

GOD, ONTOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF BEING

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Heidegger stipulated that philosophy as such has no warrant to concern itself with universal humanity and culture. He then called for a reinterpretation of this task from the vantage point that has defined his greatest work, Being and Time. But the investigation of Being did not stop in Being and Time. The great achievement of Heidegger's earlier philosophy, the profound and elaborate analysis of the ontological structure of human existence, of Dasein, was undertaken only in order to prepare the way for a more direct approach to the problem of Being. Furthermore, as Heidegger delved into the problem of Being the intensification of the presence of God in his works becomes all the more evident.

Heidegger stelde dat filosofie als zodanig geen reden heeft om zich met de universele menselijkheid en cultuur bezig te houden. Hij riep vervolgens op tot een herinterpretatie van deze taak vanuit het gezichtspunt dat zijn grootste werk, Being and Time heeft gedefinieerd. Maar het onderzoek naar Being hield niet op in Being and Time. De grote verdienste van de eerdere filosofie van Heidegger, de diepgaande en uitgebreide analyse van de ontologische structuur van het menselijk bestaan van Dasein, is alleen geleverd om de weg te effenen voor een directere aanpak van het probleem van Being. Bovendien wordt, naarmate Heidegger zich in het probleem van de versterking van de aanwezigheid van God in zijn werk verscheen, des te duidelijker.

Heidegger schrieb, dass Philosophie als solche keine Garantie habe, sich mit universeller Menschlichkeit und Kultur zu beschäftigen. Er rief dann zu einer Neuinterpretation dieser Aufgabe aus dem Blickwinkel, der seine größte Arbeit definiert hat, Sein und Zeit. Aber die Untersuchung von Sein hörte nicht auf in Sein und Zeit. Die große Errungenschaft der früheren Philosophie von Heidegger, die tief greifende und aufwändige Analyse der ontologischen Struktur der menschlichen Existenz, des Daseins, wurde nur unternommen, um den Weg für einen direkteren Umgang mit dem Problem des Seins vorzubereiten. Darüber hinaus wird, wie Heidegger sich in das Problem des Seins die Intensivierung der Präsenz Gottes in seinen Werken entlarvt.



In the *Republic*, Plato speaks about the slavery of man in his own ignorance. Plato's cave represents man being engulfed by what is not true, by what is not real. However, the story also speaks of a "redeemer", of a hero, who braced to free himself from the shackles of imprisonment.¹ After struggling, he went out from the cave, and returned eventually to the cave to persuade his fellow prisoners to free themselves and see what he saw outside. Indeed, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" carries the message of liberation, a liberation that should not be carried out with rhetoric, trivialities, clever talk, or persuasion.² It is a liberation that is only possible through a heroic "act of violence", and this is certainly the task assumed by the philosopher.³ The philosopher is not simply a learned man who was able to complete his Ph.D. with flying colors and distinction nor is he simply the man who has read philosophy. Not even him who was able to construct his own system of philosophy. A philosopher is the one who is able to face death in an authentic way as something fatal, yet accept it with profound gratitude.⁴ Martin Heidegger is this kind of thinker. He is a philosopher of first rank who has challenged

the entire tradition of Western philosophy with surprising depth and originality.⁵

Heidegger made a significant contribution in the history of philosophy in his revolutionary analysis of human existence in his monumental work "Being and Time" published in 1927. In a brief section entitled "The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology"⁶, Heidegger strongly suggested an innovative interpretation of what has transpired in the history of philosophy.⁷ Such a stance is not only found in "Being and Time", we can also read the same theme in his "The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics" (1995)⁸, "Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics" (1997)⁹, "Nietzsche" (1991)¹⁰, "The Basic Problems of Phenomenology" (1982)¹¹,

⁵ "In the years following World War 1, Heidegger's deconstruction of intellectual and cultural traditions directed particular attention not only toward the attempt to adapt philosophy to a cultural role but also toward the more specifically philosophical connotation that the term 'culture' had acquired during the course of the nineteenth century." Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "Martin Heidegger in the Perspective of the Twentieth Century: Reflections on the Heidegger Gesamtausgabe." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 64, No. 1. (1992): p. 54.

⁶ Cf. *Being and Time*, p. 41.

⁷ "We understand this task as one in which by taking the *question of Being as our clue*, we are to *destroy* the traditional content of ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieve our first ways of determining the nature of Being – the ways which have guided us ever since." *Being and Time*, p. 44.

⁸ Heidegger insists that we have failed to understand and define what metaphysics is. To be able to define it he expresses that such a question should grip us. He said "we have not understood that metaphysical questioning is comprehensive questioning so long as we have not let ourselves really be put into question through really inquiring into the whole. No matter how extensively we are concerned about it, everything remains a misunderstanding unless we are gripped by such questioning. In the attempt to deal with philosophy itself, we have become victims of an ambiguity." *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 57.

⁹ In this particular work, Heidegger develops the idea of Laying the Ground for the Retrieval of Metaphysics, in this case, with Immanuel Kant. In retrieving the basic problem of metaphysics, Heidegger said that "we understand the opening up of its original, long-concealed possibilities, through the working out of which it is transformed. In this way it first comes to be preserved in its capacity as a problem. To preserve a problem, however, means to free and keep watch over those inner forces which make it possible, on the basis of its essence, as a problem." *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 143.

¹⁰ "Unequivocal rejection of all philosophy is an attitude that always deserves respect, for it contains more philosophy than it itself knows. Mere toying with philosophical thoughts, which keeps to the periphery right from the start because of various sorts of reservations, all mere play for purposes of intellectual entertainment or refreshment, is despicable: it does not know what is at stake on a thinker's path of thought." *Nietzsche* Vol. 3, p. 9.

¹¹ In this work, Heidegger explains that the basic problems of phenomenology is tantamount to providing fundamental substantiation for the assertion that Philosophy is the science of being, and to explain how such a method is possible. The discussion should be able to show the possibility and necessity of the absolute science of being and demonstrate its character in the very process of the inquiry. For a detailed explanation, see *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 11-15.

¹ The "cave" of Plato becomes the technological world for Heidegger. How the technological world contributed to the further oblivion of Being will be discussed later. In his letter to Ingeburg Botzger dated 25 February, 1968, Martin Heidegger speaks about a "mystery" behind the technological world and the challenge for man is to remain open to this relation. "Behind the technological world there is a mystery. This world is not just a creation of human beings. No one knows whether and when human beings will ever experience the emptiness as the 'sacred empty'. It suffices that this relation remains open." The passage was quoted by Timothy Clark. Cf. Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger*. (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 97.

² The key here is hermeneutics. For Heidegger, Hermeneutics is the self-expression of facticity. "Hermeneutics has the task of making the Dasein which is in each case our own accessible to this Dasein itself with regard to the character of its being, communicating Dasein to itself in this regard, hunting down the alienation from itself with which it is smitten. In hermeneutics what is developed for Dasein is the possibility of its becoming and being for itself in the manner of an *understanding* of itself." *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 11.

³ "Genuine philosophizing is powerless within the realm of reigning truisms. Only insofar as this state of affairs changes can philosophy be well received." *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 4-5.

⁴ Between the Fall of 1929 and Spring of 1933, Heidegger said in one of his lectures: "(Philosophy is all about the) rethinking (of) the question of truth in terms of an 'experience' rather than the propositioned expression of language or logic." Cf. Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, Socialism, and the Greeks*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 38. Bambach quoted this from the unpublished lecture notes of Heidegger.



“Overcoming Metaphysics” (1973)¹², “Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity” (1999)¹³, and “Introduction to Metaphysics” (2000)¹⁴. He was also very explicit that the term “destruction” is by no means simply a purely negative attack against ontology. On the contrary, destruction speaks about an uncovering of the roots of the history of ontology in order to understand the basic decisions and breaks that have determined its entire course and at the same time open up to other alternatives. He made this explicit saying:

This destruction is far from having the *negative* sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its limits; these in turn are given factually in the way the question is formulated at the time and in the way the possible field for investigation is thus bounded off. On its negative side, this destruction does not relate to the past; its criticism is aimed at “today” and at the prevalent way of treating the history of ontology, whether it is headed towards doxography, towards intellectual history, or towards a history of problems. But to bury the past in nullity (*Nichtigkeit*) is not the purpose of destruction. *Its aim is positive*; its negative function remains unexpressed and indirect.¹⁵

¹² In his preliminary remarks, Heidegger wrote that metaphysics as a history of Being gave rise for a great deal of misunderstanding because it does not allow experience to reach the ground in virtue of which the history of Being first reveals its essence. Cf. “Overcoming Metaphysics” in *The End of Philosophy*, p. 84-85.

¹³ Ontology means “doctrine of being”, but such a definition is only legitimate if it is taken generally. Heidegger insists that such an understanding of ontology is unfitting if taken as an individual discipline. Then comes phenomenology which transforms dramatically and violently our understanding of metaphysics. Such is the case because phenomenology is the character by which the object becomes visible by looking at consciousness of the object. Heidegger then directs us to overlook the question of the field of being from which the meaning of being should be drawn. For a detailed discussion, see *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 1-3.

¹⁴ Cf. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 7-9.

¹⁵ *Being and Time*, p. 44. Gelven explains this passage saying: “In his destruction, Heidegger does not ‘explain’ what a philosopher wrote; nor is he interested merely in what the thinker ‘actually said’ in his writings. That is the task of teachers of the history of philosophy, and is a respectable form of education. But, as a philosopher, Heidegger feels that one must ‘do violence’ to the history of thought. That is, Heidegger, takes his own approach and problem, and under the guiding persuasion of this problem, prods these thinkers with his own questions, reinterprets what the past philosopher actually said along these lines, and tests, then the power of the spirit of their thought. In this way, he intends to engage past thinkers in a dialogue about his own subject – the meaning of Being.” Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Being and Time*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 36.

A very crucial dimension in the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics is the reassessment and reinterpretation of the pre-Socratic thinkers, particularly Parmenides of Elea and Heraclitus of Ephesus. The term “pre-Socratic” certainly evokes that their philosophies are underdeveloped and crude in comparison to the philosophers who came after Socrates, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Heidegger dismisses this particular kind of assessment of pre-Socratic philosophy. And we cannot deny the fact that Heidegger since then devoted a great deal of effort in commanding the Greek language and exercising his tremendous power of perception to work out a more authentic understanding and interpretation of the fragment left by these early thinkers.

Heidegger held that pre-Socratic thinking is open to the totality of being, without distinguishing or dividing it into two separate entities or regions, namely, the objective and the subjective, the *essentia* and the *existentia*. He writes:

If the questions raised are thought through even roughly, the illusion of being a matter of course, in which the distinction of *essentia* and *existentia* stands for all metaphysics, disappears. The distinction is groundless if metaphysics simply tries again and again to define the limits of what is divided, and comes up with numbering the manners of possibility and the kinds of actuality which float away in vagueness, together with the difference in which they are placed.¹⁶

The division thus came later.¹⁷ The reason of which, as Heidegger pointed it out, is a

¹⁶ “Metaphysics as History of Being” in *The End of Philosophy*, p. 3.

¹⁷ Heidegger argues that the distinction of *whatness* and *thatness*, which characterize the “metaphysics” of Plato and Aristotle, does not contain a doctrine of metaphysical thinking. It is not about Being, rather, it points to an event in the History of Being. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 4. Heidegger developed the same thesis saying: “For us there follows the task of showing that *essential* and *existential* have a common origin in the interpretative resort to productive comportment. In ancient ontology (Plato and Aristotle) itself we discover nothing explicit about this recourse. Ancient ontology performs in a virtually naive way its interpretation of being and elaboration of the concepts mentioned. We do not discover anything about how to conceive the connection and the difference between the two and how to prove that they are necessarily valid for every being.” *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 110.



mistranslation of the Greek *phusis* to the Latin *natura*, which means physical change. To quote from Heidegger: “In the age of the first and definitive unfolding of Western philosophy among the Greeks, when questioning beings as such and as a whole received its true inception, beings were called *phusis*. The fundamental Greek word for beings is usually translated as ‘nature’.”¹⁸ But the Latin translation *natura*, which literally means “to be born” or “birth” compromised the originary content of the Greek *phusis*. And Heidegger concluded that “the philosophical naming force of the Greek word is destroyed.”¹⁹ Despite the fact that Plato and Aristotle devoted a great amount of attention to this issue, still, they fail to convey the originary meaning – that is, to come into being. What does he mean by “coming into being? The originary meaning of *phusis* is not only for things to exist and endure, but also appear as they really are.

It is in here that Heidegger realized the truth in the words of Parmenides. For according to this ancient thinker knowing and being are one and the same. And truth, moreover, is appearing, that is, it happens within and through human activity. In “Being and Time” we read: “The problematic of Greek ontology . . . must take its clues from Dasein itself. . . Dasein, man’s being, is defined . . . as that living thing whose Being is essentially determined by the potentiality for discourse.”²⁰ And in another work, he elucidated that the search for the meaning of Being is always a human activity. He thus defined philosophy as philosophizing.

Philosophy itself, what do we know of it, what and how is it? It itself is only whenever we are philosophizing.

¹⁸ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 14.

²⁰ *Being and Time*, p. 47. In his commentary, Gelven explained that the potentiality for discourse of Dasein is within the ambit of understanding as man projects himself in the world. Dasein have such possibilities. The world is not present to Dasein simply as an aggregate of indifferent objects, rather, it presents to Dasein a series of service possibilities. Cf. Gelven, op. cit., p. 88.

Philosophy is philosophizing. That does not seem very informative. Yet how much we seem merely to be repeating the same thing, this says something essential. It points the *direction* in which we have to search, indeed the direction in which metaphysics withdraws from us.²¹

The originary meaning of Being as *phusis* is revealed as what they really are and brought out of the shadows of unhiddenness of truth (*aletheia*). But the paradox of Being is that it cannot reveal itself without concealing itself. Thus Heidegger recognized the saying of the ancient philosopher from Ephesus that Being loves to hide. In the 10th Fragment of Heraclitus we read: “Nature (*phusis*) loves to hide.”²² And Heidegger commented: “The highest that man has in his power is to meditate (upon the whole), and wisdom (lucidity) is to say and to do what is unconcealed as unconcealed, in accordance with the prevailing of things, listening out for them.”²³

The first evidence of the decline in the understanding of the meaning of Being happens when Plato lost contact with the world of being, and began to analyze it into separate things. He projected an ideal world, which according to him is the real one, different from the world of appearances. For Heidegger, this marks the beginning of reducing Being to beings. “Being’ has been presupposed in all ontology up till now, but not as a concept at one’s disposal – not as the look at it beforehand, so that in the light of its entities presented to us get provisionally

²¹ *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 4.

²² Kahn, Charles, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 33. It is very significant to note that Fragments VII (“He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored”), VIII (“Seekers of gold dig up much earth and find little”), IX (“Men who love wisdom must be good inquirers into many things indeed.”), and X are related in a very special manner. The four quotations share a common imagery of searching, finding, being hard to find. Kahn pointed out that the four quotations deal with the difficulty of cognition from the side of the object. And that the “gnosis” which Heraclitus has in mind is rational knowledge, and it has to be gained by hard work; it is not the miraculous revelation of a moment of grace. Cf. p. 105.

²³ *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 28.





articulated in their Being.”²⁴ The perfect, the real, and the Ideal (*eidos*) were distinguished dramatically from what appears to the senses. In the end, things that exist no longer carry with them any truth, any reality. Furthermore, we are doomed not to know the real thing. The real never becomes and never appears.²⁵ This kind of understanding has been continued by Aristotle. Truth becomes “correctness”. Truth is what is logical and not what is insightful. “If, as has become quite customary nowadays, one defines ‘truth’ as something that ‘really’ pertains to judgment, and if one then invokes the support of Aristotle with this thesis, not only is this unjustified, but, above all, the Greek conception of truth has been misunderstood.”²⁶

The Scholastics, who are reputed to be rigorous thinkers within the ambit of Christian Theology, attempted to define and understand the meaning of Being. The height and pinnacle of any philosophic and metaphysical thinking revolves around God, a Being that which nothing greater can be thought to exist.²⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, probably the greatest among the Scholastics, argued that the true wise man meditates and speaks about Divine Truth. He made this explicit when he said: “the twofold office of the wise man shown from the mouth of Wisdom in our opening words: to meditate and speak forth of divine truth . . . and to refute the opposing error. . . . By impiety is here meant falsehood against the divine truth.”²⁸ Though the scholastics will not

question this fundamental truth, their method in trying to answer the questions posited in Christian Theology differed. Thus, the Doctrine of God has become a perennial issue giving birth to various traditions that has rendered the topic trivial.²⁹ Heidegger, being steeped in learning regarding Scholastic Philosophy, would regard the Middle Ages as still being concerned with beings, rather than Being. Consequently, the question of Being has been forgotten. “Theology is seeking a more primordial interpretation of man’s Being towards God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it. It is slowly beginning to understand . . . that the ‘foundation’ on which its system of dogma rests has not arisen from an inquiry in which faith is primary, and that consequently this ‘foundation’ not only is adequate for the problematic of theology, but conceals and distorts it.”³⁰

Modern Philosophy continued the project of determining the meaning of Being, and this was embodied by the rationalist tradition spearheaded by Rene Descartes. It may be true that Aristotle is one of the first philosophers who thought about the inquiry into the soul, Descartes undertook the study of soul and made it the foundation of truths that has grounded and defined modern philosophy. His *Meditations on First Philosophy* set out a kind of philosophic system which is self-knowing, and thus becomes the pivotal First Truth, the First Certitude, the First Principle – the *Cogito ergo Sum*. We here began to realize that the weight of Descartes discussion about the soul is much greater than the discussion of Aristotle. For in Descartes, the very activity of the soul as a thinking being stand at the very opening of any philosophic discourse.

²⁴ *Being and Time*, p. 27.

²⁵ Heidegger expressed the oblivion of Being that has happened ever since Plato conceived of two worlds. Plato’s rigidity of thought added to the confusion of what Being is. He states this emphatically: “The misunderstanding that is being played out here is not accidental. Its ground is the lack of understanding that has ruled the question about beings. But this lack of understanding stems from an oblivion of Being that is getting increasingly rigid.” *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 27.

²⁶ *Being and Time*, p. 57.

²⁷ The Ontological Argument of St. Anselm proved to be unique and straightforward. The Benedictine spirituality in St. Anselm gave him the impetus to construct a fool-proof, self-sustaining argument that puts to rest any refutation that would question the existence of God. For a detailed discussion of the topic, refer to Moses Aaron Angeles, “St Anselm on the Being of God”. *Philippiniana Sacra*. Vol. XLIV, No. 130 (2009): p. 5-20.

²⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*. I, 1, 4.

²⁹ The author is referring to the *Via Antiqua* or the “Old Way” and the *Via Moderna* of the “Modern Way” of discoursing about God. The former refers to the traditional Augustinian approach championed by the Franciscans, and most eminently by St. Bonaventure. While the latter refers to the Aristotelianism that has captured the attention of the prominent Masters of the University of Paris, particularly Sts. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

³⁰ *Being and Time*, p. 30.





Wild comments that what Descartes did is to isolate the thinking subject and cut it off from the world. Such a stance gave Descartes the opportunity to master the world. Now that the subject is detached the objective world, he could now measure, calculate, and eventually become proficient with it.³¹ However, this kind of approach has certain repercussions in Heidegger. “This subject-object schema soon led, on the objective side, to the appearance of modern technology and science, which are essentially interdependent and have, therefore developed together. It also led, to the subjective side, to the appearance of idealism, which traces the process by which objects are projected and finally assimilated by a spirit working in man.”³² Moreover, for Heidegger, the Cartesian approach is still working within the ambit of medieval metaphysics, that the problems raised we not really a separation from the concerns of the Scholastics.

Even at the beginning of modern philosophy, we see how its founder, Descartes, in his major work *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Meditations on philosophy) explicitly says that First Philosophy has its objective the proof of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul. At the beginning of modern philosophy, which is readily passed off as a break with philosophy hitherto, we find that what is emphasized and held onto is precisely what has been the *proper concern of medieval metaphysics*.³³

³¹ John Wild, “The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger.” *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 60, No. 22, (1963), p. 667.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 42. In his study of Heidegger’s philosophy, Gelven pointed out that Heidegger’s claim is that many great thinkers wanted to talk about Being but, due to the impediment of traditional meaning, found themselves speaking of “existents (or “beings”) instead. Yet in spite of this failure on the part of the thinkers of the past to speak of Being, precisely because they are the greatest thinkers of our era they nevertheless, implicitly, said much to further and enrich the idea of Being. Thus, Heidegger’s attitude toward every great thinker is always an enigma. Cf. Gelven, *op. cit.*, p. 36. However, it should be pointed out that for Heidegger, the first philosopher who was able to break loose and put a halt in the thinking of Being as beings is Immanuel Kant. “The Peculiar process of ancient philosophy being taken over into the content of the Christian faith and thereby, as we have seen with Descartes, into modern philosophy, was brought to a halt for the first time by Kant, who established a proper questioning. Kant really got a grip on the matter for the first time, and attempted in one particular direction to make metaphysics itself a problem.” Cf. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 45.

The last stage of the historical development in metaphysical thinking rests in Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power, and this was of course guided by the outcry “God is dead”. Heidegger regarded him as a prophet, as the initiator of the destruction of metaphysics. The truth of being as a whole has been called “metaphysics”. Every era, every human epoch, is sustained by some metaphysics and is placed thereby in a definite relation to being as a whole and also to itself. The end of metaphysics discloses itself as the collapse of the reign of the transcendent and the “ideal” that sprang from it. But the end of metaphysics does not mean the cessation of history. It is the beginning of a serious concern with that “event”: “God is dead”.³⁴

Nietzsche argued, says Heidegger, that all ends are subordinated to a process of willing, a process that is at once self-justifying. He made it explicit when he writes:

We observe that being, which *as such* has the fundamental character of will to power, can as a *whole* only be eternal return of the same. And vice versa, being which *as a whole* is eternal return of the same, must *as being* manifest the fundamental character of the will to power. The beingness of beings and the entirety of beings in turn evoke from the unity of the truth of being the form of their particular essence.³⁵

For Heidegger then Nietzsche’s doctrine on the eternal recurrence of the same is not just a way that the totalities of entities exists but more so, also their highest mode of existence, that is, the closest the endless stream of becoming comes to being.³⁶ Furthermore, Nietzsche’s will to power

³⁴ Cf. Nietzsche, IV, p. 5.

³⁵ Nietzsche, Vol. IV, p. 210.

³⁶ Heidegger elaborated that what is most strange about the problematic of being, which Nietzsche himself regarded as “the most burdensome thought”, “can only be grasped by one who is first of all concerned to preserve its strangeness; indeed, to recognize that strangeness as the reason why the thought of the ‘eternal recurrence of the same’ pertains to the truth concerning beings as a whole. Almost more important at first than the explanation of its content, therefore, is insight into the context within which alone the eternal return of the same, as the definition of





expresses the dominating spirit of the age in which we live – the atomic age, the age of power.³⁷ Heidegger himself made an explicit remark in his short essay:

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of world as picture. The word ‘picture’ now means ‘structured image’ that is the creature of man’s producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is.³⁸

This is exactly the reason why Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as a prophet of our times. He was the first one to see the direction where humanity is flowing through. Gone are the days when knowledge and wisdom are being sought to attain happiness. Intelligence is no longer sought for its own sake, but has been regarded as a tool for will to power. Man is no longer regarded as a unique substance, a rational creature capable of attaining the heights of wisdom. Man becomes a commodity, a single entity in the masses. Human life has been degraded, and the God whom we looked upon is now dead. This is what Nietzsche saw and Heidegger saw it as the culmination of the history of Being’s more than two-thousand-year history. It all began with Plato and Aristotle, and it ended up with Nietzsche’s will to power.

The history of western metaphysics is thus a history pregnant with ontotheologies that has defined thinking across the ages. Below (table 1) is a summary of the history of the metaphysical

traditions. We see here how Being is objectified and defined ontically.

Table 1: The Different Ontotheologies in the Metaphysical Tradition³⁹

Onto-	-Theology
Entities as Such	Entities as a Whole
Most Basic Entity	Highest Entity
Whatness	Thatness
<i>Koinotaton</i>	<i>Kot holon</i>
<i>Essentia</i>	<i>Existentia</i>
<i>Idea as Universal</i>	<i>Idea as paradigm</i>
<i>Deutera ousia</i>	<i>Prote ousia</i>
<i>Ultima Ratio</i>	<i>Causa Prima</i>
<i>Ens Commune</i>	<i>Summum ens</i>
<i>Quidditas</i> (essentiality)	<i>Quomodo</i> (modality)
Reality	The Real
Subjectivity	The Subject
The Transcendental	The Transcendent
Content	Organization
Action	Organization
Will-to-Power	Eternal Return of the same

The destruction of metaphysics is an inevitable event that Heidegger has to accomplish in order to raise once more the problem of Being. He was explicit when he said: “The destruction of the history of ontology is essentially bound up with the way the question of Being is formulated, and it is only possible within such a formulation.”⁴⁰

GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF BEING: THE WORD OF NIETZSCHE

There is a determination of Heidegger’s treatment of the God-Question and this was made explicit in his readings and interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche. In 1961, the published

beings as a whole, is to be thought.” Cf. Nietzsche, IV: p. 210.

³⁷ Wild, op.cit., p. 667. The same author further argued that science and technology have at last succeeded in mastering the energies of nature and in subduing the earth to human subjects. The powers of nature are being employed in a game of power politics for the human mastery of the world. This is exactly what Heidegger pointed out in his essay “The Question Concerning Technology”. In it, Heidegger brought out the idea that what is happening is technology is a challenging of nature. And that challenging happens in that energy concealed in nature is unlocked, transformed, stored, and distributed. These are the modes and ways of revealing. Cf. The Question Concerning Technology, p. 16.

³⁸ “The Age of World Picture” in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, p. 134.

³⁹ Thomson, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁰ Being and Time, p. 44.





lectures of Heidegger on Nietzsche began with a direct quotation from *The Antichrist*: “Well-nigh two thousand years and not a single new God.”⁴¹ This statement is the guiding thought of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche. In fact, he would return to this statement more than once to disclose and unravel how and why Nietzsche is the fulfilment or completion of western metaphysics. He anticipates this when he wrote in the foreword: “‘Nietzsche’ – the name of the thinker stands as the title for the matter of his thinking. The matter, the point in question, is in itself a confrontation. To let our thinking enter into the matter, to prepare our thinking for it – these goals determine the contents of the present publication.”⁴² It will be very useful to quote the complete text of section 125 of the *Gay Science* which speaks about the “Death of God”. The section is entitled “The Madman” and goes:

The madman. – Haven’t you heard of that madman who lit up a lamp in the bright morning, ran to the market, and cried out cesalessly: “I’m looking for God! I’m looking for God!” – As there were a number of people standing about just then who did not believe in God, he aroused a good deal of laughter. “So did he get lost?,” someone said. “Had he lost his way, like a child,” another asked. “Or maybe he’s in hiding?” “Is he afraid of us?” “Gone to sea?” “Emigrated?” – so were they shouting and laughing riotously. The madman jumped into the midst of them and his eyes transfixed them: “Where did God go?,” he cried, “I’ll tell you where. *We’ve killed him* – you and I. We are all his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink the sea dry? Who gave us the sponge to wipe the entire horizon away? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all the suns? Is there no end to our plummeting? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in every direction? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we astray as in an endless nothing? It’s the empty space, isn’t it, we feel breathing on us? It has become colder, hasn’t it? Isn’t it always nightfall and more night? Don’t lamps need to be lit in the morning? Do we not hear any of the noise of the gravediggers

who are burying God? Do we not yet smell anything of the divine putrefaction? – even gods become putrid. God is dead! God remains dead! And we killed him. How are we to find consolation, we the murderer of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has hitherto possessed has bled to death under our knives. What water can cleanse us? What ceremonies of expiation, what sacred games, will we have to invent? Isn’t the greatness of this deed to great for us? Don’t we have to become gods ourselves in order merely to appear worthy of it? There have never been a greater deed – and whoever will be born after us will partake, for this deed’s sake, of a history higher than all history in time’s past!” – here the madman fell silent and looked again at his audience; they too were silent and looked at him and were taken aback. At last he threw his lamp to the ground, so that it broke into pieces and went out. “I come too early,” he said, then “the time is not yet mine. The enormous event is still on the way, itinerant – it hasn’t got as far as the ears of men. Thunder and lightning take time, the light from stars takes time, deeds take time even after they have been done, to be seen and heard. This deed is still farther from them than the farthest stars – *and yet they have done it themselves!*” It is told that on the same day the madman forced his way into different churches and started to sing his *Requiem aeternam deo* in them. Led out and questioned, he would only reply: “What else are these churches, then, if not the crypts and tombs of God?”⁴³

In his supposed lecture-course for the Winter Semester of 1944-1945 but was interrupted because of the “needs of war”⁴⁴, a second confrontation with “wartime emergencies” which he referred to as “the one word that should indicate us Nietzsche’s basic experience and basic determination.”⁴⁵ He was even clearer in his objective when he wrote: “The following commentary (Heidegger is referring to Nietzsche’s attack against the Christian God) is an attempt to point in the direction where, perhaps, the

⁴³ “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p 161-162. Heidegger quoted this passage in full and noted that Nietzsche appended to the *Four Books of The Gay Science* a fifth four years later in 1886. He gave it the title “We the Fearless”. The first section of this book (aphorism 343) is headed “What Cheerfulness is All About”. Heidegger also relinquishes that the greatest modern event was announced by Nietzsche: “God is Dead”, that is, faith in the Christian God has become untenable – that it is already beginning to throw its first shadows across Europe. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁴⁴ Cf. Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁴⁵ “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead’” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 158.

⁴¹ Nietzsche Vol. 1, p. 1.

⁴² Nietzsche Vol. 1, p. xxxix.



question about the essence of nihilism can one day be posed. The commentary derives from a thinking that is beginning to win an initial clarity about Nietzsche's fundamental place within the history of Western metaphysics."⁴⁶ This word thus begins and ends the Nietzsche lecture-courses. It is therefore very important to understand what the "word" says, because, as Heidegger stressed:

Nietzsche's word gives the destiny of two millennia of Western history. And we, unprepared as all of us are together, we must not think that we will alter this destiny by a lecture about Nietzsche statement or even to learn to know it adequately. Nonetheless, this one thing is now necessary: that out of reflection we are receptive to instruction we learn to reflect.⁴⁷

The word "God is Dead" directs to the experience of nihilism. Nietzsche uses the word nihilism as the name for the historical movement that he was first to recognize and that already governed the previous century while defining the century to come, the movement whose essential interpretation he concentrates in the terse statement: "God is Dead". That is to say, the "Christian God" has lost his powers over beings and over the determination of man.⁴⁸ He expressed the same thing somewhere saying:

Nietzsche's whole philosophy is rooted and resonates in the experience of the very fact of nihilism . . . with the unfolding of Nietzsche's philosophy there grows at the same time the depth of his insight into the essence and power of nihilism and the need and necessity of its overcoming increases.⁴⁹

It is worth noting here the inherent circularity stressed by Heidegger. In his reflection, the very growth and depth of insight into the power and essence of nihilism is the same as the increasing of the need and the necessity of overcoming it.

Furthermore, all of these statements points to the necessity of becoming aware, a coming to the self.⁵⁰

At this juncture, we are confronted with a question "How are we to understand Nietzsche's word 'God is Dead?'" Is it about Nietzsche's "basic experience and determination" that there are no new gods or is it a philosophy about the phenomenon of nihilism? In his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger understood the phrase in two senses. Each is simultaneously a determination of beings, that is, beings as a whole, first, as the will to power, and second, as the eternal recurrence of the same.⁵¹ The basic determination which Heidegger saw in Nietzsche is thus a clarification of what the philosophy of nihilism means. The death of God is not a nod to atheism, rather, it speaks of an even in Western History. "The word 'God is dead' is not an atheistic doctrinal principle, but the formula for the basic experience of an event in Western history."⁵² Nietzsche's word is therefore is not a declaring that there is no God, which is actually what the common meaning of atheism tells us. Atheism for Heidegger is an event (*das Ereignis*) which is used to describe nihilism. Furthermore, he insisted that there is a "need and necessity" for nihilism's overcoming.⁵³ Nihilism is a complete negation of all, that is, of beings as a whole. He expressed this saying:

The truth of being as a whole has long been called *metaphysics*. Every era, every human epoch, is sustained by some metaphysics and is placed thereby in a definite relation to being as a whole and also to itself. The end of metaphysics discloses itself as the collapse of the reign of the transcendent and the "ideal" that sprang from it. But the end of metaphysics does not mean the cessation of history. It is the beginning of a serious concern with that "event": "God is dead." That

⁴⁶ "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 157.

⁴⁷ "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 160.

⁴⁸ "The Five Major Rubrics of Nietzsche's Thought" in *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ "The Eternal Recurrence of the Same" in *Nietzsche Vol. 2*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Cf. "Nihilism" in *Nietzsche Vol. 4*, p. 19-25.

⁵¹ Cf. "The Eternal Recurrence of the Same" in *Nietzsche Vol. 2*, p. 16-18.

⁵² "The Will to Power as Art" in *Nietzsche Vol. 1*, p. 201.

⁵³ Nihilism's overcoming will be dealt with in the next chapter.



beginning is already under way. Nietzsche himself understood his philosophy as an introduction to the beginning of a new age.⁵⁴

Beings as a whole has been identified by Heidegger before, that is, as the basis and ground to the intentional structure of cognition and contrasted with the new way of Event, that is, *das Ereignis*. Nihilism therefore is fundamentally an Event (*das Ereignis*) which brings Dasein a basis and grounding experience of beings as a whole and its immediate confrontation with the character of nihilism.

We have discussed earlier that beings as a whole function as the name for God as thought by metaphysics. God as *ens creatum* and God as the ground for beings. Keeping firmly in view that beings as whole is within the province of ontotheology rather than Being-itself, Heidegger says this elsewhere:

Every philosophy as metaphysics is theology in the original and essential sense that the conceiving (*logos*) of beings as a whole asks about the ground (that is, the first cause) of being (*Sein*), and this ground is named as *Theos*, God. Indeed, Nietzsche's philosophy, for instance, in which the essential saying states: "God is dead" is in accord with this saying "Theology."⁵⁵

For Heidegger theology is operating within the realm metaphysics, hence his constant usage of the concept "ontotheology."

How are we then to understand the notoriously blunt statement of Nietzsche "God is Dead"? For Martin Heidegger the fundamental metaphysical position concerning God is that God and Being are the same. The scholastics understood it, and it was passed down up until Nietzsche. But a more important question looms: what does it mean when we say God and Being are the same? For Heidegger, to think

God within the realm of ontotheology is the thought of beings as a whole⁵⁶ and construe God as what gives being to beings⁵⁷. From the above utterances, we can clearly see a distinction made by Heidegger between metaphysics construing Being which speaks of beings as a whole and the "being-ness" of being.⁵⁸ It is therefore within this dualism that metaphysicians understood God as a being rather than being-itself, which is not being.⁵⁹ In the entire history of metaphysics, beings as a whole is for Heidegger the thought and thinking of God. Classical metaphysics has traditionally distinguished questions within the province of the ontological order, a realm where the question of being qua being is the order of the day, and a theological order of questioning, a questioning traversing the question of beings as a whole, which is directly related to the being of God.⁶⁰ It is in this regard that made Heidegger say: "Philosophy is ontotheology. The more originally it is both in one, the more authentically it is philosophy." We can clearly see now that for Heidegger all that is under scrutiny within the domain of the God question in metaphysics is within the consideration of being, either as a whole or in part. Therefore, even if the metaphysician discourses on God nothing is actually said about God other than God is beings as a whole. This is evidently an inquiry solely determined by what is found within the facticity of the world and allows absolutely nothing outside from it. Nietzsche's pronouncement "God is dead" signals a new beginning and thus prepared the way for a more grounding questioning of God.

What we have discussed so far is the ontotheological shape of any metaphysical discourse on God, but at this juncture, we have yet

⁵⁶ Cf. "Nietzsche's Word "God is Dead", in Pathmarks, p. 164

⁵⁷ Cf. "Nietzsche's Word "God is Dead", in Pathmarks, p. 166.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hemming, op. cit., p. 167.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

⁶⁰ Cf. Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 34 and "Nietzsche's Word "God is Dead", in Pathmarks, p. 173.

⁵⁴ "Nihilism" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 13.



to disclose how Heidegger read and interpreted Nietzsche's word "God is dead." What is that which is pronounced and proclaimed to be dead? The death of God is the death of a God who is seen and understood in the province of morality. Heidegger writes:

The God who is viewed in terms of morality, this God alone is meant when Nietzsche says "God is dead." He died because human beings murdered him. They murdered him when they reckoned his divine grandeur in terms of their petty needs for recompense, when they cut him down to their own size. That God fell from power because he was a "blunder" of human beings who negate themselves and negate life.⁶¹

Here therefore is the coming to the fore of his insistence not to understand the Good simply as the moral good.⁶² What has this something to do with morality? We all know that morality speak of what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. From this basic standpoint of morality comes God who is seen as beings as a whole and the basis of all existence. Morality thus becomes the very aspect, the very manifestation, of beings as a whole disclosed in metaphysics as ontotheology – God. This is why Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as a prophet, a prophet not of the messiah, but a prophet of nihilism. In the age of nihilism, everything is a creation of value, everything is within the subject's creative production of the meaning, and everything is grounded on the value of the object.⁶³ The full impact of this is clearly described in the lecture course "European Nihilism". Here, he comments:

⁶¹ "The Third Communication of the Doctrine of Return" in Nietzsche Vol. 2, p. 66.

⁶² Cf. Plato's Sophist, p. 34. Here he explained how the Good is understood as a commodity, as a thing worthy of value or "valuable." Heidegger expressed the same thing elsewhere saying: "One of the 'vital values' of a people, or of the 'cultural values' of a nation. It is said that the supreme values of mankind are worth protecting and preserving. We hear that things of 'great value' are carried to safety, meaning that works of art, for example, are guarded from air attacks. In this case, 'value' means the same as 'goods.' A 'Good' is being that 'has' a particular 'value'; a good is a good on grounds of value, is that in which a value becomes an object and thus valuable." "Nihilism as the 'Devaluation of the Uppermost Values'" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 13.

⁶³ Cf. "Nihilism as the 'Devaluation of the Uppermost Values'" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 13-14.

"Nietzsche mostly understands the moral as the system of valuation in which a transcendent world is posited as the desired standard of measure. Nietzsche consistently understands the moral metaphysically, that is, with the view to the fact that in it something is decided about the whole of beings."⁶⁴ The proclamation therefore of the death of God is none other than the event in which the uppermost values are devalued and where the thought of the moral ceases to have any meaning. The moral ideal (that which speaks of the uppermost value) ceases to have any meaning at all and is replaced by the values posited by the subject in revaluation. Heidegger commented:

The question asks about the essence of nihilism. The answer is that "*the uppermost values devalue themselves.*" We immediately perceive that in the answer there is something decisive for any understanding of nihilism: nihilism is a process, the process of devaluation, whereby the uppermost values become valueless. Whether or not that exhausts the essence of nihilism is left undecided by the description. When values become valueless, they collapse on themselves, become untenable.⁶⁵

The devaluation of the uppermost values that Heidegger is stressing is carried out for and as a revaluation. This revaluation occurs in the will to power. This revaluation of values as will to power is nothing other than the subject securing things in terms of the internal relationship of valuation.⁶⁶ This experience of nihilism which comes about as an event (*das Ereignis*) is at the actually about an experience arising from need and necessity. It is a turn-toward-and-into-a-need⁶⁷ (*Notwendigkeit*). Heidegger raised the question: "What is this experience? What need is experienced in it, as a needful turn and thus necessity (*Notwendigkeit*), of a revaluation and

⁶⁴ "The Five Major Rubrics of Nietzsche's Thought" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 6-7.

⁶⁵ "Nihilism as the 'Devaluation of the Uppermost Values'" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Valuation and Will to Power" in Nietzsche Vol. 4, p. 62.

⁶⁷ As for the translation of the German *Notwendigkeit*, the author is indebted to Laurence Paul Hemming. His translation can be found in the glossary. Cf. Hemming, op. cit., 293.



therewith a new valuation? It is that event in the history of Western humanity that Nietzsche ignites with the name nihilism.”⁶⁸ Why is it that this experience becomes a need? It has become an uttermost need because of man’s experience of being God-less. To experience Godlessness is to be deprived of a creator, to be deprived of meaning, and thus there arise the need to create one. Just like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, “as the godless Zarathustra experiences the outermost need, and therewith the innermost necessity, to create what is needed.”⁶⁹

To reiterate, Nietzsche’s word “God is Dead” is an Event, an *Ereignis* of nihilism itself determined by the will to power. This nihilism demands for a devaluation of the most valuable, the uppermost values, and the revaluation of all values resulting in the negation of beings as a whole. This Event (*Ereignis*) brings to the fore the completion and fulfilment of Western Metaphysics (which is ontotheological). The death of God, the will to power, and the basic determination and experience of nihilism came about and was witnessed for the first time within Nietzsche’s philosophy. No wonder Heidegger was quite blunt when he put at the very beginning of his Nietzsche lectures: “Well-nigh two thousand years and not a single new God!

GOD AND BEING: THE ZURICH SEMINAR OF 1951

At this juncture, it should be very clear to us now that for Martin Heidegger the history of Being can be construed as an unfolding as a history of God. This is inevitable because God is thought of in the realm of metaphysics, in the province of ontotheology. This discussion about God is no longer the God of faith, the God of primal

Christianity. We now turn our attention to one of the most enigmatic statement made by Heidegger regarding God and Being. In 1951, in Zurich, Switzerland, Heidegger was invited to deliver a lecture before the former students of the theologian Rudolf Bultmann. The reply to the third question is very relevant for us, and it will be very useful if we quote it in full.

Third Question: May being and God be posited as identical?

Heidegger: I am asked this question almost every fortnight because it (understandably) disconcerts theologians, and because it relates to the Europeanization of history, which already began in the Middle Ages, through Aristotle’s and Plato’s penetration into theology, specifically the New Testament. This is a process whose immensity cannot be overestimated. I have asked an old Jesuit friend of mine to show me the place in Thomas Aquinas where he says what “*esse*” specifically means and what the proposition means that says “*Deus est suum esse.*” I have to this day received no answer. –

God and being is not identical. (If Rickert suggests that the concept “being” might be too loaded, this is because he understood being in the very restricted sense of reality in distinction to values). Being and God are not identical, and I would never attempt to think the essence of God through being. Some of you perhaps know that I came out of theology, and that I harbour an old love for it and that I have a certain understanding of it. If were to write theology – to which sometimes I feel inclined – then the word “being” would not be allowed to occur in it.

Faith has no need of the thinking of being. If faith has recourse to it, it is already not faith. Luther understood this. Even in his own church this appears to be forgotten. I think very modestly about being with regard to its use to think the essence of God. Of being, there is nothing here of impact. I believe that being can never be thought as the ground and essence of God, but that nevertheless the experience and manifestness of God, insofar as they meet with humanity, eventuate in the dimension of being, which in no way signifies that being might be regarded as a possible predicate for God. On this point one would have to establish wholly new distinction and delimitations.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “Valuation and Will to Power” in Nietzsche Vol. 4., p. 63.

⁶⁹ “Valuation and Will to Power” in Nietzsche Vol. 4., p. 64.

⁷⁰ Seminars, p. 436-437. The statement can also be found in appendix of Hemming’s work. Cf. Hemming, op. cit., p. 291-293.



Martin Heidegger's very brief reply in Zurich is perhaps one of the most enigmatic and perplexing of his utterances regarding the problem of being. It is also one of the most complex and at the same time one of the very few remarks he makes about the most central question of his relation to theology and the discourse on God. From the above question, we can immediately recognize that it is constructed in such a way that Heidegger is asked whether his project – his problem of being, as laid out and developed within the ambit of medieval thought and ancient philosophy, has supplanted God with being. And this expressed most emphatically in the question: "Whether being and God be posited as identical?" As was already discussed in the previous topic, Heidegger's reading and interpretation of Nietzsche's statement "God is dead" is not genuine atheism. This is precisely because Nietzsche's statement is a cry for replacing God with an occurrence which he referred to as subjectivity. This very subjectivity has taken the place of God in philosophy which is, for Heidegger, the ground of beings. Heidegger insists that to ask the question of being in a most genuine and authentic way is to ask it and raise it atheistically.⁷¹ At the very outset then, Heidegger separated being with God and God with being. Neither God nor Dasein have a ground.⁷² The question of being the, as Heidegger understands it, can only be raised and appear only atheistically, that is, as finite, as raised by Dasein who is thrown into the world, and therefore has nothing to do at all with God. The question "Whether being and God be posited as identical?" from the very outset once again

⁷¹ The Question of Being is at once grounded in intentionality. The aspect of the lived experience directs Dasein to raise the question authentically. Heidegger says: "*Intentio* literally means *directing-itself-toward*. Every lived experience, every psychic comportment, directs itself toward something. Representing is a representing of something, recalling is a recalling of something, judging is judging about something, presuming, expecting, hoping, loving, hating – of something. But, one will object, this is triviality hardly in need of explicit emphasis, certainly no special achievement meriting the designation of discovery. Notwithstanding, let us pursue this triviality a bit and bring out what it means phenomenologically." History of the Concept of Time, p. 29.

⁷² Hemming, op. cit., p. 185. See also Nicholson, op. cit., p. 214-216.

collapsed God back into being. We are even safe to say that the questioner has failed miserably to ask any question at all regarding being. Heidegger was very emphatic when he said:

One thinks Being as objectivity, and then tries from there to find beings in themselves. Only one forgets to question and to say what one means by "in being." What "is" Being?

Being – unquestioned and a matter of course and thus unthought and uncomprehended in a truth which has long since been forgotten, and is groundless.

Being is beingness; beingness as *ousia* is presence, continual presence with its space-time forgotten.⁷³

The moment the questioner names being, he is thinking about it within the domain of ontotheology and metaphysics. On the other hand, when Heidegger speaks about being, he says it in province of the Being-Question, that is, outside ontotheology. The questioner therefore and Heidegger are saying the same words, however, the totally speak of different things. And certainly, Heidegger is very aware of it and the questioner has no slightest idea about what he is asking for. From his reply we can immediately see that Heidegger is not thinking about being within the framework of the medieval ages, and certainly, without supplanting God with being. He is very much aware that to speak about God should dwell within the framework of faith and not within the province of metaphysics. The dynamism between God and man, God and Reality, is fundamentally a characteristic of a response.

What is truly real (*actus purus*) is God. Reality (*actualitas*) is the effecting causality of which itself brings about the stabilizing of independent constancy. Causality, however, is not exhausted in the effectuation of the constancy on earth of all that is not divine, that is, created. The highest causality is the *actus purus* as *summum bonum*, which is the final

⁷³ "Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics" in The End of Philosophy, p. 59.



goal (*finis*) predestining everything and thus elevating everything to its true constancy anchors all reality of what is real in the first cause. For this reason, the real being which is man, created in the image of God, must above all bring about his reality by holding fast to the highest good, that is, by faith (*fides, qua creditor*). Through faith, man is certain of the reality of the highest real being, and thus at the same time also of his own real continuance of eternal bliss. The causality of the highest real being allots to man thus created a definite kind of reality whose fundamental characteristic is faith.⁷⁴

What he did is to conceive what follows the thinking of the medieval philosopher and contrast it with his own view. From his lectures, Heidegger made it explicit saying:

The Middle Ages trans-lated themselves into modern philosophy, which moves within the conceptual world of the Middle Ages and then creates those familiar representations and conceptual terms that are used even today to understand the inception of Western philosophy. This inception is taken as something that we have left behind long ago and supposedly overcome.⁷⁵

Heidegger's atheism is precisely the authentic and genuine overcoming of the Middle Ages, not by exceeding them, but by inquiring into the originary ground of what made them and modern philosophy possible, the being of being human.⁷⁶

Heidegger's reply speaks about the essence of God and at the same time excluding from the discussion of the problem of essence the term "being". Being for Heidegger, as was already mentioned in the chapter on Fundamental Ontology, means the Being of Dasein. He not only expressed it in "Being and Time" but also in a minor work written in 1938. "Being depends on man. That means: the sway of be-ing reaches unto itself and falls into the loss of the ownmost – man's relation to being – is fundamental to man

and is the ground of 'humanity'. Thereupon, being is delivered over to man, in each case to his ownmostness."⁷⁷ All that Heidegger says is that after the Middle Ages, all theologies has been understood as ontotheology, that God and Being are one and the same. Moreover, he continued, he would not even attempt to think about God within the province of Being, within the realm of Dasein. He says: "I would never attempt to think the essence of God through being." However, we should not think that Heidegger is simply barring the usage of the term "Being" with theological discourse. What he did is to set it in its proper place. Overcoming metaphysics then is separating or divorcing any thought or thinking about the essence of God from any proofs or discussion of the philosophical basis of God's existence. This is not within the realm of metaphysics, rather, it is ruled and regulated in the domain of faith. Heidegger's reflection tells us:

In faith rules certainty, that kind of certainty which is safe even in the uncertainty of itself, that is, of what it believes in. What is believed in is that real being whose reality as *actus purus* binds and directs all human activity in its plans and ideas. Man can stand in such a commitment only if he of himself and as himself bows down toward something committing him, frees himself from what he believes in such bowing down, and is free in such a way.

Furthermore, what Heidegger seeks to put into light is the truth that Greek metaphysics, primarily the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, becomes a way to articulate the God of faith. This very process, which he referred to as "The Europeanization of History", (which actually speaks about the Christianization of Europe) tells us how thinking has become dominated by the thinking of the Greeks. Plato and Aristotle is conflated into the reflection on faith in the

⁷⁴ "Metaphysics as History of Being" in *The End of Philosophy*, p. 23.

⁷⁵ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 14-15.

⁷⁶ Hemming, op. cit., p. 187.

⁷⁷ *Mindfulness*, p. 119.





Christian God, even when the theologies of faith and philosophy are named apart.⁷⁸

Metaphysics, precisely because of its vigorous attempt to determine the essence of God and even exhaust it, was able to produce God as a “Being”, even the “Highest Being” and the “Most Perfect Being”. Now human beings play the metaphysical role as *ens creatum*, that is, created being, and definitely not God. God therefore, having nothing to do with Ontology, that is, He is no longer fulfilling the metaphysical role as Creator, must appear as one other being among the many, and as dead.⁷⁹ “In fact”, Heidegger says somewhere, “if we want to understand the reality of the real, we must look to the structure of being and not, say, to the founding relationships of entities among themselves.”⁸⁰

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⁷⁸ Hemming, op. cit., p. 187-188.

⁷⁹ Cf. “European Nihilism” in Nietzsche vol. IV, p. 141.

⁸⁰ History of the Concept of Time, p. 202.

