

*Martin Heidegger*

DISCOURSE  
ON  
THINKING



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MARTIN HEIDEGGER

DISCOURSE  
ON THINKING

A Translation of *Gelassenheit*

by

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With an Introduction by

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## II

### CONVERSATION ON A COUNTRY PATH ABOUT THINKING\*

*Scientist:* Toward the last you stated that the question concerning man's nature is not a question about man.

*Teacher:* I said only that the question concerning man's nature makes a consideration whether this is the case unavoidable.

*Scientist:* Even so, it is a mystery to me how man's nature is ever to be found by looking away from man.

*Teacher:* It is a mystery to me too; so I seek to clarify how far this is possible, or perhaps even necessary.—

*Scientist:* To behold man's nature without looking at man!

*Teacher:* Why not? If thinking is what distinguishes man's nature, then surely the essence of this nature, namely the nature of thinking, can be seen only by looking away from thinking.

*Scholar:* But thinking, understood in the traditional way, as re-presenting is a kind of willing; Kant, too, under-

\* This discourse was taken from a conversation written down in 1944-45 between a scientist, a scholar, and a teacher.

stands thinking this way when he characterizes it as spontaneity. To think is to will, and to will is to think.

*Scientist:* Then the statement that the nature of thinking is something other than thinking means that thinking is something other than willing.

*Teacher:* And that is why, in answer to your question as to what I really wanted from our meditation on the nature of thinking, I replied: I want non-willing.

*Scientist:* Meanwhile this formulation has proved ambiguous.

*Scholar:* Non-willing, for one thing, means a willing in such a way as to involve negation, be it even in the sense of a negation which is directed at willing and renounces it. Non-willing means, therefore: willingly to renounce willing. And the term non-willing means, further, what remains absolutely outside any kind of will.

*Scientist:* So that it can never be carried out or reached by any willing.

*Teacher:* But perhaps we come nearer to it by a willing in the first sense of non-willing.

*Scholar:* You see, then, the two senses of non-willing as standing in a definite relation to each other.

*Teacher:* Not only do I see this relation, I confess that ever since I have tried to reflect on what moves our conversation, it has claimed my attention, if not challenged me.

*Scientist:* Am I right if I state the relation of the one sense of non-willing to the other as follows? You want a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this we may release, or at least prepare to re-

lease, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not a willing.

*Teacher:* You are not only right, but by the gods! as I would say if they had not flown from us, you have uncovered something essential.

*Scholar:* I should now be tempted to say that you, in your interpretation of the ambiguous talk about non-willing, have surpassed both us and yourself—if anyone were entitled to mete out praise and if that were not contrary to the style of our conversations.

*Scientist:* That I succeeded in this, was not my doing but that of the night having set in, which without forcing compels concentration.

*Scholar:* It leaves us time for meditating by slowing down our pace.

*Teacher:* That is why we are still far from human habitation.

*Scientist:* Ever more openly I am coming to trust in the inconspicuous guide who takes us by the hand—or better said, by the word—in this conversation.

*Scholar:* We need this guidance, because our conversation becomes ever more difficult.

*Teacher:* If by “difficult” you mean the unaccustomed task which consists in weaning ourselves from will.

*Scholar:* Will, you say, and not merely willing . . .

*Scientist:* . . . and so, you state an exciting demand in a released manner.

*Teacher:* If only I possessed already the right releasement, then I would soon be freed of that task of weaning.

*Scholar:* So far as we can wean ourselves from willing, we contribute to the awakening of releasement.

*Teacher:* Say rather, to keeping awake for releasement.

*Scholar:* Why not, to the awakening?

*Teacher:* Because on our own we do not awaken releasement in ourselves.

*Scientist:* Thus releasement is effected from somewhere else.

*Teacher:* Not effected, but let in.

*Scholar:* To be sure I don't know yet what the word releasement means; but I seem to presage that releasement awakens when our nature is let-in so as to have dealings with that which is not a willing.

*Scientist:* You speak without letup of a letting-be and give the impression that what is meant is a kind of passivity. All the same, I think I understand that it is in no way a matter of weakly allowing things to slide and drift along.

*Scholar:* Perhaps a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world and in the machinations of all mankind . . .

*Teacher:* . . . which higher acting is yet no activity.

*Scientist:* Then releasement lies—if we may use the word lie—beyond the distinction between activity and passivity . . .

*Scholar:* . . . because releasement does not belong to the domain of the will.

*Scientist:* The transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me.

*Teacher:* And all the more, since the nature of releasement is still hidden.

*Scholar:* Especially so because even releasement can still be thought of as within the domain of will, as is the case with old masters of thought such as Meister Eckhart.

*Teacher:* From whom, all the same, much can be learned.

*Scholar:* Certainly; but what we have called releasement evidently does not mean casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will.

*Teacher:* No, not that.

*Scientist:* In many respects it is clear to me what the word releasement should not signify for us. But at the same time, I know less and less what we are talking about. We are trying to determine the nature of thinking. What has releasement to do with thinking?

*Teacher:* Nothing if we conceive thinking in the traditional way as re-presenting. Yet perhaps the nature of thinking we are seeking is fixed in releasement.

*Scientist:* With the best of will, I can not re-present to myself this nature of thinking.

*Teacher:* Precisely because this will of yours and your mode of thinking as re-presenting prevent it.

*Scientist:* But then, what in the world am I to do?

*Scholar:* I am asking myself that too.

*Teacher:* We are to do nothing but wait.

*Scholar:* That is poor consolation.

*Teacher:* Poor or not, we should not await consolation—something we would still be doing if we became disconsolate.

*Scientist:* Then what are we to wait for? And where are we to wait? I hardly know anymore who and where I am.

*Teacher:* None of us knows that, as soon as we stop fooling ourselves.

*Scholar:* And yet we still have our path?

*Teacher:* To be sure. But by forgetting it too quickly we give up thinking.

*Teacher:* It strikes me as something like a region, an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests.

*Scholar:* I'm not sure I understand what you say now.

*Teacher:* I don't understand it either, if by "understanding" you mean the capacity to re-present what is put before us as if sheltered amid the familiar and so secured; for I, too, lack the familiar in which to place what I tried to say about openness as a region.

*Scientist:* That is perhaps impossible here, if for no other reason than because presumably what you call a region is exactly that which alone permits all sheltering.

*Teacher:* I mean something like this; but not only this.

*Scholar:* You spoke of "a" region in which everything returns to itself. Strictly speaking, a region for everything is not one region among many, but the region of all regions.

*Teacher:* You are right; what is in question is *the* region.

*Scientist:* And the enchantment of this region might well be the reign of its nature, its regioning, if I may call it that.

*Scholar:* It seems a region holds what comes forward to meet us; but we also said of the horizon that out of the view which it encircles, the appearance of objects comes to meet us. If now we comprehend the horizon through the region, we take the region itself as that which comes to meet us.

*Teacher:* In this way, indeed, we would characterize the region through its relation to us, just as we did a moment ago with the horizon—whereas we are searching for the

*Teacher:* Waiting, all right; but never awaiting, for awaiting already links itself with re-presenting and what is re-presented.

*Scholar:* Waiting, however, lets go of that; or rather I should say that waiting lets re-presenting entirely alone. It really has no object.

*Scientist:* Yet if we wait we always wait for something.

*Scholar:* Certainly, but as soon as we re-present to ourselves and fix upon that for which we wait, we really wait no longer.

*Teacher:* In waiting we leave open what we are waiting for.

*Scholar:* Why?

*Teacher:* Because waiting releases itself into openness . . .

*Scholar:* . . . into the expanse of distance . . .

*Teacher:* . . . in whose nearness it finds the abiding in which it remains.

*Scientist:* But remaining is a returning.

*Scholar:* Openness itself would be that for which we could do nothing but wait.

*Scientist:* But openness itself is that-which-regions . . .

*Teacher:* . . . into which we are released by way of waiting, when we think.

*Scientist:* Then thinking would be coming-into-the-nearness of distance.

*Scholar:* That is a daring definition of its nature, which we have chanced upon.

*Scientist:* I only brought together that which we have named, but without re-presenting anything to myself.

*Teacher:* Yet you have thought something.

*Scientist:* Or, really, waited for something without knowing for what.

*Scholar:* But how come you suddenly could wait?

*Scholar:* By virtue of what kind of designation would it have its name?

*Teacher:* Perhaps these names are not the result of designation. They are owed to a naming in which the namable, the name and the named occur altogether.

*Scientist:* What you just said about naming is unclear to me.

*Scholar:* Probably that is connected with the nature of words.

*Scientist:* However, what you noted about designation, and about the fact that there is nothing nameless, is clearer to me.

*Scholar:* Because we can test it in the case of the name releasement.

*Teacher:* Or have tested it already.

*Scientist:* How so?

*Teacher:* What is it that you designated by the name releasement?

*Scientist:* If I may say so, not I but you have used this name.

*Teacher:* I, as little as you, have done the designating.

*Scholar:* Then who did it? None of us?

*Teacher:* Presumably, for in the region in which we stay everything is in the best order only if it has been no one's doing.

*Scientist:* A mysterious region where there is nothing for which to be answerable.

*Teacher:* Because it is the region of the word, which is answerable to itself alone.

*Scholar:* For us it remains only to listen to the answer proper to the word.

*Teacher:* That is enough; even when our telling is only a retelling of the answer heard . . .

*Scientist:* . . . and when it doesn't matter in this if there is a first retelling or who does it; all the more since one often doesn't know whose tale he retells.

*Scholar:* So let's not quarrel over who first introduced the name, releasement, let us consider only what it is we name by it.

*Scientist:* And that is waiting, as the experience I referred to indicates.

*Teacher:* And so not something nameless, but what is already designated. What is this waiting?

*Scientist:* Insofar as waiting relates to openness and openness is that-which-regions, we can say that waiting is a relation to that-which-regions.

*Teacher:* Perhaps it is even *the* relation to that-which-regions, insofar as waiting releases itself to that-which-regions, and in doing so lets that-which-regions reign purely as such.

x // *Scholar:* Then a relation to something would be the true relation if it were held in its own nature by that to which it relates.

*Teacher:* The relation to that-which-regions is waiting. And waiting means: to release oneself into the openness of that-which-regions.

*Scholar:* Thus to go into that-which-regions.

*Scientist:* That sounds as if before then we had been outside that-which-regions.

*Teacher:* That we were, and yet we were not. Insofar as we as thinking beings (that is, beings who at the same time re-present transcendently) stay within the horizon of transcendence, we are not and never could be outside that-which-regions. Yet the horizon is but the

*Scientist:* Now I see what was meant. The program of mathematics and the experiment are grounded in the relation of man as ego to the thing as object.

*Teacher:* They even constitute this relation in part and unfold its historical character.

*Scientist:* If any examination which focuses on what is a part of history is called historical, then the methodological analysis in physics is, indeed, historical.

*Scholar:* Here the concept of the historical signifies a mode of knowing and is understood broadly.

*Teacher:* Understood, presumably, as focused upon a history which does not consist in the happenings and deeds of the world.

*Scholar:* Nor in the cultural achievements of man.

*Scientist:* But in what else?

*Teacher:* The historical rests in that-which-regions, and in what occurs as that-which-regions. It rests in what, coming to pass in man, regions him into his nature.

*Scholar:* A nature we have hardly experienced as yet, supposing it has not yet been realized in the rationality of the animal.

*Scientist:* In such a situation we can do nothing but wait for man's nature.

*Teacher:* Wait in a releasement through which we belong to that-which-regions, which still conceals its own nature.

*Scholar:* We presage releasement to that-which-regions as the sought-for nature of thinking.

*Teacher:* When we let ourselves into releasement to that-which-regions, we will non-willing.

*Scientist:* Releasement is indeed the release of oneself from transcendental re-presentation and so a relinquishing of

§ 1. lassenheit: The mood of letting-be,  
As condition for determining the na-  
ture of thinking -

This nature is fixed in relaxment,  
namely non-willing.