

Heidegger's Philosophical Endeavor:

A Journey through Plato, Comparative Thought, and Indic Contemplation

“Brahman is Being, but not in the sense in which it is other than what it is Being for or to, not in the sense of what knowing, thinking, and speaking are about, other than them, as a reality confronting them, but inclusive of these as themselves modes of Being.”

Mehta¹

In his essay, *“The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,”* Heidegger proposes the existence of uncharted avenues for intellectual exploration that transcend the confines of metaphysical philosophy. He articulates a more contemplative form of thinking, distinct from the incessant rationalization that permeates traditional discourse, transcending the dichotomy of rational and irrational thought.² In typical Heideggerian fashion, this paper lacks a central thesis but embarks on a journey to delve into Heidegger's relentless pursuit of novel modes of thought. Along this path, it also addresses the enduring bias within the realm of philosophy towards non-Western philosophies, specifically those rooted in the Indic tradition. This inquiry encompasses three essential facets: Andrea Nightingale's examination of Plato's role in shaping the philosophical discipline, Steven Burik's exploration of the link between early and later Heidegger's assertions about the culmination of philosophy and comparative philosophical thought, and Mehta's illuminating juxtaposition of Heideggerian Being with the concept of Vedāntic Brahman.

¹ Mehta, *Heidegger*, 32

² Heidegger, *Thinking*, 449

In his article, Heidegger posits that the inquiry into the nature of thinking's purpose must transcend the boundaries of conventional philosophy. Heidegger's perspective emerges from his characterization of philosophy as Western metaphysics, an intellectual foundation characterized by its ontic causation of the actual and the transcendental facilitation of objectivity in the realm of objects.³ In simpler terms, philosophers have traditionally conceived metaphysics as mandating a causal relationship between Being and beings. They have become entrenched in this metaphysical relationship, which, in turn, enables the objectivity of beings at the expense of the subjectivity of Being. In Heidegger's words, a metaphysical understanding of Being is one from which beings derive their essential nature as entities that can be comprehended, manipulated, and utilized in their becoming, perishing, and persisting processes.⁴ Ultimately, Heidegger contends that metaphysics has marginalized genuine contemplation of Being in favor of an excessive focus on the beings themselves, thereby diminishing the profound significance of Being in philosophical discourse.

Understandably, Heidegger raises concerns about the prevailing infatuation with metaphysical considerations of beings, given that this preoccupation has inadvertently led to a transformation of philosophy into a nihilistic, technologically-oriented mode of thinking. However, Heidegger diverges from conventional wisdom by asserting that we lack any criteria for evaluating philosophical perfection.⁵ He goes on to emphasize that the culmination of philosophy does not equate to its attainment of perfection; quite the

³ *Thinking*, 432

⁴ *Thinking*, 432

⁵ *Thinking*, 433

opposite.⁶ In Heidegger's perspective, this culmination emerges from a philosophical tradition deeply rooted in Platonism underpinned by distorted metaphysical paradigms. This lineage has constrained philosophy to operate scientifically, primarily due to its positing of Being's relationship to beings as an objective construct. In Heidegger's own words, the progression of the sciences, which originated in ancient Greece, is inexorably tied to the culmination of this philosophical tradition.⁷ Consequently, the evolution of scientific disciplines now regards beings as technological entities, often overlooking the profound essence of one's unexplored relationship with Being.

It is crucial to emphasize that Heidegger's perspective is not inherently anti-scientific. Instead, his critique centers on relegating the ontologies of the various domains of beings to the exclusive purview of the sciences, subjecting them to scientific interpretation governed by the rules of scientific inquiry.⁸ Put differently, individuals find themselves ensnared in a state where their very existence is predefined by preconceived notions regarding their relationship to Being. It, in essence, reflects how metaphysical thought has reduced one's status to that of a mere technologically active being. Heidegger argues that contemporary theories have devolved into mere suppositions of scientific categories that have lost all ontological significance.⁹ Individuals have shifted from being firmly grounded in the realm of Being through an objective connection between their existence and Being to adopt a technologically driven and, consequently, ontologically vacuous form of representational thinking.

⁶ *Thinking*, 432

⁷ *Thinking*, 433

⁸ *Thinking*, 435

⁹ *Thinking*, 435

Hence, Heidegger staunchly insists on the necessity for fresh intellectual pursuits that transcend the prevailing void-like self-perception that has emerged at the culmination of Western Platonic metaphysical and philosophical inquiry. He poignantly wonders whether the end of philosophy is merely the termination of its distinctive mode of thought. To assert this, he considers, would be hasty.¹⁰ Following Heidegger's perspective, this new intellectual undertaking cannot be categorized within metaphysical or scientific thinking. It constitutes a task that aspires to imbue all that philosophy has traditionally regarded as its subject matter, significantly transcending the confines of philosophical thought. Heidegger dubs this endeavor as less than philosophy, a label befitting its aspiration to encompass more than what the history of Western philosophical thought has thus far encompassed.¹¹

While Heidegger's task for thinking embarks on a trajectory that traverses the rich tapestry of Western philosophical history, it simultaneously calls for a return to its origins. Heidegger envisions one of the potential facets of this task as an endeavor to articulate something communicated long ago, right at the inception of philosophy, but has remained unarticulated to this day.¹² Crucially, this endeavor should no longer entail a summons to the essence of philosophy itself, whatever that may be. Heidegger firmly contends that the subjective orientation of Being towards the objective realm of beings needs to be transcended. In his view, the essence of this thinking task has perpetually eluded scrutiny within the objective relationship between being and Being. In his words, what eludes the

¹⁰ *Thinking*, 433

¹¹ *Thinking*, 436

¹² *Thinking*, 437

grasp of philosophy now conceals itself precisely where philosophy claims to have attained absolute knowledge and irrefutable certainty.¹³ It aligns with Heidegger's assertion of the imperative need for a process of clearing, an intellectual effort essential to unveil these concealed dimensions of thought.

For Heidegger, the concept of "*Lichtung*" represents the backdrop against which the relationship between Being and being can find an appropriate context for novel intellectual endeavors. Heidegger's notion of "clearing," as articulated within the framework of his philosophy, conveys a fundamental phenomenon where what is evident can be directly apprehended.¹⁴ It is essential to note that this apprehension is characterized as intuition rather than thought, as thoughts still bear the marks of metaphysical thinking.¹⁵ This distinction holds significant importance in Heidegger's view because he contends that conventional philosophy remains oblivious to the existence of this clearing. He argues that the Platonic metaphysical tradition, in its objectification of being concerning Being, has bypassed the clearing instead of fully engaging with it, resulting in a critical oversight within philosophical discourse.

In addition to his exploration of clearing, Heidegger intricately ties his pursuit of post-philosophical thinking to the concept of "*Aletheia*," which he interprets as a form of clearing. He expresses this perspective by stating that *Aletheia* is the clearing that bestows upon Being and upon thinking their mutual presence and disclosure.¹⁶ Heidegger accords a particular significance to *Aletheia* because he regards it as a fertile ground for the search

¹³ *Thinking*, 441

¹⁴ *Thinking*, 442

¹⁵ *Thinking*, 443

¹⁶ *Thinking*, 445

for truth, particularly within the context of the early Greek intellectual origins before formalized philosophy emerged. He takes this notion to such an extent that he rhetorically asserts that one must encounter *Aletheia* as unconcealment and then, transcending even the Greek perspective, conceive it as the clearing.¹⁷ It is essential to recall Heidegger's earlier quest for a form of thinking characterized as more sober-minded, and that exists beyond the dichotomy of rational and irrational, distinct from Platonic thought concerning the nature of Being.

Before delving into the concept of a more sober-minded approach, it is imperative to grasp Heidegger's resistance to Greek Platonic metaphysical thought. In her work "Genres in Dialogue," Andrea Nightingale asserts that Plato's notion of Philosophy encompassed not just an analytical examination of specific subject matter but entailed an intricate interplay of ethical and metaphysical commitments, which, in turn, necessitated an entirely novel way of existence.¹⁸ It is reasonable to surmise that such a call for ethical positions intertwined with metaphysics presupposes the objective relationship between being and Being. In other words, the ethical question of how to live precedes the more foundational question of why one exists in the first place. Nightingale argues that this shift, from perceiving Being as what-is to comprehending beings within their ethical contexts, stemmed from Plato's explicit delineation of the dialectical mode of discourse employed by philosophers, in contrast to other modes of existence. This philosophical transition

¹⁷ *Thinking*, 448

¹⁸ Nightingale, *Genres*, 10

from metaphysics to ethics made exploring Being less relevant than inquiring about how beings should lead their lives.

To further illuminate the perplexing nature of Plato's contemplation on Being, Nightingale contends that Plato specifically targeted genres of discourse that claimed wisdom and authority in constructing his philosophical framework. She argues that it is unsurprising that when Plato engages with a particular discourse genre within his dialogues, his approach is often characterized by an adversarial stance.¹⁹ As Plato begins his quest to establish modes of existence for beings, he employs strategic methods to distinguish philosophy from other disciplines that present alternative frameworks for truth-seeking endeavors. Nightingale asserts that Plato elevated his thinking to a position of greater authority than these alternative ways.

To elucidate this point, Nightingale demonstrates that what Plato's audience perceived was often a distorted interpretation of alternative modes of thought, which Plato deemed less rational than philosophy. Nightingale's analysis underscores that *philosophein* did not acquire a specialized and technical meaning until Plato appropriated it for his philosophical enterprise.²⁰ As Nightingale elucidates, this enterprise had effectively abandoned the Presocratic exploration of Being to focus on ethical considerations concerning beings. Consequently, Nightingale argues that despite Plato's continued engagement with the ideas of numerous Presocratic thinkers, his definition of a

¹⁹ *Genres*, 5

²⁰ *Genres*, 10

philosopher excluded these intellectual predecessors. It is precisely where Heidegger's critique of Platonic philosophical thought converges with Nightingale's perspective.

This potential critique is one that even Plato himself might have acknowledged as feasible. Nightingale observes that Plato occasionally forms rare but pointed alliances with traditional discourse genres beyond the realm of philosophy.²¹ She argues that Plato remains receptive to the idea that other genres may offer valuable contributions to the philosopher's pursuits, leading him, on occasion, to blur the boundaries he labored to establish. Crucially, while Nightingale highlights that Plato refrains from definitively demarcating the boundaries of philosophy once and for all, she concludes by posing a pivotal question: what is at stake when contemporary professional philosophers, echoing the Platonic tradition, categorically assert that confident thinkers do not merit the title of philosopher? This inquiry sets the stage for Steven Burik's subsequent exploration.

In his essay "*The End of Comparative Philosophy and the Task of Comparative Thinking*," Burik asserts that, in line with Heidegger's call for a more experiential form of thinking, the insistence among philosophers that specific individuals do not qualify as philosophers becomes irrelevant. Burik encapsulates this perspective, suggesting that this is one of the reasons Heidegger turned to the East.²² In essence, the issue at hand is not whether non-Western thinkers can be considered philosophers or not. Instead, it highlights how far Western metaphysical thought has strayed from its connection to Being. If the fundamental problem facing philosophy at its culmination is intrinsically philosophical,

²¹ *Genres*, 12

²² Burik, *Comparative*, 44

then designating non-Western thought as non-philosophical is, in fact, a testament to the recognition of these traditions as distinct from the Western philosophical tradition.

Burik further contends that due to the inherently metaphysical nature of the language employed in Western philosophy, a crucial element of Heidegger's task of rethinking philosophy's culmination lies in recognizing the linguistic dimension of the issue. Burik asserts that it is also a fact that most, if not all, Western languages have been so thoroughly shaped by metaphysical modes of thought that even broaching the idea of an alternative way of thinking becomes a formidable challenge.²³ This challenge is precisely why Heidegger frames his project as transcending the confines of Greek thought, even though it necessitates a return to its origins. Conscientiously, Burik raises concerns about the feasibility of seeking common ground in the context of comparative philosophy. He notes that Heidegger hinted that this common ground might be concealed, making the endeavor particularly complex.

As per Burik's analysis, the early Heidegger exhibited little interest in comparative philosophy. He took a rather categorical stance, going as far as to declare that only in the West does what we call philosophy exist and that, for example, India does not possess philosophy.²⁴ In the eyes of the early Heidegger, Western languages other than German were deemed inadequate for engaging in philosophical discourse. Heidegger explicitly asserted that French and English were ill-suited for this purpose due to their linguistic roots in Latin rather than Greek. According to Burik, Heidegger even believed that a significant

²³ *Comparative*, 3

²⁴ *Comparative*, 35

portion of the original Greek meaning had been lost due to the forceful translation of ancient Greek into Latin.

It is how the later Heidegger gradually recognized the boundaries inherent in Western philosophical thought. As Burik points out, Heidegger becomes increasingly conscious that his primary wellspring of thought, the ancient Greeks, attained their exceptional stature through direct engagement with others.²⁵ In essence, Heidegger began to acknowledge that there might exist alternative pathways for thinking at the culmination of philosophy, which does not hinge on an exclusive fascination with Greek philosophy and metaphysics. Within this context of Heideggerian thought, J. L. Mehta undertakes a comparative exploration of Vedāntic thinking, assessing it concerning the evolving philosophical landscape.

In his work titled "Heidegger and Vedānta," J. L. Mehta leverages Heidegger's conceptual framework, particularly his notions of the end of philosophy and the task of thinking, to challenge the prevalent philosophical assertion that Vedāntic thought is inherently mystical. Mehta underscores that comparative philosophy has, up to this point, primarily advanced by employing metaphysical concepts without critical examination, assuming their inherent validity when interpreting other philosophies, such as those from India.²⁶ It becomes significant in Mehta's perspective because, if one follows Heidegger's understanding of a novel intellectual undertaking within philosophy, dismissing Vedāntic thought as non-philosophical and mystical is a double-edged sword. As mentioned

²⁵ *Comparative*, 37

²⁶ Mehta, *Heidegger*, 28

previously, the characterization of Vedāntic thought as both non-philosophical and mystical might now serve as a form of compliment to the realm of Indic thought.

Mehta draws a clear distinction between two forms of thinking: the thought that emerged from Aristotle's philosophical framework and the thinking that serves as the core medium within the Vedānta tradition. He elaborates that, within Vedānta, thinking is not merely an expression of the universal drive, as in Aristotle's notion that all individuals are naturally inclined to seek knowledge, a drive that, when infused with the profound sense of wonder, becomes the foundation of all philosophy.²⁷ In essence, Mehta argues that within the Vedāntic tradition, the Heideggerian concept of the Gods, although absent, has not been entirely discarded. Instead, this tradition retains a connection to them within the framework of its philosophical thinking. This continuity exists because, in Mehta's view, the contemporary Vedāntic thinker, despite the influence of Western metaphysical thought, still interprets the present through the lens of a rich historical legacy that had not yet succumbed to the objectification of Being.

Mehta's perspective underscores that Nietzsche's spirit of Socratism had not yet overshadowed the existence of the Vedāntic thinker. In the context in which these thinkers thrived, life remained profoundly connected to the Divine, with the dimension of the holy serving as the overarching framework for all inquiries into the nature of reality.²⁸ Hence, Mehta contends that nihilism, which Nietzsche regarded as an outcome of the post-Greek understanding of the end of philosophy, had not infiltrated and cast its shadow over

²⁷ Heidegger, 18

²⁸ Heidegger, 16

Vedāntic thought. The Vedāntic thinker did not primarily engage with metaphysics through the lens of the objective relationship between beings and Being. Instead, Vedāntic thought posited that beings themselves were non-objective transformations of Being. This Vedāntic conception of Being does not adhere to a subjective understanding; it aligns more closely with Heidegger's concept of the what-is. Although Mehta acknowledges that the preoccupation with the philosophy of Vedānta may have obscured the central task of its thinking itself, he underscores that in the pre-philosophical era of Vedānta, the presupposition of Being was integral to the non-ethical inquiry of discovering the nature of Being.

Mehta draws a further distinct contrast between the Vedāntic task of thinking and the intellectual milieu of Heidegger's era. In Heidegger's contemporary philosophical landscape, thought was often under the sway of a profound illusion, one rooted in the unwavering conviction that through the thread of logic, the human intellect could penetrate the deepest recesses of being, even to the extent of altering it.²⁹ Given Heidegger's acute recognition of this profound illusion, Mehta commends him not only for his audacious attempt to reexamine the Greek conception of Being fundamentally but also condemns the impoverishment that characterizes Heidegger's contemporary age, an impoverishment stemming from the Greek understanding of Being. This understanding has led to the classification of non-Western thought as irrational and mystical, perpetuating a divisive and dismissive stance that persists today.

²⁹ Heidegger, 18

Mehta contends that even one of the most eminent Vedāntic thinkers, Śankara, grappled with this sense of destitution in his time. In Mehta's words, Śankara was not merely a traditionalist endeavoring to revive the Vedic tradition, but rather, he was a profound thinker who was deeply affected by the prevailing sense of destitution in his era.³⁰ Mehta asserts that the ascendancy of nihilism introduced by Buddhism in India prompted Śankara to engage in a battle against it. Śankara sought to demonstrate that it was still conceivable to anchor life in Being. The metaphysical philosophy of Buddhist subjectivity revolved around the perception that everything lacked a self, a foundation, yet paradoxically, it held Being captive within the context of non-Being. According to Mehta, Śankara's efforts were successful because he communicated his ideas to individuals who shared a common tradition, which was still perceived as binding and meaningful.³¹ In contrast, Heidegger's world, which reflected the Europeanization of the Earth and the subsequent sense of homelessness, exhibited a desolate quality akin to a world steadfastly adhering to the metaphysical principles rooted in Greek thought.

Mehta cautions against the attempt to transpose Vedāntic thought into the confines of Western conceptual frameworks. Indeed, even Heidegger's pursuit of Being is intrinsically tied to the search for an appropriate language that adequately conveys the essence of Being, allowing the very source of Being to manifest itself through words.³² As Mehta points out, Western languages have proven inadequate for conveying the nuances of post-philosophical and non-metaphysical thought, which Heidegger championed. Heidegger

³⁰ Heidegger, 20

³¹ Heidegger, 21

³² Heidegger, 26

himself recognized the limitations of languages like Greek, German, French, and English, as they remained entrenched in the grip of Greek metaphysical thinking.

On the other hand, Heidegger displayed a distinct lack of interest in Sanskrit. He asserted that since the metaphysical possibility of thinking has been fully realized in its most comprehensive and purest form in Greek thought,³³ Sanskrit did not capture his attention as a potential language for pursuing a new mode of thinking. For Mehta, the Western perception of Indian thought, and consequently, the Sanskrit language in which it was enshrined as mystical, merely serves as a designation for a category used to pinpoint one's blind spot.³⁴ Thus, Heidegger's characterization of Sanskrit as just another metaphysically representational language conflicts with his quest to explore what lies beyond the Greek,³⁵ especially in an era marked by global civilization and human displacement. In Mehta's view, Heidegger's prospect of embracing non-Western thought as a task for thinking necessitates reevaluating the negative attributes of Indic thought, such as irrationality, magic, and mysticism.

Moreover, Mehta contends that framing Brahman's thinking as a Heideggerian task for thinking aligns with Heidegger's appropriation of mystical thought. In Mehta's words, Heidegger assimilates what he identifies as genuine thinking inherent in the writings of mystics, interpreting them as manifestations of thought, as events along the path of thinking.³⁶ For Mehta, the Western concept of mysticism is rooted in an extreme rationalization of philosophy that becomes detached from lived experience. The

³³ Heidegger, 27

³⁴ Heidegger, 28

³⁵ Heidegger, 28

³⁶ Heidegger, 35

traditional metaphysical division between concepts apprehended through reason and personal experiential reality must disintegrate. In this context, thinking assumes the role of a perceptual act, coming into focus as an act of experiencing. According to Mehta, thinking encompasses both intellectual insight and lived experience. In conclusion, Mehta underscores the need to challenge the characterization of Vedāntic thought as mystical, given that it fails to capture the essence and depth of this philosophical tradition.

Although much more could be said about this topic, in this paper, I hope to have shown an approach to delve into Heidegger's conception of the culmination of philosophy in the Western tradition and the emerging opportunities for reimagining the thinking tasks. Concurrently, I have addressed the prevalent tendency to label non-Western thought as magical, religious, irrational, and mystical while exploring the implications of Heidegger's perspective. I have demonstrated that if we take Heidegger's viewpoint seriously, it is imperative to relinquish these categories when applied to non-Western thought. Heidegger recognized the limitations of what the Western philosophical tradition has achieved without negating its merits. This realization underscores the increasing necessity for steadfast philosophers and tenacious philosophical thinking to liberate themselves from the confines imposed on intellectual exploration.

As Plato's formulation of philosophy progressively shifted its focus from Being to beings, Heidegger prompts us to be cautious not to overlook what has remained unexamined throughout this transformation. The tenacity of philosophy as an academic discipline should not lead us to narrow our perspective to the extent that we lose sight of Being itself. One of the implications of his inquiry is that Being may not even be

concealed; somewhat, it is veiled by philosophers in the course of their philosophical contemplation. If, as Heidegger contends, Western philosophy has culminated in nihilism, it is incumbent upon philosophy not to dismiss or categorize what remains unexplored, distinct from nihilism, as mere instances of religious, magical, irrational, or mystical thought. It is possible that within these seemingly peculiar categories lies a potential clearing that can offer a path out of the predicament of a homeless and destitute global civilization, as described by Heidegger. In essence, Heidegger encourages us to break free from viewing ourselves as mere pieces of technological data to be manipulated. We should also refrain from treating thinking as a commodity in a turbulent marketplace of ideas. Heidegger's inquiry thus resonates with the wisdom imparted by Parmenides, who questioned "the opinions of [philosophers] who lack the ability to trust what is unconcealed [in their thinking]."³⁷

³⁷ Heidegger, *Thinking*, 444

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