner yoga, working on the subtle energy system of the body”⁴⁸.

Maha-yoga and Anu-yoga in Nyingma correspond to the Highest Paternal and Maternal Tantras (in Tibetan: *pha rgyud* and *ma rgyud*) in the tradition of the new translation (i.e. Gelug, Sakya and Kagyu schools). In the practice of tantra, after dissolving a visualisation in emptiness, an adept enters the state of contemplation, which in the tradition of the new translations of tantras is called *mahamudra* (Sanskrit for ‘great symbol’)⁴⁹, which is the height of tantric practice. In the system of old tantras, this state is called Dzogchen. In Nyingma classification, the ninth vehicle, Ati-yoga (i.e. Dzogchen) is considered a tantric path, but this system is actually no longer a tantra in the strict sense of the term, because it is situated outside the system of tantras, not being founded on methods characteristic to tantra, namely purification and transformation. While the path of sutra is based on sacrifice (disowning), tantra on the transformation of an unclean vision into a clean one, the method used in Dzogchen is self-liberation (*rang grol* in Tibetan). A Dzogchen practitioner neither disowns nor transforms anything, but he allows thoughts and phenomena to liberate themselves in the moment of appearance.

In each of the Buddhist paths one can distinguish three closely connected aspects: view, meditation, and way of conduct appropriate to an adept of a particular path. However, one remark should be made here. The Tibetan word ‘*lta ba*’ should be understood as ‘seeing’, or ‘viewing’, rather than as ‘theory’ or collection of some ideas in Western understanding. Thus, to understand the essence of self-liberation as a method of practice in Dzogchen, one should learn the view of Dzogchen. Here we can do so only very briefly.

From the Dzogchen point of view, the primal state of an individual – in other words, its enlightened, essential nature – is perceived and eternally pure (*ka dag* in Tibetan) and spontaneously self-perfect (*lhun grub* in Tibetan). Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, one of the greatest Dzogchen masters, teaches that:

“Our essence, which we call the basic space of dharmadhatu, is already primordially empty and nonexistent. At the same time, we have a natural cognizance that is spontaneously present: this is the other aspect. These two are the main qualities. That is to say, in the moment of recognizing how our essence actually is, there is a spontaneously present wakefulness that knows or sees this primordial purity. Therefore, you can say that primordial purity and spontaneous presence are indivisible.... The essence is empty but also cognizant by nature⁵⁰.”

The buddha mind, rigpa, is undivided empty cognizance.... “Undivided” means that these two aspects, primordially unformed emptiness and spontaneously present cognizance, are indivisible. They have always been an indivisible unity, and this is what all the teachings of all the buddhas are about⁵¹.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ *Phyag rgya chen po* in Tibetan.

⁵⁰ T. U. Rinpoche, *As it is*, Vol. II, Esby/Boudnath, Hong Kong 2000, p. 137.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

This primordial state is “beyond time, and beyond creation and destruction”⁵². It is a pure foundation of all being, both on a universal and individual level. In Dzogchen teachings it is said that primal consciousness becomes obscured and the mind of an individual erroneously takes appearances of its own pure, unborn and primal consciousness for reality existing independently of him. This dualistic polarisation develops in infinite variations, in continuity of thought running after thought. In Buddhism this is called a cyclic existence (*samsara* in Sanskrit, *khor ba* in Tibetan). Thus the Dzogchen practice, as other Buddhist paths, works against the improper, erroneous perception of reality, or against the situation of falling into a dualistic confusion, and tries to stop this process.

Certainly, it can be discussed to what extent Geuther was right in juxtaposing Heidegger’s *Sein* with the term ‘*gzhi*’ that appears in Buddhist teachings, especially in Dzogchen. What is crucial here is that both baselessness of being in Heidegger’s works, and ‘empty foundation’ in Tibetan Buddhism is ‘something’ that can be experienced by a mind or consciousness liberated from an ego-logical perspective. This non-nihilistic experience is a moment of exceptional cognition, something that Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche calls an ‘empty cognition’. This is exactly the aim of Buddhist practice. Reflecting on the foundations of Western philosophy, called also by him a destruction of metaphysics, and opening up to another, non-nihilistic understanding and experiencing of groundlessness (as it takes place in Buddhism), seems to be the great merit of Heidegger.

In Heidegger’s paper *Wissenschaft und Reflexion (Science and Reflection, 1958)*, one comes across the statement that a dialogue between East and West is unavoidable⁵³. According to the author, a dialogue with the thought of the Far East may contribute to saving people from the dangerous situation in which the character of their existence is determined by technology. Let us remember that for Heidegger the history of being begins in ancient Greece. In Plato’s thought, being takes the form of an idea, and it somehow starts its existence in the history of Western metaphysics, gradually falling into oblivion, reaching its climax in contemporary technology. In technology, according to Heidegger, obscuration of the primal unconcealment of being at its height, and there is the possibility of cutting off unconcealment, in which he sees the greatest danger for the essence of humanity. At the same time, something that he calls the “total Europeanisation of the Earth and humans” takes place.

It seems, however, that today it is still difficult to talk about the vital influence of Eastern thought on the philosophical culture of the West. Heidegger, noticing the constant presence of metaphysics in the history of the European philosophical tradition, called it a tautology. This influence may be most visible in the field of cognitivism, or philosophy of mind, where contemporary methods of research can be related to theory and meditative practices in Eastern traditions, especially to Buddhism.

⁵² N. Norbu, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵³ M. Heidegger, *Science and Reflection*, trans. by William Lovitt [in:] M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York 1977, p. 158

HEIDEGGER I BUDDYZM.

O NIENIHILISTYCZNYM DOŚWIADCZENIU BEZPODSTAWNOŚCI

Artykuł omawia kwestię bezpodstawności w myśli zachodniej i w buddyzmie. W pierwszej jego części przedstawione zostają najważniejsze toposy zachodniej myśli (m.in. byt, Bóg, prawda, subiektywność). Kolejny fragment artykułu poświęcony jest filozofii postmodernistycznej, która – ogólnie rzecz ujmując – obala mit obecności i odkrywa brak jakiegokolwiek podstawy. Filozofia Derridy, czy też szerzej postmodernizm, niekiedy jest nazywany filozofią „końca filozofii”. Z jednej strony dekonstrukcja jest jeszcze filozofią, jeśli odgrywa demaskatorską rolę w stosunku do niekrytycznej i dogmatycznej metafizyki obecności, pokazując strukturę fundujących ją opozycji, ujawniając antylogocentryzm pisma, a nawet własne uwikłania w metafizykę. Z drugiej jednak strony byłaby już kresem filozofii, gdyż podważa samą możliwość dyskursu filozoficznego fundowanego na metafizycznej, logocentrycznej podstawie. W postmodernizmie ulegają równocześnie destrukcji sensy ufundowane na metafizyce obecności: podmiot, prawda, kultura. Derrida sięga tu po metaforę pustyni. Keji Nishitani, japoński filozof ze Szkoły Kioto, twierdzi, że zachodni nihilizm niejako zatrzymuje się w tym miejscu, nie rozwijając filozoficznych i doświadczalnych konsekwencji z odkrycia bezpodstawności. Istnieje bowiem także inna, nienihilistyczna możliwość jej doświadczenia. Możliwość ta wymaga jednak pewnego wyjścia poza perspektywę zachodnią. Zachodowi brak w zasadzie tradycji pracy poznawczej, która zasadzałaby się na konkretnym, bezpośrednim doświadczeniu. Możliwym wyjątkiem są tu niektóre nurty mistyki chrześcijańskiej. Psychologia i psychoanaliza nie są zaś w stanie głęboko przetransformować naszej świadomości. Tradycja poznawcza, która odwołuje się do bezpośredniego doświadczenia istnieje w Azji, by wymienić tu choćby klasyczną jogę indyjską, taoizm czy zwłaszcza buddyzm, którego intelektualny dorobek może czynić go partnerem dla zachodniej tradycji myśli. Przy braku własnej tradycji musimy sięgnąć do metod pracy ze świadomością, które prowadzą do wyjścia poza dualizm podmiotowo-przedmiotowy, i dalej w kierunku doświadczenia tego, co sytuuje się już poza horyzontem owego dualizmu.

Zdaniem autora artykułu szczególna rola w odkryciu na Zachodzie tej możliwości przypada Martinowi Heideggerowi. Heidegger, podobnie jak to ma miejsce w postmodernizmie odkrywa bezpodstawność rzeczywistości, wskazuje jednakże na możliwość jej nienihilistycznego, pozakonceptualnego doświadczenia. Wielką załugą Heideggera wydaje się przemyślenie fundamentów zachodniej filozofii, nazywane też przez niego destrukcją metafizyki, i otwarcie jej na inne, nienihilistyczne rozumienie i doświadczenie bezpodstawności, tak jak dzieje się to w buddyzmie. W myśleniu Heideggera od początku zaznacza się też odejście od perspektywy egologicznej ku namysłowi nad niekrytością (*aletheia*), samym byciem (*Seyn*), prześwitem (*Lichtug*), otwartym (*Offene*) czy wydarzeniem (*Ereignis*), a jego myślenie które chce opuścić obszar metafizyki w wielu swych momentach nawiązuje dialog z myślą wschodnią. Przykładem tego jest choćby to, że znany niemiecki buddolog Herbert V. Guenther sięga po Heideggerowskie bycie, gdy chce przełożyć na język kultury Zachodu ważny w buddyzmie tybetańskim termin „podstawa” (*gzhi*).

W odczycie Heideggera *Nauka i namysł* (1958) znalazło się zdanie, że dialog Wschodu i Zachodu jest nieunikniony. Jego zdaniem, dialog Wschodu i Zachodu jest nieunikniony i może się przyczynić do ratowania człowieka przed zagrożeniem płynącym z tego, że charakter jego bytowania jest określany przez technikę. Wydaje się jednak, że dziś trudno jest jeszcze mówić o żywotnym oddziaływaniu myśli wschodniej na filozoficzną kulturę Zachodu. Wpływ ten jest może najbardziej widoczny w obszarze kognitywizmu czy też filozofii umysłu, gdzie współczesne metody jego badania da się odnieść do teorii i medytacyjnych praktyk umysłu we wschodnich tradycjach, zwłaszcza zaś do buddyzmu.