



An Analysis of Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics' Approach to the Nothing from a Muslim Philosopher's Perspective

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Abstract. Heidegger's most significant critique of metaphysics is that the history of metaphysics is the history of the forgetting of being. However, he also criticizes metaphysics for forgetting the nothing. Metaphysics fails to adequately address both being and nothingness, neglecting the nothing and treating it as a conceptual abstraction without objective reference. Metaphysics reduces discussions of the nothing to mere figurative expressions. However, by drawing on the approach of a contemporary Muslim philosopher who examines the the problem of the nothing in particular and the fact-itself and reality in general, and the division of being into general, real, and specific, we can respond to Heidegger's critique within the framework of metaphysics. According to this perspective, the nothing, like being, is an integral part of reality in a general and real sense. The nothing, with its nothingness, manifests itself in the external world without being reduced to the being. Thus, Heidegger's statement that "nothing nihilates (or noths) itself" finds metaphysical justification.

Keywords: Nothing; Metaphysics; Fact-Itself; Heidegger; Muslim philosopher.

Summary: 1. Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics; Metaphysics' incapability of dealing with the nothing; 2. The Conception of Muslim Philosophers of the nothing; 3. Fayyāzi's conception of *Nafs al-Amr*; 4. The place of the nothing in the conception of *Nafs al-Amr*; 5. Two Arguments for the True Realization of the Nothing; 6. Objections of Islamic Philosophers and their Response; 7. Properties of the nothing from the Viewpoint of Fayyāzi; 8. Metaphysical Response to Heidegger; 9. Conclusion; 10. Bibliographic references.

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Heidegger is one of the most significant critics of classical metaphysics. In his opinion, metaphysics has accomplished its whole possibility and now a different way of thinking would be needed. Whatever the new way is, it is not metaphysics. Therefore, Heidegger does not consider himself as a metaphysician or even as a philosopher, in its conventional sense of the words. For him, 'philosophy in fact is the enemy of thinking' (Spiegelberg 1994, p. 352). Heidegger's major criticism of metaphysics is that it 'formerly has been engaged in determining the meaning of being, but the outcome of all determination is the theory of existents rather than Being as such' (Acikgenc 1393, p. 68) and therefore the history of metaphysics is the history of forgetfulness of Being and dealing with beings. According to him, metaphysics is 'represented as an ontical study as opposed to ontological study' (Acikgenc, 1393, p. 68). In other words, metaphysical thinking is essentially ontical and substitutes thinking about beings for thinking about Being (Abdolkarimi 2018, p. 374). Since metaphysics holds that Being, firstly, is the most general concept, secondly, is undefinable and thirdly, is self-evident, it is unable to accurately ask the real question about Being itself (Heidegger 1985, p. 21). In this way, in every era and for each philosopher a being considered as the supreme being replaces Being:

In the course of this history [of western thought] certain distinctive of Being have come into view: the *ego cogito* of Descartes, the subject, the 'I', reason, spirit, person. But these all remain uninterrogated as to their Being and its structure, in accordance with the thoroughgoing way in which the question of Being has been neglected. (Heidegger 1985, p. 44)

However, Heidegger expresses another significant criticism of metaphysics. For him, metaphysics is incapable of thinking about the nothing which is not less than Being for firstly, it cannot be regarded as a thing, and secondly, it is undiscoverable as Being is so. For this reason, both Being and nothing are empty words in metaphysics: 'The Being that we are asking about is almost like Nothing ... Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing ... The word "Being" is then finally just an empty word. It means nothing actual, tangible, real' (Heidegger 2000, p. 38). In fact, Heidegger seeks to finalize his criticism of metaphysics by posing the problem of the nothing, which is firstly denied by 'Parmenides of Elea by asserting that being was the only reality' (Kamal 2010, p. 121). He earlier indicated that metaphysics is incapable of thinking about Being (it only thinks about beings). Now he is trying to demonstrate that 'in the history of metaphysical thinking in the west from Plato to Nietzsche, nothingness is thought to be negative' (Kamal 2010, p. 138) and therefore metaphysics is unable to think authentically about the nothing, which contradicts Being, as well. In the present article we aim to offer an appropriate response to Heidegger's criticism from the standpoint of metaphysics. We argue that the ideas put forward by the metaphysicians should not be considered as the final words about metaphysics and that the horizon of metaphysics is open, as the horizon of Being is open too. We draw upon some of the considerations of Islamic philosophy in order to discuss the nothing and find a response to Heidegger's criticism. It seems that the conception of some contemporary Muslim philosophers of the nothing, which arises from their view of *Nafs al-Amr* (fact-itself), can be considered as constructive in this area and remove the ambiguities that Heidegger appealed to in order to attack metaphysics, an attack that seems appropriate, not in terms of the essence of metaphysics, but by virtue of the existing metaphysics.

Before starting the main discussion, one point should be noted. Heidegger's discussion of the nothing has various aspects. We shall address only one of Heidegger's critiques of the philosophers in this regard, i.e. metaphysics is incapable of thinking about the nothing without facing a contradiction, and that the metaphysics considers the nothing as a mentally posited thing without any objective reference to which it corresponds. In fact, Heidegger has attacked metaphysics in context of metaphysics to clarify that metaphysics is incapable of conceptual thinking about the nothing, a kind of thinking which it claims to be. We will only try to provide a response to this criticism and we will not deal with other dimensions of Heidegger's opinions in this regard. For instance, 'Heidegger deals with Nothingness in existential analysis of Dasein in his fundamental ontology. According to him, it is revealed in the experience of Dasein in the world' (Kamal, 2010, p. 124). And he relates his discussion of the nothing with death; death is the absolute annihilation of Dasein (human existence), by virtue of which besides the non-existence of Dasein, the world of Dasein becomes non-existent too. Even though, Dasein cannot experience its pure nothingness- since when death comes, there will be no longer Dasein – being-toward-death is one of the main elements of Dasein which allows it to understand nothing. However, we will not study these aspects of Heidegger's discussion of the nothing, apart from the points which were already highlighted.

1. Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics; Metaphysics' incapability of dealing with the nothing

In Heidegger's view, metaphysics tries to suppress the nothing due to its ontic view but fails to do so; because metaphysics, on the one hand, considers the nothing to be pure nullity or absurdity and on the other hand, regards it as a being, a thing, or an object. Anyhow, the nothing should be discussed, and as soon as discussing it, we face contradiction, in that, metaphysics should first pose the nothing as a being and then, speak about it. Thus, the law of non-contradiction will be broken, since the nothing was not supposed to have existed, on that account, and it will not be discussed, but it is being discussed.

The commonly cited ground rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradiction is to be avoided, universal "logic" itself, lays low this question. For thinking, which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing. Since it remains wholly impossible for us to make the nothing into an object, have we not already come to the end of our inquiry into the nothing—assuming that in this question "logic" is of supreme importance, that the intellect is the means, and thought the way, to conceive the nothing originally and to decide about its possible exposure? (Heidegger, 1993, p. 97).

Thus, by proposing the problem of nothing, Heidegger seeks to challenge the metaphysics. According to him, reducing the nothing into a being is an indication of incapability of logic and metaphysics in facing the nothing. We assume that there is something to investigate and it is the nothing. Accordingly, the law of non-contradiction would be called into question (Ahmadi 2007, pp. 141–142). Metaphysicians have no choice but to deny the principle and authority of logic

when facing the issue of the nothing. The defenders of analytical philosophy, after Carnap, are struggling to prove that Heidegger by denying the authority of logic makes discussion impossible for himself. Carnap remained in the world of logic so that Heidegger would show him that his logical principles have become invalid in that world, because metaphysical foundation of the modern science and logic have no other way to the problem of the nothing without self-contradiction (Ahmadi 2007, p. 143). Heidegger's main point is that one must think about the nothing, about the nothing itself, but metaphysics is unable to do so, therefore, another approach and way of thinking would be needed.

Now the question is that whether the nothing is merely a mental thing, a mentally constructed thing or an act of reason, or the mental nothing is a concept derived from the external nothing? Heidegger accepted the second alternative:

However, according to the reigning and never-challenged doctrine of "logic," negation is a specific act of the intellect. How then can we in our question of the nothing, indeed in the question of its questionability, wish to brush the intellect aside? Are we altogether sure about what we are presupposing in this matter? Do not the 'not,' negatedness, and thereby negation too represent the higher determination under which the nothing falls as a particular kind of negated matter? Is the nothing given only because the "not," i.e., negation, is given? Or is it the other way around? Are negation and the "not" given only because the nothing is given? That has not been decided; it has not even been raised expressly as a question. We assert that the nothing is more original than the "not" and negation (Heidegger 1993, p. 97).

It could be said that distortion of the nothing by metaphysics is in opposition to the established principles of Phenomenology. Phenomenology consists in encountering anything as they appear themselves; whereas metaphysics fails to think about the nothing itself, and it considers it as a being, then makes judgment about it. Heidegger writes: 'If the nothing itself is to be questioned as we have been questioning it, then it must be given beforehand. We must be able to encounter it.' (Heidegger 1993, p. 98), and 'the nothing itself nihilates' (Heidegger 1993, p. 103). This is Heidegger's famous word. What is he trying to say? It seems that he wished to think about the nothing through nothing itself. He relates the verb 'to nihilate' to the nothing in order to prevent reducing it to beings in describing the nothing. However, Heidegger believes that metaphysicians reduce the nothing to being. In fact, in the history of metaphysics, there has always been, or at least often is, a connection between two assumptions. One assumption does not view the nothing as real while the other approves the principle of non-contradiction, as evidenced by the fact that metaphysicians on the one hand, have considered being qua being as the subject-matter of metaphysics, and on the other hand, they have held that it is contradictory to the nothing. This means that the nothing is first and foremost not a metaphysical issue. Even Hegel, who takes the nothing to have a true realization, first calls into question the principle of non-contradiction and then claims that the nothing is real (Hegel 1986).

2. The Conception of Muslim Philosophers of the nothing

In order to clarify the Muslim philosophers' standpoint regarding the nothing, firstly, some of their views regarding the nothing³ will be pointed out and then, the views of some Islamic theologians and mystics will be presented. According to Muslim philosophers, the subject-matter of philosophy is being, which contradicts the nothing and philosophy is a science studying the essential accidents of being. Therefore, it is obvious that they fail to accept the discussion of the nothing as an authentic philosophical discussion. Thus, they consider it as a peripheral discussion: 'discussion of the nothing in philosophy, the subject-matter of which is being, is a peripheral discussion'. (Mesbāh Yazdi 2014, p. 68). In the fourth stage of *Nihāyah al-Hikmah (The Utmost of Philosophy)*, concerned with the modalities of being, Tabātabāi stressed that the initial purpose of this discussion is dividing being into necessary and possible and discussing the properties of those two. However, the discussion of impossible and its properties is the secondary and derivative purpose⁴ (Tabātabāi 2013, V. 1, p. 69). Mulla Sadra maintains that 'in *Nafs al-Amr* (fact-itself), there is no such thing as nothing' (Mulla Sadra 1981, V. 1, p. 350); in the same vein, Mirdāmād writes that 'the absolute nothing, has no essence' (Mirdāmād 1988, p. 179). Similarly, Ibn Sina has denied the realization of the nothing (Ibn Sina 1984, vol. 1, p. 24). In the Islamic philosophy, the discussion of the nothing can be regarded as an epistemological discussion not ontological one:

Suppose that Zayd's existence has been originated twenty years ago, and he still exists up to now. The main proposition that is true is that 'Zayd did not exist before twenty years ago'... the primal state of mind is the removal of Zayd's existence before twenty years ago not to affirm anything... However, after removing Zayd from reality, mind considers Zayd's non-existence in reality, and says: now that Zayd had not existed before these twenty years, therefore, there was Zayd's non-existence before twenty years, i. e, mind assumes non-existence as a positive matter of fact. The primal state of mind is to deny Zayd's existence and to remove it. The secondary state of mind, which considers [the nothing as something], is to posit Zayd's non-existence before these twenty years in place of its existence... But why does mind do that? Because it needs that, i.e. when it sees the issue from this viewpoint, knowing [and talking] become easier (Motahari 2008, V. 1, pp. 535–536).

Motahari writes elsewhere:

That we ascribe subsistence or reality to non-existence [or the nothing] is just a poetic and mental imagination. It may seem beautiful poetically but it has no philosophical significance... There is no territory but the territory of being. The nothing is imagination and assumption in our mind (Motahari 2008, V. 2, pp. 52–53).

It is worth noting that in the works of Muslim thinkers, there are expressions that indicate reality of the nothing and its significance. For example, in some places,

³ Islamic philosophy is a kind of metaphysics, thus, proposing instances from it can be relevant to the discussion. Especially with respect to the nothing, the Muslim philosophers have the same manner of thinking as Heidegger.

⁴ Impossibility means lack of necessity, and for that reason, according to Muslim philosophers, discussion of the nothing cannot originally be considered as a philosophical discussion.

Al-Ghazali implies that reality is inclusive of both existence and non-existence and speaks of the possibility of happening of the non-existence: ‘the happening of any thing because of eternal will is conceivable, it makes no difference whether that thing is existence or non-existence’ (al-Ghazali 1963, p. 62). Such an interpretation can be found in the works of Mulla Sadra too (Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. 1, p. 125; 2003, vol. 1, p. 146). According to him, ‘Being and Nothing are meaningful only within the context of reality-Being in which these two notions are mutually exclusive’ (Acikgenc 1393, p. 75). Furthermore, in a different way, in Mulla Sadra’s thought, the nothing ‘seems to be a serious ontological problem: if Being is the only reality, and there is nothing else besides Being, then how can we talk about Becoming?’ (Kamal 2010, p. 124). Similarly, in his *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Averroes states that if someone says something is so or is not so, his statement is necessarily either true or false; for if his statement ‘corresponds to the outside of the soul [or mind] - whether it exists or not - it will necessarily be true; otherwise, it will necessarily be false’ (Averroes 1998, p. 455). His remark implies that the nothing, like being, has a kind of realization outside the soul or mind.

However, it is not easy to infer the belief in the nothing from such remarks; because, firstly such statements do not clearly and explicitly signify that the nothing has a true realization, and according to other expressions of Muslim thinkers, they can be interpreted as mentally posited reality. Secondly, such thinkers, assuming that they have accepted the reality of the nothing, have not explained how the reality of the nothing can be reconciled with the principle of non-contradiction?

Another issue which can be considered in this regard is how Fayyazi’s belief that the nothing has a realization (which will be explained) is related to the Mu’tazilites’ view about the objectification of the nothing. Most Mu’tazilites divide things into subsistent and negative. Then, they consider negative things as limited to impossibilities and divide the subsistent things into possible beings and non-beings, so they believe in a mode of subsistence for the possible non-beings (Jorjani 1998, vol. 2, p. 66). But this view of the Mu’tazilites is different from what Fayyazi states about the nothing; because firstly, Fayyazi does not distinguish between existence and subsistence, rather, he divides both into general, real, and specific. Secondly, Fayyazi also considers the nothing of the impossible to have a real essence whereas the Mu’tazilites consider the non-existence of the impossible as having true *Nafs al-Amr*; furthermore, they include the nothing of the impossible in the negative and do not hold any realization for it. Some Mu’tazilites have added to various kinds of the subsistent the modes that are neither existent nor non-existent (Jorjani 1998, vol. 2, p. 67). However, this is different from how Fayyazi views the nothing as he does not believe in mode as a mediator between existence and non-existence.

Viewing the problem of the nothing from a different standpoint, mysticism takes into account the fixed entities. For mystics, the fixed entities are the forms and theophanies of divine names (Yazdanpanah 2013, p. 463) that do not possess the external existence (Qaisari 1996, p. 1025), but have a kind of subsistence. Explaining the fixed entities, one of the contemporary scholars of mysticism writes:

It should be noted that the essential subsistence of things is different from their existential subsistence; therefore, they have a kind of subsistence when they do not exist, and they have certain properties of *Nafs al-Amr* that the true propositions indicate (Eshaghi 2018, p. 71).

In his final analysis of the mystics' words, Mulla Sadra believes that the mystics do not think of the fixed entities as absolutely non-existent, but they hold that they exist in the divine knowledge. These entities have an intelligible existence and are only non-existent in a sense that are not found in the phenomenal world outside of the divine knowledge, thus they exist in one sense (scientific subsistence), and in another sense (objective existence) they does not exist (Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. 6, p. 187). Rumi's viewpoint in this regard has been presented in the following poem:

In non-existence seeds are just a form,
 Existent with the Lord, they must transform,
 And in the end our names from God dictate
 How we will truly be and what's our fate (Rumi 2004, p. 79).

However, even if in the Islamic intellectual history one can find instances of remarks indicating the reality of the nothing, three important points distinguish Fayyazi's distinct formulation of the nothing from such remarks:

1- Fayyazi explicitly considers the nothing as having the real *Nafs al-Amr* and the objective reference outside the mind.

2- He has clearly defined the place of the nothing in his account of *Nafs al-Amr* and has considered the particular nothing and being as divisions of real existence.

3- He has explained the relationship between the reality of the nothing and the principles of the impossibility of negation/co-existence of two contradictories and not only has not regarded the reality of nothing as requiring the co-existence of contradictories, but also has interpreted the reality of the nothing as necessary for the two basic principles.

In our opinion, metaphysicians' words should not be treated as the final words of metaphysics, and the horizon of metaphysics is open. This article is an attempt to provide a metaphysical answer to Heidegger's criticism of metaphysics in this regard on the basis of Fayyazi's views about the nothing rooted in his interpretation of the *Nafs al-Amr*.

3. Fayyāzi's conception of *Nafs al-Amr*

Nafs al-Amr is equivalent to being in its general sense, i.e. a being that includes every realization, because every sense has a realization proper to itself. Being or reality in its general sense comprises the following:

1. The first one is the real being or being which has truth and reality in the external world independently of any consideration of mind. It has two instances: A. being in its specific sense or being that contradicts the nothing, or being that philosophers considered it as the subject-matter of philosophy, such as the existence of the sky and the earth; and B. nothing, like the nothing of giants.

2. The second one is mentally posited being that its realization depends on positing of mind and cannot be realized without this positing; this type comprises three kinds:

A. mental positing or a *Nafs al-Amr* that is mentally posited or constructed; although it does not enjoy external reality, it has been abstracted from objective reality. In other words, even though it does not possess external reality, it is an abstraction from a thing enjoying external reality. When mind analyzes an external,

real thing and contemplates it, it obtains a mentally posited thing. Thus, although mentally posited things are abstract things, intellect merely discovers them without the need to add anything from itself. Rational or *Nafs al-Amri* constructions, such as the quiddity as such, which do not have independent realities, are abstractions of things - like human nature possessing objective reality. Therefore, the quiddity as such is not the real thing, but is the *rational or Nafs al-Amri* abstraction.

B. Rational consensus construction, which firstly, has not external reality, and secondly, has not an origin of abstraction in the external world, i.e., unlike the former one, is not an abstraction of the things enjoying objective reality. However, its positing is merely due to the positer, and is accepted by the rational subjects. That is to say, they assign a given effect and purpose to it, rather than positing it without purpose or on the basis of delusion and imagination. Some instances of this kind of being are conjugality, ownership, and divorce.

C. Imaginary and pure mentally posited thing, firstly, does not have an external reality, secondly, does not possess a real origin of abstraction, but its positing is based on the will of a rational subject, and thirdly, there is no rational purpose for it by consensus, but like giants and phoenix is merely the product of imagination (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, pp. 89–90, pp. 454–460).

In sum, general being means anything that exists, in its most general sense that can be considered for being. This general being includes any realization, either real, external or mentally posited, either true realization contradicting the nothing or the realization of the nothing itself. There is one thing similar to all these realizations and it is being, reality in the most general sense. Then, whatever there is in its general sense, sometimes (1) it is truly there (real being), like the sky, sometimes, (2) it exists in the area of mind-constructions (mentally posited being) like the quiddity as such. And whatever is truly real, sometimes, (1 A) contradicts the nothing (specific being), like being of the sky, sometimes (2 A) the construction of its being is *Nafs al-Amri* (mental construction), like positing being of quiddity as such, and sometimes, (2 B) positing its being is rational consensus, like the consideration of ownership, and sometimes (2 C) it is purely imaginary, like being of giant.

4. The place of the nothing in the conception of *Nafs al-Amr*

As already discussed, according to Fayyāzi's approach to the *Nafs al-Amr*, the nothing - like its contradictory (specific being) – enjoys a kind of true realization and is not a concept without a true corresponding object. Providing an example could be helpful to clarify the issue. When we say that the pencil is not in the room, are we informing a matter of fact or positing the nothing for non-existence of the pencil in the room? According to Fayyāzi, the former is definitely correct. Is pencil's not-being in the room created by our minds or it really is not in the room, whether or not we know? Everyone confirms that the pencil's not-being is in the room and this does not depend on our minds, understanding and positing. Is there any difference between when we say that the pencil is in the room, and when we say that the pencil is not in the room, in this regard that both propositions inform us about two facts independent of our minds? It seems that the answer is no. The nothing and being are different in contradicting each other, but there is no difference between them in that they are both real or indicate real things.

However, according to Muslim philosophers in general, the phrase “the pencil is not in the room”, is a figurative statement of reality. Indeed, there are pens, scissors, tables, etc. in the room. This is a true statement of the reality, but this reality can be expressed as follows: the pencil is not in the room. Pencil’s not-being in the room is a mental, figurative statement of the reality that there are pens, scissors, tables, etc. in the room.

5. Two Arguments for the True Realization of the Nothing

Fayyāzi, proposed four arguments in order to prove that the nothing really exists. These arguments are of two types: In arguments 1, 2, and 3, through the impossibility of negation two contradictories and in 4 through the impossibility of co-existence of two contradictories, he argues for reality of the nothing. For him, the nothing’s failure to be real results in both the negation of two contradictories and the co-existence of two contradictories. Here, for the sake of brevity, arguments 1 and 4 will be offered.

The First Argument:

1. If in the real world, a limited being were realized, certainly it is non-existent outside the limits of its being, because the limitation of a being requires that it exists merely in its limitations of its own and be non-existent outside those limitations; because if the limited being exists beyond the limits of its being, it means that it is limitless, while the assumption was that it is limited.
2. If the existence of that limited being is non-existent beyond the limitations of its being, then, its non-existence will exist beyond those limitations; because if beyond the limitation of existence of that being, neither its being nor its not-being exists, then it will require the negation of two contradictories, which is impossible. Therefore, non-existence of that limited being exists beyond the limits of its being.
3. However, in the real world, the limited beings exist.

Consequently, non-existence of a being beyond its limits exists in the real world (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 378).

The forth Argument:

1. Being and the nothing contradict each other and their contradiction is a type of opposition.
2. The receptacle of the realization of the two opposites is one, i.e. if one of the opposites is in the receptacle of reality, the other one will be non-existent at the same receptacle, and in the case of its non-existence the other one is realized in that receptacle, and if one of them is realized in the vessel of consideration or mind, the other is non-existent in the same vessel. Because if the realization receptacle of the two opposites is not the same, co-existence of the two opposites will not be impossible, whereas it is certainly impossible. For instance, existence of Zayd in the external world, opposes and contradicts non-existence of Zayd in the same world, not with non-existence of Zayd in the mind or consideration, because existence of Zayd in the external world is

compatible with his non-existence in the mind, and this will not be absurd. Thus, existence of Zayd in the external world does not oppose and contradict his non-existence in mind, but it opposes and contradicts non-existence of Zayd in the same vessel.

3. Being in its specific sense is a true reality and realizes in the receptacle of true reality.
4. The nothing that contradicts and opposes being should be realized in the receptacle of true reality, i.e. if its being is not realized in the same receptacle, certainly, its not-being will be realized in the same vessel, because if the nothing did not have a kind of true reality and its actuality is merely mental, it would not contradict and oppose the real being and would be compatible with it.

Consequently, the nothing like being in its specific sense has true reality, (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, pp. 378–380).

6. Objections of Islamic Philosophers and their Response

At first glance, it seems that the nothing is a matter of fact and those two arguments presented endorse this understanding. But why did some Islamic philosophers go into so much trouble to demonstrate that the nothing is merely a mental concept? Why do they deviate from the initial understanding? From the Islamic philosophers' perspective, if the nothing is an actual fact, we will face the co-existence of two contradictories. If one says that the nothing of the pencil is in the room, it means that the nothing exists, and this is the co-existence of two contradictories. Consequently, they hold that the nothing has no referent in the external world and is constructed by mind⁵. This objection made them believe that the external world is filled with being and outside of mind there is no such thing as nothing.

However, the philosophers who raise the objection did not take this point into consideration that by giving this answer they themselves fall into the negation of two contradictories: if neither the pencil nor its not-being were in the room, then the negation of two contradictories would occur⁶. Yet, if one considers *Nafs al-Amr* as explained above, and if one distinguishes among the general being (divisible into real and mentally posited being) and real being (divisible into specific being and the nothing) and specific being (contradictory to the nothing), then neither the co-existence of two contradictories nor the negation of two contradictories will occur, and we will not have to suppress the nothing due to which we will face the negation of two contradictories and nor will we have to accept the contradiction, but the nothing exists and the co-existence of two contradictories is impossible. But

⁵ In our opinion, in order to solve the problem of the nothing there is no need to go beyond metaphysics.

⁶ Heidegger attacks metaphysics with respect to this point. Heidegger's argument against metaphysics can be formulated as follows:

- Metaphysics considers the co-existence of two contradictories to be impossible.
- If nothing exists in the external world and is not a mental thing, the co-existence of two contradictories will occur.
- But the nothing exists in the external world.
- Then, the co-existence of two contradictories is possible.
- But metaphysics considers the co-existence of two contradictories to be impossible.
- Conclusion: Metaphysics is invalid.

How? The nothing exists, its existence is subsumed under general real being⁷ and its existence is not a kind of specific being. When the pencil is not in the room, then, the pencil's not-being is in the room. However, the word "is" in this sentence means real being which is divisible into being and nothing and is itself the kind of divisions of general being. In other words, the main problem is the ambiguity of the word "being" which includes both general being and specific being. When one says that the pencil's not-being is in the room, what she means is that, first, it enjoys general realization, second, this realization is not mental but it is real. However, the not-being of the pencil contradicts specific being of the pencil, but this not-being does not contradict real being, but is an instance of it. Thus, the co-existence of two contradictories is impossible, i.e. not-being of the pencil is not in coincidence with specific being of the pencil; in other words, the pencil cannot both exist and not exist in the room. Not-being of the pencil in the room enjoys real general being, i.e. it is not a mentally posited thing. Because if we deny this general realization, then, we negate two contradictories together. Then the problem of negation of two contradictories, which is impossible, will be resolved.

7. Properties of the nothing from the Viewpoint of Fayyāzi

Now we will discuss the properties of the nothing from Fayyāzi's perspective⁸. For Fayyāzi:

- Discussion of the nothing, is an authentic philosophical discussion, not a digressive one (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 371). In his opinion, the subject-matter of philosophy is being in its general sense not in the specific sense (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 84–92). Therefore, discussion of the nothing is as philosophical as discussion of the specific being. According to this view, the nothing is not a digressive, insignificant, and non-philosophical issue. Certainly, being, contradictory to the nothing, is not the subject-matter of philosophy as real being which is divisible into being and nothing is not. But rather, subject-matter of philosophy is general being which is divisible into real and mentally posited being.

- The nothing possesses reality, thingness, and true existence in general sense and its reality is nullity and nothingness. The nothing, like its contradictory, being, enjoys *Nafs al-Amr* and true reality (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 376).

- One nothing can truly – without assumer's assumption - be the cause of another nothing, like causality of non-existence of rain for non-wetness of the ground (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, pp. 399-400).

- The nothings are different from each other in truth; therefore, if both cat and fly

⁷ In fact, philosophers, unintentionally, chose the negation of two contradictories in order to avoid the co-existence of two contradictories. They eliminate the contradiction in the sentence "not-being of the pen exists in the room" as follows: neither the pen nor its not-being exists in the room. However, Heidegger consciously accepts the contradiction. Yet, in the fourth reason mentioned above, Fayyazi demonstrated that denying the reality of nothing will result in denying the impossibility of the negation of two contradictories.

⁸ Both Heidegger and other philosophers neglected general being and real being and merely focused on the specific being. General being and real being are more fundamental than the nothing and specific being. Heidegger seeks to reach the foundation, but neglects these two, and therefore, he considers the sentence, "nothing exists" as an instance of the co-existence of two contradictories. However, by neglecting general being and real being, philosophers often consider the sentence "nothing exists" to be metaphorical and fall into accepting the negation of two contradictories.

are non-existent in the room, the nothing of the cat is different from the nothing of the fly⁹. Thus, the nothing of the cat's voice and the nothing of the fly's voice in the room are related to the non-existence of cat and fly in the room. If the nothings are not really different, the nothing of cat's voice can be attributed to the nothing of fly and vice versa, which is absurd (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 389).

- The nothings and even impossibilities can be the objects of knowledge, and the concept of nothing indicates the nothing itself, not the hypothetical instance that we consider to be the nothing (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, pp. 406–407).

8. Metaphysical Response to Heidegger

The main criticism leveled by Heidegger against metaphysical view of the nothing is that metaphysics faces contradiction as soon as the nothing is being discussed. When we speak of the nothing, we should consider it as a being, even though, being and existent contradict the nothing and non-existent respectively. Thus, Heidegger's opinion that metaphysics is incapable of dealing with being itself can be supplemented by his criticism that metaphysics is incapable of encountering the nothing.

From our perspective, based on Fayyāzi's conception of *Nafs al-Amr* and through contemplating on his specific meontology, we can offer a response to the objection he raised against metaphysics regarding the nothing. By differentiating general being, real being, and specific being, the main criticism of the discussion of the nothing could be answered. The sentence "the nothing is" bears no contradiction in itself, because the nothing has both general being and real being, but it contradicts specific being. Thus, the nothing – while truly exists - is not reduced to its contradictory. Neither general being nor real being contradicts the nothing, but in fact, the nothing and specific being - that contradict each other - are subsets of real being which itself is the subset of general being. The nothing enjoys the same true reality as specific being, however, each of them possesses its unique effects, which makes them to contradict each other. It is true that the philosophers seem to have misunderstood the nothing, but, for this reason, one cannot attack metaphysics and its principles; accuracy of metaphysical principles is one thing and the philosophers' interpretation of these principles is another. What matters is that according to this conception, the essence of metaphysics has the potential to answer this criticism. In other words, we can discuss the reality of the nothing without violating the principles of metaphysics. Even on the basis of the above-mentioned conception of *Nafs al-Amr* and the nothing, there is a problem with Heidegger's perspective, which is why he neglected and did not discuss general being and real being that are placed higher than specific being and the nothing. Thus, the nothing, if we consider *Nafs al-Amr* in such a manner, is a true part of reality and is not created by mind. Even if our minds do not exist, that is, if there were no perceiving being that can encounter the nothing or understand its concept, the nothing will still exist. The reality of the nothing is independent of the human mind. Furthermore, the nothing, appropriate to its special essence, and without violating the principles of metaphysics is truly the nothing or, in Heidegger's words, annihilates itself. For example, if it is not raining in the region A, the ground

⁹ Fayyazi proposed many properties for the nothing, but we discuss a few here (most of the properties that are mentioned here and are the main ones). We mentioned the properties that are related to the present discussion.

will not become wet. The nothing of the rain is a real thing as well as non-wetness of the ground, the latter is truly caused by the former.

We will recite three phrases from Heidegger's text and we will try to respond to them considering the above-mentioned principles.

1. The commonly cited ground rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradiction is to be avoided, universal 'logic' itself, lays low this question. For thinking, which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing. Since it remains wholly impossible for us to make the nothing into an object, have we not already come to the end of our inquiry into the nothing—assuming that in this question 'logic' is of supreme importance, that the intellect is the means, and thought the way, to conceive the nothing originally and to decide about its possible exposure? (Heidegger 1993, p. 97).

Observation and Response: Heidegger's main question is whether the nothing is an object or a thing. It must be said that in Islamic philosophy, being is co-extensive with thingness and whatever does not exist, does not possess thingness and vice versa: "Whatever does not exist will not be a thing, for us thing is co-extensive with being" (Sabzevāri V. 2, pp. 183–184). However, since on the basis of the specific conception of *Nafs al-Amr* mentioned before, being is divisible into general, real, and specific being, thing is divisible into general, real, and specific thing as well. Anything that exists enjoys thingness, but a thingness appropriate to itself. The nothing is an individual of real being, thus, it has true thingness, but, this thingness is not such a thingness that specific being possesses. In fact, the problem here consists in restricting thingness to specific thingness. However, by dividing thingness into general, real, and specific, the nothing is a thing without the need to reduce it to its contradictory, i.e. specific being. The nothing is nothing and at the same time, it is a thing or object, but its thingness or objectivity is different from that of specific being. Thus, Heidegger's remark that metaphysics, which is thinking about a thing, in thinking about the nothing must act in a way contrary to its own essence (Heidegger 1993, p. 97), may be a critique leveled against metaphysicians, not against the nature of metaphysics, and one does not need to overcome metaphysics to solve it. The law of non-contradiction, in both sides, does not suppress the question of the nothing, but these two major elements of metaphysics take the nothing as a true matter of fact seriously.

The law of non-contradiction considers the nothing as a matter of fact, i.e. if being is a real matter of fact, then, its contradictory should be real matter of fact too; it does not make sense that a mentally posited thing contradicts an external thing. However, the law of non-contradiction considers the nothing as a matter of fact in such a way that for example, if I am not in the room, my being in the room means that I am not on the street, namely, my not-being on the street is a real fact, not a mental thing; if neither my not-being on the street nor my being on the street exists, then, the negation of two contradictories will occur. In other words, if I have a specific being, then, my being cannot be together with my not-being. I cannot both exist and not exist, and if I am supposed to be my being and not my not-being, then, my being will be concomitant with other nothings. Thus, I am not the car, i.e. my being cannot be car's being. When I am present in the place, there is the car's not-being in that place and vice versa; otherwise, the car and I would be the one

and same thing and my being and not-being could be together at the same time. But metaphysicians neglected this point and thought that if we say 'my not-being is on the street' we will face contradiction. Therefore, in order to avoid the co-existence of two contradictories, they fall into the trap of the negation of two contradictories; whereas by distinguishing among general being, real being, and specific being, we could see that the nothing contradicts specific being, not general or real being. Accordingly, the exact form of the sentence 'my not-being is on the street', is 'my not-being on the street enjoys a real general being' (although it contradicts specific being). Consequently the law of non-contradiction, in both side, will remain valid and will not be violated. The same point holds for time. I did not exist five centuries ago, therefore, five centuries ago my not-being had real general realization. Hence, when metaphysics speaks of the nothing, it acts exactly in accordance with its own essence not, as Heidegger states, against its own essence.

2. However, according to the reigning and never-challenged doctrine of 'logic,' negation is a specific act of the intellect. How then can we in our question of the nothing, indeed in the question of its questionability, wish to brush the intellect aside? Are we altogether sure about what we are presupposing in this matter? Do not the 'not,' negatedness, and thereby negation too represent the higher determination under which the nothing falls as a particular kind of negated matter? Is the nothing given only because the 'not,' i.e., negation, is given? Or is it the other way around? Are negation and the 'not' given only because the nothing is given? That has not been decided; it has not even been raised expressly as a question. We assert that the nothing is more original than the "not" and negation. (Heidegger 1993, p. 97)

Observation and Response: Heidegger has opposed his view with logic: logic reduces the nothing to a mental thing. Logically, negation/nothing is a special act of intellect and has no referent outside of intellect or mind, because having a referent amounts to being there and being contradicts the nothing. However, we have concluded that according to metaphysical and logical foundations, the nothing can be considered as real thing and possesses a referent.

3. Heidegger writes: 'where shall we seek the nothing? Where will we find the nothing? In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there?' (Heidegger 1993, p. 98).

Observation and Response: Our response on the basis of the specific interpretation of the metaphysical principles is that the nothing should be sought outside the mind, namely, in a true outside, but, true outside includes specific being and the nothing. The nothing has real subsistence and presence, and the real subsistence includes specific being and the nothing.

In an afterword¹⁰¹¹ that later was added to a lecture entitled 'What is Metaphysics?' Heidegger summarized three distortions that might be provoked by this lecture. The third one is as follows: 'the lecture adopts an anti-logic position' (Heidegger 1955, p. 45). In the following pages he calls into question the universal validity of logic in this passage: 'we want to suggest that the logic is only one interpretation of the

¹⁰ Although these two nothings are both realized at the same level, they are not the same. Fayyazi called this event "interference of two nothings" (Nabavian 2016, V. 1, p. 357).

¹¹ This "Afterword", as far as we know, has not been translated into English.

essence of thinking, and in fact, as the word implies, it is an interpretation based on experience of being as it is present in Greek thought' (Heidegger 1955, p. 47). In the end, two points should be noted. First, the critique that was studied in this text is Heidegger's critique of metaphysics based on the metaphysical thinking. He tried to question the validity of metaphysics by proposing this critique, which is certainly the best way to approach this critique. The summary of his work is that no word should be spoken of the nothing based on metaphysics, however, the nothing always exists. Secondly, we agreed with Heidegger's criticism and mentioned that neglecting the nothing as a real thing is a significant fault of metaphysicians. However, at the same time, we stressed that this criticism not only does not call into question the validity of metaphysics, but rather, reality of the nothing is among the essentials of metaphysical thinking that metaphysicians have neglected. Therefore, Heidegger's critique is applicable to metaphysicians not the metaphysics itself. Hence the discussion of the nothing does not discredit metaphysical thinking or call into question the authority of logic.

9. Conclusion

Heidegger considers the history of metaphysics as the history of forgetfulness of being and emphasizing on the beings instead of being. But, believes that the history of metaphysics is the history of neglecting the nothing as well. Thus, metaphysics is incapable of thinking of both being and its contradictory, i.e. the nothing. Metaphysics suppresses the nothing and considers it as a derivative and empty concept without any reference which thinking about it requires violating the logical principle of non-contradiction, accordingly, it is unable to think of nothing qua nothing. In Heidegger's view, this arises from the essence of metaphysics and its presuppositions because the principle of the non-contradiction, which is the basis of metaphysical thinking, means that the nothing is not a part of the real world, but it is created by our minds. Therefore, in order to think about the nothing (like Being), one must go beyond metaphysical thinking. In this article, in the first step, we attempted to present Heidegger's critique of metaphysicians suggesting that metaphysicians, on the basis of their ontical attitude, have objectified the nothing and as a result have regarded it as an unreal object and an empty concept derived from the general concept of negation. Even if some philosophers, such as Hegel, have considered the nothing to be real, they have based this view on the denial of the principle of non-contradiction. The dominant approach in the history of metaphysics, then, has been that either we do not take the nothing to be real or we call into question the principle of non-contradiction. In the second step, through outlining the concept of nothing in the history of Islamic philosophy, as well as in the Islamic theology and mysticism in brief, we tried to show that although in the intellectual Islamic history there are remarks indicating that the nothing is real, firstly, most of these statements do not have a clear implication of the reality of the nothing, and secondly, how the reality of nothing is compatible with the principle of non-contradiction has not been well explained. In the third step, drawing on some of the recent achievements of one of the Muslim philosophers in the discussion of *Nafs al-Amr*, reality in general, the nothing in particular, and the division of the meanings of being into general, real and specific, we set out to show that Heidegger's critique of metaphysicians, though seems to be

pertinent, can have a metaphysical answer. Within this perspective, the nothing, like being, is a part of reality or being in general and real sense. So when we say 'being is real' and 'the nothing is real', the two propositions do not contradict each other because the being and the nothing that are the subjects of the two propositions are subsumed under being in real sense which has been predicated of them. According to this contemporary view, not only is the reality of the nothing compatible with the principles of negation/co-existence of two contradictories, but also the denial of the reality of the nothing leads to the denial of these two principles. Therefore, the nothing, with its nothing-ness, has a kind of reality in the external world without being reduced into a being or a thing. Heidegger's critique, though pertinent to the existing metaphysics, does not discredit metaphysics; on the contrary, the reality of the nothing is one of the metaphysical implications of thinking that metaphysicians have neglected. So, it can be claimed that the target of Heidegger's critique is the way in which metaphysicians consider some metaphysical concepts such as being and nothing, not the metaphysics itself. For this reason, if we reformulate our treatment of these concepts, their definitions, and classifications, the topic of the nothing can be discussed in metaphysics, and the definite principles of logic, including the principle of non-contradiction, will not be compromised too. Consequently, one does not have to overcome metaphysics to think about the nothing as well as Being.

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