

On Waiting

A comparative reading of Martin Heidegger's *Country Path Conversation (3)* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*



Martin Heidegger completed his third Country Path Conversation, titled "*Evening Conversation: In a Prisoner of War Camp in Russia, Between a Younger and an Older Man*," on May 8th, 1945, at Schloss Hausen, opposite Burg Wildenstein on the Danube. After the University of Freiburg was bombed, its faculties were temporarily relocated to Schloss Hausen, which had previously served as a youth hostel.

Irish writer, Samuel Beckett wrote *En attendant Godot* around 1947 in French while he was still under the impression of the destruction of French cities. In France, he had been active in the Resistance.

So, both dialogues were written at roughly the same time, and both authors had witnessed similar devastations—of lives, material goods, buildings, ideologies and civic order. The theme of waiting is no coincidence either. For countless people, the whole war had consisted in *waiting for it to end*, and when it did end, the waiting continued. It is also important to mention that Heidegger's two sons were in Russian captivity at the end of the war, along with many of his former students, and nobody knew if or when they were going to return.

In an addendum to his dialogue, Heidegger writes:

"The war is at an end, nothing changed, nothing new, on the contrary. What has long subsisted must now noticeably come out."¹

In this dialogue, Heidegger's Younger Man and Older Man are Wehrmacht soldiers held in

1 Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, Translated by Bret W. Davis, Indiana University Press

Russian captivity and forced to work in a camp, deep in an huge Russian forest. The forest stands in contrast to the oppressive conditions within the camp, even though those conditions are never described directly. The Younger Man speaks of a vision of healing that seems to arise from the mysterious, vast woods. This healing, he explains, has to do with a way of waiting that is entirely new to him.

Their conversation is highly philosophical, deeply affectionate, and marked by such mutual interest and understanding, so as to seem completely unrealistic, especially under such terrible conditions. They are consciously cultivating this mode of reflective dialogue because they feel such an urgent need for it.

Heidegger is also deliberately placing his philosophical dialogue in a truly existential setting, with life and death side by side. There is not the solitary thinker at his desk surrounded by books. There are two men, who have only their memory and their present thoughts to work with, after a day of heavy labour in a foreign land.

There is a heightened sense of urgency of philosophy, or rather, thinking.

The soldiers recall German poets and philosophers as they try to come to terms with the destruction — not only that caused by the war, but also a devastation that, they believe, had begun long before. They call this devastation *Verwüstung*, after Nietzsche, who wrote:

*"Die Wüste wächst: weh Dem, der Wüsten birgt!"*²

"The wasteland grows. Woe to him who hides wastelands within."

Waiting for Godot was described by Irish critic Vivian Mercier as a play in which 'nothing happens, twice'³ (that is: nothing happens – comma – twice) because is a two-act absurdist piece where the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for a man named Godot who never appears and could represent absence itself. They are not even certain on which day, or at which tree, they were supposed to meet him.

The play begins with Estragon struggling to put on his shoes and saying, "Nothing to be done." Vladimir, advancing with stiff, long strides, replies: "I am beginning to come round to that opinion."

The scenery is a kind of wasteland. There is a country road and one tree that seems to be dead. It is by this tree that the two elderly tramps—wait for the unknown man, in the hope that he might give them food, shelter, or a dry place to rest on some hay.

Both tramps are in poor health: Estragon suffers with his foot, Vladimir with his kidneys. They are underfed, sleep in a ditch, and feel like outcasts. Their situation leaves them irritated, bored, and agitated. Because of age, exhaustion, and deprivation, they suffer from serious memory problems, both short- and long-term. Sometimes, they can not distinguish morning from evening.

2 Also Sprach Zarathustra, Nietzsche

3 "The Uneventful Event", The Irish Times, February 18, 1956

Twice, they are visited by two other figures. Pozzo, the master, carries a whip and keeps Lucky, his slave, tied to a rope. Lucky hauls bags filled with sand. He has been with Pozzo for sixty years. At first he was treated as a kind of philosopher, teaching Pozzo how to think “deep things.” He was also a dancer, able to perform old dances like the baroque *allemande* or the *fandango*. But years of abuse have ruined both of them. Lucky has lost his skills. Now he can only perform a short dance he calls “the net,” in which he imagines himself caught and trapped. When he shows it to Vladimir and Estragon, they are not impressed. Pozzo then orders him to think for them, shouting: “Think, pig!”

What follows is a long monologue. Lucky begins speaking about a personal god, and then about the importance of people playing sports. But his thoughts are jumbled from the beginning to the end in a very Joycean manner. The speech grows so unbearable that the others finally throw themselves on Lucky to stop it.

So, even though the two dialogues are very different, they have in common *that nothing happens*. And also, that the perspective is *not a moral one*. Both also circle around many of the same themes: language, nihilism, pessimism, blindness, time, home and homelessness, forced labor, and waiting versus expectation.

The question arises whether we are dealing with two authors who are seeing the same phenomena in their parts of the world, or whether they are also reflecting a common philosophical tradition. And while Heidegger probably could not have known about Beckett in the 40s, Beckett at least knew about Heidegger.

So I will briefly touch upon three questions:

- How did Beckett find his style?
- Was he a philosophical writer? And:
- Did he know about Heidegger?

Beckett did not like to explain himself because he did not feel that it helped. He could not understand what his readers and audiences liked and they, in turn, could not understand him either. He almost never gave interviews. If you search for a Beckett interview today, the one you will most likely find is the so-called “Mute Interview,” recorded for Swedish television in 1969 after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. His wife Suzanne immediately called the award “a catastrophe.”

Beckett studied modern languages in Dublin and then moved to Paris after graduating because he had been offered a post as a teaching assistant in English at the *École Normale Supérieure*. In Paris, he met James Joyce, whom he greatly admired.

Ezra Pound, used to say that every poet (and indeed every soul) had one unique virtue and that a poet had to discover this virtue and survive the discovery long enough, until he could write in his own style.

Something like this must have happened to Beckett. He talked about it to his biographer, James Knowlson in 1989:

"I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding."

In 1961, Samuel Beckett claimed that philosophers had no influence on his thought. I quote from 2 interviews:

"- Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?
- I never read philosophers.
- Why not?
- I never understand anything they write.
- All the same, people have wondered if the existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works.
- There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms."⁴

He must have meant "I never read philosophers" in the present tense, as in, anymore, because there was a time where he was very serious about trying to understand philosophy.

Also in 1961, he said in a different interview to Tom Driver:

"What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other. One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess."⁵

However, philosophy had played an important role in his life, at least between 1928 and 1938, as Matthew Feldmann has pointed out in "Beckett and philosophy".⁶

Precisely in this time, Beckett had a friendship with a young French philosopher, Jean Beaufret, whom he had nicknamed the "Bowsprit". To his biographer Knowlson he said:

⁴ Interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède of 16 Feb. 1961

⁵ Beckett's interview with Tom Driver of Summer 1961 is also reprinted in Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage, 219. <https://rickontheater.blogspot.com/2018/01/beckett-by-madeleine.html>

⁶ BECKETT AND PHILOSOPHY, 1928-1938 Matthew Feldman, *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22

"A man I knew at the École Normale fairly well was Jean Beaufret who was the Heidegger expert, a very well-known philosopher and specialist on Heidegger. He came to the defence of Heidegger against accusations of being a Nazi and so on, you know. We used to go about together when I was the École Normale."⁷

Jean Beaufret, a philosopher who was also a part of the Résistance in the 40s, was the man who started the Heidegger reception in France. Directly after the war, he had written some questions to Heidegger and passed them on to a friend who was traveling to Freiburg with a request to submit them to Heidegger for a reply. And Heidegger replied to one of these questions and in his "Letter on Humanism".

In 1936/37, Beckett traveled through Germany because he could not find work in Dublin or give his life a more decisive direction. In Hamburg, Dresden and Munich, he was mostly going to museums and galleries.

Of course, in those years the National Socialist campaign against "degenerate art" ("entartete Kunst") had begun. He met a Swiss painter named Karl Ballmer in 1936⁸, who was not allowed to pursue his art anymore, and left for Basel in Switzerland.

In 1933 Ballmer had written a polemic directed at Martin Heidegger entitled "Aber, Herr Heidegger!". The book was about Heidegger's rectoral address in that year. In a letter from 1937⁹ Beckett mentions that a German actor named Kurt Eggers-Kestner had given him that book.

Beckett returned to France and after the German occupation of France in 1940, he joined the French Resistance, even though he could have returned to Ireland, that was a neutral country.

Language, Nihilism, and "Home"

und die findigen Tiere merken es schon,
daß wir nicht sehr verlässlich zu Haus sind
in der gedeuteten Welt.¹⁰

and the astute animals are beginning to realize
that we are not reliably at home
in the interpreted world.

7 qtd. In Knowlson, 112

8 "I have met a lot of friendly people here, mostly painters. Kluth, Ballmer, Grimm ... " letter to Thomas McGreevy 28th November 1936, Hamburg

9 Letter to Günter Albrecht, 30.03.1937

10 Duinischer Elegien, Rainer Maria Rilke

That is from the Duino Elegies by Rainer Maria Rilke

The 20th century was full of a new kind of mistrust in language, and deliberate misuse of language. There was propaganda for enormous masses of people in war and peace. There was a revolt of a group of modernists and there was the emergence of semiotics, the theory of signs.

As if - out of key with his time -, Heidegger was saying that language was the house of being.

So what did Beckett think about language and style? I quote from his famous a letter he had written in German to Axel Kaun in 1937, in perfect German by the way:

"It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask. Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it — be it something or nothing — begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today."¹¹

You can see how this manner of perception shaped the absurdist theater. And in its intention this is similar to the Dada movement of an earlier period. Some of the early Dadaists were literally trying to make people see that the newspapers contained nothing but effective misuse of language - that was really nonsense.

What Beckett writes here about the veil or the mask - also does have similarities to what Heidegger often described in many different ways. Let's remember Heidegger's line:

"The war is at an end, nothing changed, nothing new, on the contrary. What has long subsisted must now noticeably come out."

That could very well mean come out from behind a veil.

The two soldiers in Heidegger's text talk about the *Verwüstung*, the devastation of the earth and the annihilation of the human essence that can be seen as evil itself. But in order

¹¹ Letter to Axel Kaun, 1937

to truly think *the devastation*, one cannot think *about it morally*. Morality may be one of the veils or masks:

Der Jüngere: (...) Das Bösertige ist das Aufrührerische, das im Grimmigen beruht, so zwar, daß dieses Grimmige seinen Ingrim in gewisser Weise verbirgt, aber zugleich ständig damit droht. Das Wesen des Bösen ist der Ingrim des Aufruhrs, der nie ganz ausbricht, und der, wenn er ausbricht, sich noch verstellt und in seinem versteckten Drohen oft ist, als sei er nicht.

Younger Man: (...) Malice is insurgency, which rests in furiousness, indeed such that this furiousness [Grimmige] in a certain sense conceals its rage [Ingrim], but at the same time always threatens with it. The essence of evil is the rage of insurgency, which never entirely breaks out, and which, when it does break out, still disguises itself, and in its hidden threatening is often as if it were not.

In Heidegger's dialogue, the two soldiers are not talking about language. They talk about certain words and try to understand them and get to a deeper understanding by talking with each other.

What always stands out to me in Heidegger is that even when he does not speak *about* language, he is always speaking about it *in speaking*. One can see this very well in "What is called thinking" – there he speaks about thinking, but he does so by also **showing how** he thinks. It gives you the impression of seeing two things at once. Similarly, in this text, he speaks about *Verwüstung*, about war, but you can all the time see how he works his way through with language or in the interaction with language.

BUT, if **we are not reliably at home in the interpreted world**, the problem cannot lie only in language. In the case of Vladimir and Estragon, they cannot remember things, because they do not **see** things to begin with, they cannot see anything because there is nothing they consider worth **noticing**. Not only do they not know what day it is, or on which day their appointment was supposed to take place, they also do not know where they are or even what is right in front of them.

VLADIMIR : He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others.

ESTRAGON : What is it?

VLADIMIR : I don't know. A willow.

ESTRAGON : Where are the leaves?

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON : Looks to me more like a bush.

VLADIMIR: A shrub.

ESTRAGON : A bush!

VLADIMIR : A - ... What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?¹²

12 Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, Copyright © 1954 by Grove Press Translated from the original French text by the author

If you do not see if you have a tree or a bush in front of you, how can you properly talk about it and give the phenomenon a name?

This is Martin Heidegger 20 years after the war:

„We live in a strange, alienating, frightening time. The quicker the amount of information increases, the more decisively also the blindness increases for the phenomena. What's more, the more excessive the information, the less ability we have to see that modern thinking is becoming increasingly blind and turning into sightless calculation, which has only one chance: to calculate the effect and, possibly, the sensation or public stir.“¹³

-This is from 1965 in Heidegger's famous *Zollikoner Seminare*.

And so language also becomes an unclear and unimportant blathering.

VLADIMIR: (sure of himself) Good. We weren't here yesterday evening. Now, what did we do yesterday evening?

ESTRAGON: Do?

VLADIMIR: Try and remember.

ESTRAGON: Do . . . I suppose we blathered.

VLADIMIR: (controlling himself). About what?

ESTRAGON: Oh . . . this and that I suppose, nothing in particular. (With assurance.) Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century.¹⁴

In all of this, we can feel a neglect, an emotional numbness, even self-abandonment. There is a word for this in German, *Verwahrlosung*.

“Verwahrlosung” refers to a state of neglect, deterioration, or falling into disorder—both physically and socially. Its etymology can help English speakers understand the meaning more:

“Verwahrlosung” comes from the verb “verwahrlosen.” This is formed from several roots:

- “ver-” (a German prefix meaning “for-”, as in “forsaken” and “forgotten”, or indicating „away“)
- “wahr” comes from Old High German “wara” meaning “attention” or “care”, “wahren” today means to keep and “wahr” means true
- “-los” meaning “-less”
- “-ung” as a noun-forming suffix

¹³ Zollikoner Seminare, Protokolle, Zwiegespräche, Briefe, p. 96, my translation

¹⁴ Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, Copyright © 1954 by Grove Press Translated from the original French text by the author

So, “verwahrlosen” literally means “to become without care or attention.” The noun “Verwahrlosung” is the state or process of neglect—when something or someone is left without proper care, falling into disrepair, or deteriorating.

The word is often associated with something frightening, if you see a dog that is *verwahrlost*, you will probably react with fear because you don't know what kind of experiences have formed him and if he might react aggressively. The word is also often associated with poverty.

However, Heidegger sees this differently.

I will read the next quote from Heidegger and then talk about the word *Verwahrlosung*, that he uses there.

Der Ältere: Das Sein eines **Zeitalters der Verwüstung** bestünde dann gerade in der Seinsverlassenheit. Dergleichen ist allerdings schwer zu denken.

Der Jüngere: Jedenfalls vorerst und für den heutigen Menschen, der sich kaum einen Gedanken darüber macht, daß unter dem Anschein eines gesicherten, sich steigernden Lebens eine **Verwahrlosung** des Lebens, wenn nicht gar eine Verwehrung, sich ereignen könnte.

Older Man: The being of an **age of devastation** would then consist precisely in the abandonment of being. Such a matter is, however, difficult to think.

Younger Man: To be sure, it is difficult currently and for the contemporary human, who hardly gives thought to the fact that, under the appearance of a secured and improving life, a **disregard** (*neglect, forsakenness*)—if not indeed a barring (*inhibition, thwarting*)—of life could occur.

The translation by Bret Davis is very good, only he did not emphasize **more** the words that seem the most important **to me** in this passage, so I wrote some alternatives in a different color.

Since Heidegger wants to get to the source or the roots of things, he wonders where the *Verwahrlosung* starts. Not in the decline of one person in the social hierarchy nor in the whole society plunging into poverty, as happened in Germany twice. According to him, *Verwahrlosung*, a problem that we mostly associate with poverty, may already exist when a society is improving their standard of living.

The *Verwahrlosung*, the neglect of life, that is also a *Verwehrung*, an inhibition of life, are a part of the process that Heidegger identifies with Nietzsche's *Verwüstung*.

And Heidegger considers this devastation to be a *Welt-Ereignis*, a world event. And this is

so because it comes forth from Being itself.

I quote one of Nietzsche's prophetic passages from the fragments of "The Will to Power", that seems to speak of *nihilism as a world-event* because *necessity, Notwendigkeit*, is at work here.

"What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related even now; *for necessity itself* is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; (...). For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect." (The Will to Power, Nietzsche)

A small side-note, the translation *reflect* for *besinnen*, has the disadvantage that *a river that no longer reflects* sounds like a very fancy metaphor *and it is not in the original*.

The German *sich besinnen*, means a range of things, *to come to one's senses, to think, to contemplate, to meditate, to remember, to recollect*.

Heidegger explains Nietzsche's "the wasteland grows" more detailed in a text that is very related to this country path dialogue, in "Was heißt Denken". I quote Gray's translation:

"A generation ago it was "The Decline of the West." Today we speak of "loss of center." People everywhere trace and record the decay, the destruction, the imminent annihilation of the world. We are surrounded by a special breed of reportorial novels that do nothing but wallow in such deterioration and depression. On the one hand, that sort of literature is much easier to produce than to say something that is essential and truly thought out; but on the other hand it is already getting tiresome. The world, men find, is not just out of joint but tumbling away into the nothingness of absurdity. Nietzsche, who from his supreme peak saw far ahead of it all, as early as the eighteen-eighties had for it the simple, because **thoughtful**, words: "The wasteland grows." It means, the devastation is growing wider. Devastation is more than destruction. Devastation is more unearthly than destruction. Destruction only sweeps aside all that has grown up or been built up so far; but devastation blocks all future growth and prevents all building. (...) Mere destruction sweeps aside all things including even nothingness, while devastation on the contrary establishes and spreads everything that blocks and prevents."¹⁵

When Beckett was talking **against** philosophy earlier, he used the word "mess". He said: "I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now *is simply the mess*."

¹⁵ What is called thinking? Martin Heidegger. Translation of Was Heisst Denken? By Wieck and Gray, p. 29

I would like to point out that this *mess* could very well be another word for *Verwüstung*, devastation.

And in "Waiting for Godot", the devastation has completed incorporating everything into its wasteland. Memory is blocked. For example Vladimir sounds like a Slavic name, but he does not seem to remember where he came from. Seeing is blocked. When the businessman Pozzo returns in the second act, he is suddenly blind and Lucky is dumb. Thinking is not possible, suicide is not possible.

VLADIMIR : The tree!

ESTRAGON : The tree?

VLADIMIR : Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON : I'm tired.

VLADIMIR : Look at it.

They look at the tree.

ESTRAGON : I see nothing.

In the Heidegger dialogue, the younger man tells the older that he has experienced a healing. And the older man then says that in order to understand his healing, he would also have to know of his wound or pain.

Younger Man: Since having been allowed to experience what is healing early this morning, I can also name for you the wound that is beginning to heal. Throughout all the years of military service in the war, indeed in a certain sense already prior to that during my study at the university, it was as if my essence were walled up and wholly expelled from the open expanse of thinking. At the same time, however, I was allowed to presage and learned to presage this thinking like a distant land.
(...)

The burning pain is that we were not permitted to be there [da sein] for the unnecessary.

At the end of the text there is a supplement, where Heidegger repeats this and adds an explanation. I will read the German first because it is very poetic:

"Der brennende Schmerz, daß wir nicht für das Unnötige da sein dürfen und nur dem Nützlichen verknechtet, das für sich das Nichts ist und so nichtig, daß es die tiefste Entwürdigung des Menschenwesens betreibt."

"The burning pain that we are not allowed to be there for the unnecessary and are enslaved only to the useful, which by itself is the nothing and so null that it drives forth the deepest degradation of the human-being."

This is very easy to understand for anyone who has practiced an art. A little girl who starts

ballet is looked at by the teacher if her anatomy would permit her to become a professional dancer and make money with it. When you paint pictures, you are asked, who is going to buy them. When you write a book, you have to have an idea of your target audience. And that means that you have to change your writing to meet their expectations. Is it understandable to them? Is it entertaining to them?

If you are a serious writer this can make it impossible to write what you mean to write. It is not possible to make something difficult sound easy and feel easy and yet, to convey it.

In one situation, the older man says to the younger man:

"All of this is, of course, not easy."

And the younger replies:

"That this, namely thinking what is essential, is supposed to be easy is also a demand that comes only from the spirit of the devastation."

And Heidegger certainly struggled with people telling him to write more understandably and that truth must be understandable to all. But Heidegger was calling notions into question that we are so used to that it takes a lot of effort to think them through. For example, the unity of perceptio and appetitus, as the oneness of perception and appetite, as Leibniz saw it in his monad. *Perceptio, is an aspect subjectivity and appetitus, can be regarded as the will.*

Heidegger is however trying to convey a different vision of life. Life in the widest sense.

The younger man talks about the abandonment of all life by explaining:

"And this abandonment extends to such depths that the wasteland allows for nothing to emerge of itself, in its emergence to unfold itself, and in unfolding to call others into emerging together."

„Der Jüngere: (...) Welche Verlassenheit so tief reicht, daß die Öde nichts zulässt, was von sich aus aufgeht, in seinem Aufgang sich entfaltet und in der Entfaltung Anderes in das Mitaufgehen ruft“

When you think of life as will and subjectivity, *Wille und Vorstellung*, as Schopenhauer put it, then your actions will be driven by a goal, an effect, you will wonder "is this useful to me?".

Vladimir and Estragon, on their side, have given up everything except the *useful*, that is the hope of Godot coming and giving them food and a dry and warm place to sleep.

When they see someone like Pozzo they immediately think how they can get something

from him.

VLADIMIR : (vehemently).Let's go!

Pozzo : I hope I'm not driving you away. Wait a little longer, you'll never regret it!

ESTRAGON : (scenting charity). We're in no hurry.

In the second act, Pozzo is suddenly blind, he falls on the ground and cries for help. Since Pozzo had once given Estragon a chicken bone to chew on, that is what he thinks of.

ESTRAGON : We should ask him for the bone first. Then if he refuses we'll leave him there.

VLADIMIR : You mean we have him at our mercy?

ESTRAGON : Yes.

VLADIMIR : And that we should subordinate our good offices to certain conditions?

ESTRAGON : What?

VLADIMIR : That seems intelligent all right.

And while this kind of thinking is very understandable in their situation, it should not come as a surprise that they have lost everything, except a hope for something useful, that in the end might never materialize.

And this is also the difference in waiting in the two dialogues. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting FOR something, they are expecting something and this is why they are impatient for time to go by.

The two soldiers in the Heidegger text are trying to cultivate waiting, without waiting for something nor for nothing. Just wait for the coming itself.

Heidegger ends his dialogue with the older man telling the following story:

In my student days I copied it down from a historiological account of Chinese philosophy because it struck me, though I did not quite understand it earlier. This evening it became bright around me for the first time, and probably because of that, this conversation also occurred to me. The names of the two thinkers escape me.

The conversation goes like this:

The one said: "You are talking about the unnecessary."

The other said: "A person must first have recognized the unnecessary before one can talk with him about the necessary. The earth is wide and large, and yet, in order to stand, the human needs only enough space to be able to put his foot down. But if directly next to his foot a crevice were to open up that dropped down into the underworld, then would the space where he stands still be of use to him?"

The one said: "It would be of no more use to him."

The other said: "From this the necessity of the unnecessary is clearly apparent."