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SEINSVERGESSENHEIT W FILOZOFII MARTINA HEIDEGGERA

Mariia Dankanich

aspirantka Katedry Filozofii

Dnieprzańskiego Narodowego Uniwersytetu imienia Olesia Honczara (Dniepr, Ukraina)

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2253-1227

e-mail: maria_dankanich@ukr.net

Adnotacja. Prezentowany artykuł bada koncepcję Martina Heideggera „zapomnienia bycia” (Seinsvergessenheit) i jej implikacje w świetle analizy historycznej i filozoficznej. Twierdzi się, że heideggierska koncepcja zapomnienia bycia pośrednio i nieświadomie wyraża chrześcijańskie elementy eschatologiczne językiem filozofii (ontologii). Pomimo akcentowanego dystansu Heideggera od chrześcijaństwa, wydaje się, że jego myśl nadal wyrażała chrześcijański pogląd na świat. Jak twierdzi, tracąc swoje bycie stajemy się elementami współczesnej kultury konsumenckiej i społeczeństwa, a na koniec przechodzimy do powszechnego zapomnienia. W tym względzie staje się oczywiste, dlaczego ostrzeżenie Heideggera brzmi niezwykle krytycznie i desperacko. Ważne jest, aby pamiętać, że istnieją pewne hermeneutyczne podejścia do heideggerowskiego pojęcia zapomnienia bycia: 1. Teoria krytyczna (Heidegger okrzyknięty najzdolniejszym krytykiem kultury zachodniej). 2. Filozofia historii (Heidegger jest uważany za krytyka filozofii europejskiej i metafizyki, który opuścił ontologię na rzecz epistemologii). Te hermeneutyczne podejścia można scharakteryzować jako redukcję Seinsvergessenheit do kontekstów społecznych i intelektualnych. Natomiast uważamy, że jego poglądy nie mogą być w pełni wyrażone w takich horyzontach interpretacyjnych. Z tego powodu proponujemy opisanie poglądów Heideggera na temat zapomnienia bycia jako projektu eschatologicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: Seinsvergessenheit, zapomnienie bycia, technologia, teologia, historia, metafizyka, późny Heidegger, chrześcijaństwo.

SEINSVERGESSENHEIT IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Mariia Dankanich

*Postgraduate Student at the Department of Philosophy
Oles Honchar Dnipro National University (Dnipro, Ukraine)*

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2253-1227

e-mail: maria_dankanich@ukr.net

Abstract. The present paper explores Martin Heidegger’s concept of “oblivion of being” (Seinsvergessenheit) and its implications in the light of historical and philosophical analysis. It argues that Heidegger’s concept of oblivion of being indirectly and unconsciously expresses Christian eschatological elements in the language of philosophy (ontology).

Despite Heidegger's emphasized distancing from Christianity, it seems that his thought continued to articulate Christian attitudes. Losing our being, he claims, we become elements of contemporary consumer culture and society, and eventually we move toward overwhelming oblivion. In this respect, it becomes apparent why Heidegger's agenda sounds highly critical and desperate. It is essential to note that there are some hermeneutical approaches to Heidegger's notion of oblivion of being: 1. Critical Theory (Heidegger is proclaimed as the most profound critic of Western culture). 2. Philosophy of History (Heidegger is considered as a critic of European philosophy and metaphysics, which left ontology in favor of epistemology). These hermeneutical approaches can be described as reducing *Seinsvergessenheit* to social and intellectual contexts. In contrast, we believe that his views cannot be fully expressed in these interpretative horizons. For this reason, we propose to describe Heidegger's views on the oblivion of being as an eschatological project.

Key words: *Seinsvergessenheit*, oblivion of being, technology, theology, history, metaphysics, later Heidegger, Christianity.

SEINSVERGESSENHEIT У ФІЛОСОФІЇ МАРТИНА ГАЙДЕГГЕРА

Марія Данканіч

аспірантка кафедри філософії

Дніпровського національного університету імені Олеся Гончара (Дніпро, Україна)

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2253-1227

e-mail: maria_dankanich@ukr.net

Анотація. Представлена стаття досліджує концепцію Мартіна Гайдеггера «забуття буття» (*Seinsvergessenheit*) та її імплікації у світлі історичного та філософського аналізу. Стверджується, що гайдеггівська концепція забуття буття опосередковано і несвідомо виражає християнські есхатологічні елементи мовою філософії (онтології). Незважаючи на акцентоване дистанціювання Гайдеггера від християнства, здається, що його думка продовжувала артикулювати християнське світовідчуття. Втрачаючи своє буття, стверджує він, ми стаємо елементами сучасної споживацької культури та суспільства і, зрештою, рухаємось до всеохоплюючого забуття. У цьому плані стає очевидним, чому гайдеггівське застороження звучить надзвичайно критично та відчайдушно. Важливо зазначити, що є деякі герменевтичні підходи до гайдеггівського поняття забуття буття: 1) критична теорія (Гайдеггер проголошується найяскравішим критиком західної культури); 2) філософія історії (Гайдеггер вважається критиком європейської філософії та метафізики, які залишили онтологію на користь гносеології). Ці герменевтичні підходи можна охарактеризувати як зведення *Seinsvergessenheit* до соціального та інтелектуального контекстів. На відміну від цього, ми вважаємо, що його погляди не можуть бути повністю виражені в таких інтерпретаційних горизонтах. З цієї причини ми пропонуємо описати погляди Гайдеггера на забуття буття як есхатологічний проєкт.

Ключові слова: *Seinsvergessenheit*, забуття буття, технологія, теологія, історія, метафізика, пізній Гайдеггер, християнство.

Introduction. Today, we often hear about apocalyptic predictions for the future of mankind and the end of consumer civilization. In a sense, these warnings describe a world that is spiraling out of control and moving forward to its collapse. It is important to note that such expectations are derived from the existential roots of human nature. As Paul Tillich once rightly pointed out in his brilliant sermon, “The Depth of Existence”, modern man and his life are highly meaningless. He continues, “... we are enslaved by the routine of our daily lives, in work and pleasure, in business and recreation. We are conquered by innumerable hazards, both good and evil. We are more driven than driving. We do not stop to look at the height above us, or to the depth below us. We talk and talk and never listen to the voices speaking to our depth and from our depth. We accept ourselves as we appear to ourselves, and do not care what we really are. Like hit-and-run drivers, we injure our souls by the speed with which we move on the surface; and then we rush away, leaving our bleeding souls alone...” (Tillich, 1953: 56). Perhaps for this reason, another acclaimed German thinker Martin Heidegger claims a similar thing: we are on the verge of overwhelming cultural, spiritual, and social crisis and self-destruction. In other words, according to Heidegger, human beings living in the 21st-century directly experience the era of oblivion of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). In this respect, Heidegger's agenda sounds highly critical and desperate. So the question arises what indeed Heidegger means, talking about oblivion? In our opinion, its theological connotations can no longer be ignored. In order to understand Heidegger's philosophy, we have to keep in mind its theological background. Undoubtedly, the theological perspective is viewed as extremely important and beneficial. For this reason, the present paper is offered as a humble attempt in this direction and aims to analyze the Heideggerian notion of *Seinsvergessenheit* in the light of a theological (eschatological) perspective.

In this paper, we attempt to explore the following things as clearly as we can:

First, we will explore Heidegger's concept of *Seinsvergessenheit* and its philosophical connotations. This will be expressed primarily through the analysis and interpretation of Heidegger's philosophical writings (*Philosophische Schriften*) widely known as his *Gesamtausgabe* (collected works), and his most influential and profound commentators (Philip Tonner, Julian Young, Zaine Ridling).

Secondly, we will attempt to examine the Heideggerian idea of *Seinsvergessenheit* in the light of Systematic Theology.

Discussion. Before the realization of our analysis, it should be noted here that the term *Seinsvergessenheit* is found in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* at least 441 times. The relative frequency with which this concept occurs is a matter of deep interest.

This term is the most extensively used by Heidegger in the following volumes:

1. Bd. 54 Parmenides (Wintersemester 1942/43);
2. Bd. 65 Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis) (1936–1938);
3. Bd. 66 Besinnung (1938/39);
4. Bd. 71 Das Ereignis (1941/42);
5. Bd. 73 Zum Ereignis-Denken;
6. Bd. 76 Zur Metaphysik / Neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft / Technik;
7. Bd. 95 Überlegungen VII – XI (“Schwarze Hefte” 1938/39);
8. Bd. 97 Anmerkungen I-V (“Schwarze Hefte” 1942–1948).

Admittedly, there are two traditional English translations of *Seinsvergessenheit*: “oblivion of being” and “forgetfulness of being”. Any philosophical term whether written or proclaimed should never be analyzed without its linguistic definition. With respect to acclaimed German thinker Martin Heidegger, this methodological approach is essential because of his specific terminology. In this case, it is essential to emphasize the following context of the term:

1. Die Vergessenheit is derived from the verb *vergessen* (to forget) and can be translated as “oblivion” or “forgetfulness”.

2. In philosophy the German noun *Sein* literally means “being”, the visible and invisible existence of things.

Thus, the word *Seinsvergessenheit* could mean that we have finally forgotten being. Alongside *Seinsvergessenheit* there are found other similar notions with its significance in Heidegger’s writings:

1. *Seinsverlassenheit* – Abandonment of Being.
2. *Gottverlassenheit* – Godforsakenness.

Of course, other translations are possible. Perhaps because of Heidegger’s language, there is no one common and adopted English translation of his writings, even if we are talking about Being and Time. Heidegger’s German can be described as idiomatic and symbolic. This is especially apparent in his later period when he seriously meditated about language.

Since the idea of *Seinsvergessenheit* is important to us, we will analyze its development as presented in Heidegger’s later works.

In the 66th volume called “*Besinnung*” (Meditation), Heidegger claims that the forgetting of being is not a falling away or a loss of what has been retained (*ist kein Entfallen und kein Verlieren von Behaltenem*), because it is no repression of what is remembered and no turning away from what is remembered. Heidegger adds, “...What is it then? A mere overlooking of being, which is constantly being understood in advance?...” (Heidegger, 1997: 217). Further, Heidegger emphasizes that oblivion of being is a true embodiment of the end of western metaphysics. Moreover, this process, he states, was expressly proven in different ways: by Hegel as the “indefinite immediate” and by Nietzsche as “the last haze of an evaporating reality” (*letzte Rauch einer verdunstenden Realität*) (Heidegger, 1997: 218). It is interesting that to Heidegger the beginning of oblivion is caused by metaphysics itself. In considering this issue, he claims that through metaphysics there is a forgetting of being to the point of oblivion, because metaphysics “raised” being to the indifference of the “most general”. Therefore, Heidegger concludes, metaphysics is an approach of oblivion. This emphasis on the destructive essence of metaphysics is such a fundamental aspect of Heidegger’s criticism that he writes: “...The fact that we are no longer touched by the oblivion of being, is a consequence of the domination of metaphysics and a negative indication of its own foundation...” (Heidegger, 1997:218). Besides, Heidegger states, metaphysics is unable to raise the question of being (*der Seinsfrage*).

Heidegger notes that the future history of western man depends on an understanding of being. The important question concerning oblivion relates to the interpretation of being. In the language of Heidegger, it sounds quite dualistic:

1. The present interpretation of being stays, which leads to indifference and oblivion;
2. Oblivion of being shakes man up and eventually sets him free.

The power of oblivion can never be eliminated, Heidegger states. This explains why man can never remove the forgottenness of being, even if he desperately attempts it. In this case, it becomes understandable why Heidegger warns about an epistemological mistake: to examine being means to forget about it. Furthermore, even if we consider the historical context of thinking we can see only its surface. According to Heidegger, oblivion itself can never be revealed and overcome; the only thing possible – its pre- openness.

As we have seen above, Heidegger extensively describes the metaphysical context of forgetfulness of being. The next stage of oblivion, he continues, is firmly affiliated with theology. In his acclaimed work “*Das Ereignis*” (The Event) he notes, Godlessness (*Gottlosigkeit*) cannot be considered as the loss of God. Heidegger confirms this, claiming that the Christian God is still omnipresent and is invoked in the most unrecognizable forms and in changing forms of genuine and false faith. Godlessness as such, Heidegger claims, is an experienced matter in the history of being (Heidegger, 2009: 88).

Further, Heidegger draws attention to three prominent aspects of godlessness.

First, godlessness is the burial of the time-space appearance of the divine realm. Second, godlessness is not the product of the unbelief of man or a moral inability. Third, godlessness is history in the history of being itself (Heidegger, 2009:88).

What is more, Heidegger claims *Seinsvergessenheit* reveals itself in several forms:

1. as the merging with objects (technology – history);

2. as the dissolution (Auflösung) of everything into the effective “life” (Heidegger, 2009: 106).

It is interesting that according to Heidegger the starting point of oblivion is directly related to Plato (Heidegger, 2013:200). Heidegger decisively accuses Plato and Aristotle, claiming that because of them being has completely fallen into oblivion. Thus, the cornerstone of Heidegger’s message was the absolute distortion of being and its immeasurable oblivion.

Heidegger’s acclaimed volume “Bd. 76 Zur Metaphysik / Neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft / Technik” is dedicated to the fundamental question of “Principles for the emergence of metaphysics, modern science and modern technology”. In over seventeen passages Heidegger draws attention to the link between oblivion of being and technology.

According to Heidegger, technology can only be grasped from the fundamental essence of metaphysics. This, he claims, is only possible if the first step in overcoming metaphysics has already been taken, and this is understood as a result of need (the abandonment of being). Eventually, this process directly leads to the establishment of an oblivion of being that has been torn from being and released from it (Heidegger, 2009: 294). Technology does not save or facilitate “work” in the actual sense, it only reshapes it and, through the change in the nature of work, actually consolidates the forgetting of being (mechanization and experience) (Heidegger, 2009: 295). Further, Heidegger states, technology is the establishment of the unassailable oblivion of being that is never accessible to itself (Einrichtung der unangreifbaren Seinsvergessenheit) (Heidegger, 2009: 311).

Having attempted to set forth as clearly as we can what Heidegger states about the essence of oblivion, we turn our attention now to an evaluation of it. Our discussion here will go in two directions. First, we will review it in the light of a theological viewpoint. Second, we will evaluate some of the problems commentators have noted with Heidegger’s conception of Seinsvergessenheit.

As we have already mentioned, it is not possible to evaluate Heidegger’s viewpoint adequately without a theological analysis. In our opinion, Heidegger’s project of oblivion of being has several eschatological peculiarities.

Eschatology is a sub-field of theology concerned with the end times of history or the ultimate destiny of humanity. According to well-respected theologian Millard Erickson, some theologians, see eschatology as a description of events in the here and now, while others view eschatology as a description of what has always been, is, and always will be true (Erickson, 1990: 1059). Concerning the classification of contemporary eschatologies, Erickson lists them in the following way:

1. The futurist view holds that most of the events described are in the future. They will come to fulfillment at the close of the age, many of them probably clustered together.

2. The preterist view holds that the events described were taking place at the time of the writer. Since they were current for the writer, they are now in the past.

3. The historical view holds that the events described were in the future at the time of writing, but refer to matters destined to take place throughout the history of the church. Instead of looking solely to the future for their occurrence, we should also search for them within the pages of history and consider whether some of them may be currently coming to pass.

4. The symbolic or idealist view holds that the events described are not to be thought of in a time sequence at all. They refer to truths that are timeless in nature, not to singular historical occurrences (Erickson, 1990: 1059).

Another acclaimed theologian Henry Thiessen points out eschatology can be divided into two broad areas: personal and general eschatology (Thiessen, 1979: 337).

It is important to note, that there are several modern eschatologies, which can be also classified in the following way:

1. Modern Eschatology (Adolf von Harnack, Albrecht Ritschl);
2. Premodern Eschatology (Albert Schweitzer);
3. Realized Eschatology (Charles Harold Dodd);
4. Existential Eschatology (Rudolf Bultmann);
5. Political Eschatology (Jürgen Moltmann);
6. Dispensationalism.

Under the influence of Heidegger, Bultmann insisted that much of the New Testament is in the form of mythology. Bultmann brought Martin Heidegger’s existentialism to his interpretation of the New Testament. Since the message of the New Testament is existential rather than historical (i.e., it does not tell us what actually happened), does it not make good sense to interpret it by using existential philosophy? Bultmann considers Heidegger’s thought to be a secularized, philosophical version of the New Testament view of human existence (Erickson, 1990: 1065).

According to Tonner Philip, after the change in orientation in his thought in the 1930s Heidegger became concerned with charting the history of being as it unfolds in the epochs of Western history. The history of being serves as the clue to all human history. Heidegger, concerned with the happening of truth in history, holds that being has fallen into oblivion because the ontological difference between being and beings has been passed over by western metaphysics. This process began with Plato and Aristotle. It was in 1923 that Heidegger realized that the Greek term *ousia* means “constant presence”. With Aristotle, being became associated with the being of a particular being and the difference between being and beings was concealed; as a result, being fell into oblivion (Tonner, 2018: 126). Tonner adds that what is in oblivion in the metaphysical tradition is what Heidegger calls the difference: the process of clearing (Lichtung) and dispensing (Geschick) which makes possible the metaphysical difference between being and beings (Tonner, 2018: 127).

For Heidegger, the oblivion of the matter to be thought, which was inaugurated in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, has had the effect of instigating the forgetting of the more original and primordial Greek experience of *aletheia*. *Aletheia* is that happening whereby the world as an elaborate historical context of significance becomes opened-up or uncovered for *Dasein*. *Aletheia* is the very emergence into the open, it is that process whereby beings are brought into the clearing and become un-concealed. Within the course of the unfolding of the history of being there is no recourse to any transcendent ground: there is nothing beyond the immanent play of the revealing and concealing of being (Tonner, 2018: 129).

It is interesting that the noted Heidegger scholar Zaine Ridling makes a similar point: “his thought embodies an extreme thinking and attracts many scholars precisely because a diagnosis of the world situation as well as an overcoming of this situation is posited in the thinking of being. The diagnosis announced”, Ridling states, “is the forgottenness of and by Being. The overcoming would lead to the human essence belonging to Being” (Ridling, 2001: 221). Regarding Heidegger’s viewpoint on technology and its connection with oblivion, Ridling states that it is a way of sin: “because it seems to commit what for him is the cardinal sin of becoming absorbed in beings and so becoming oblivious of Being; yet on the other hand, common sense tells him that we are already (a fateful word in Heidegger’s writings) deluged in technology and there is no way back, so we have to learn to live with it. As with so many other matters in both public and private life, it is too late to ask whether we want to live in a technological society, for such a society is already our factual situation – we have been thrown into it without choice” (Ridling, 2001:65).

Concerning oblivion of being in later Heidegger thought, acclaimed American philosopher Julian Young notes that Being – reality in the plenitude of all its sides – is what we have become oblivious to. The task of thinking, of both meditative and poetic thinking, is to overcome this oblivion, to raise ourselves to the kind of thinking which, in grasping the ground of our being, recollects Being (Young, 2002: 21–22). What is more, Julian Young adds, metaphysics blocks access to the unfathomable depth of Being, as well as to the mystery of its self-concealment. Further, for this reason metaphysics blocks access to Being. Metaphysics, therefore, blocks both the mystery of Being and its character as origin. Young supposes that Heidegger’s phrase «oblivion of being» embraces both of these effects (Young, 2002: 29–30).

Results. It is essential to emphasize that both Tonner and Young pay particular attention to metaphysics as the starting point in the process of oblivion. Thus, it is appropriate to conclude that Heidegger’s commentators are in agreement about the decisive role of metaphysics in the process of oblivion.

As to the question of how technology is related to oblivion, we might say the following:

First, Heidegger radically criticizes the concept of the hegemony of science, because of its exclusive claims to disclose how things really are.

Second, in our opinion, technology is closely related to Heidegger’s term “*Vorhandenheit*” (being of a thing) which is widely found in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger states that things are unable to think and realize their thing-hood. Eventually, technology leads to the reification of human beings. Therefore, technology is a thing and a way of reification.

Further, Heidegger emphasizes that oblivion of being is a true embodiment of the end of western metaphysics.

We must acknowledge the fact that Martin Heidegger does not present a finished and homogeneous doctrine of *Seinsvergessenheit* either in his early or later writings. Another important issue is related to Heidegger’s symbolic and idiomatic language. It is perhaps the primary reason why his views on the oblivion of being are not clearly expressed. Nevertheless, oblivion of being is essential to Heidegger’s later thought. There are many reasons for such a claim, but several stand out. First, it implies that oblivion of being is the true end of western metaphysics. Second, its starting point is directly related to Plato and Aristotle. Third, oblivion as such cannot be overcome. The fourth aspect of oblivion is closely affiliated with the historical experience of godlessness. It is not difficult to see that Heidegger’s viewpoint on the destiny of being is quite pessimistic. But this pessimism cannot be considered as a form of historical and philosophical reductionism. As a matter of fact, Heidegger’s diagnosis sounds more radical than it turns out to be. As we have proposed earlier, Heidegger’s doctrine of oblivion is an eschatological project. It is interesting that in his widely-known interview “*Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten*” (Only a God can save us) which was published in *Der Spiegel* on 30 May 1976, Heidegger, commenting on the problem of contemporary dehumanization, states that it is a product of technology. Technology, he claims, continuously tears man loose and uproots him from the earth (*losreißt und entwurzelt*). It is interesting that Heidegger was pretty amazed when he saw the pictures of the earth taken by the Soviet and American moon vehicles. Further, according to Heidegger, there is no necessity for nuclear weapons in this regard. The process of uprooting humanity had already begun. Relationships, he goes on to say, have transformed into purely technical ones (*Wir haben nur noch rein technische Verhältnisse*). As a result, Heidegger claims, mankind no longer lives on earth (Heidegger, 1977: 206). Such a pessimistic scenario encouraged an interviewer to ask Heidegger about the role of philosophy and its possibility to influence this web of circumstances (*Geflecht von Zwangsläufigkeiten*). To the interviewer’s amazement, Heidegger’s response was quite pessimistic: “...philosophy is unable to change the current affairs in the world. This is related not only to philosophy but to all human reflections and endeavors respectively. Only a God can save us...” (Heidegger, 1977: 209). The appearance of a God, Heidegger goes on, is possible only by poetry and reflection. Therefore, we are either ready for this appearance or not. If not, Heidegger claims, we will continue to experience a state of decline. We are not able to change the world, and the only thing that is possible for us is to wait. What is more, we cannot bring God forth by our mindset (Heidegger, 1977: 209).

Conclusions. It should be pointed out in this regard that Heidegger's later thought articulated the following themes: hermeneutics, ontology, language and poetry, pre-Socratic philosophy, the question of technology, and Nietzsche's philosophy. It is our opinion, Heidegger's later thought can be considered as deeply pessimistic. We can summarize his views in the following way:

1. History as such is an experience of the oblivion of being;
2. Technology is a product of our thinking, which leads to the dehumanization and eradication of mankind;
3. Metaphysics is a brilliant example of false philosophy;
4. Eventually, the only possible scenario for our civilization is awaiting God. Otherwise, we are all doomed to oblivion at last and forever.

Of course, Heidegger did not write about a return to classical theism in a religious manner. Besides, his language cannot be described as theological, even if we explore his later views. However, Heidegger's views, in our opinion, can be evaluated as a secular variant of eschatology. Following Nietzsche, Heidegger continues the criticism of history, European philosophy, and Christianity but he performs it in a much more hidden way. Perhaps Heidegger didn't want to become the second Nietzsche or to join the camp of European atheism. Interestingly, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is not close to Heidegger's later attitude. Furthermore, he in a religionless way talks about awaiting God's appearance. Finally, Heidegger, commenting on the oblivion of being, nevertheless experiences its mystery. This mystical element is often found in his later writings. In this respect, Heidegger is close to both medieval apophatic tradition and Christian eschatological feeling.

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