

# God and the Language of *Poiesis*

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Is there really a problem of God? To answer the question either in the affirmative or in the negative posits more problems than provide a viable solution. If such a difficulty is really a predicament, a more pressing question emerges, how are we supposed to conduct our investigation? Moreover, how are we to raise and formulate our questions considering God, a "Being" that prominent thinkers held to be as "that which nothing greater can be thought to exist"? The very history of philosophy is replete with reflections and voluminous treatises that speaks about God's existence, His nature, His attributes, His actions, His relevance to human existence and history, and quite recently, even the notion of God as Non-Being.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the God-problem has been a perennial question that has haunted the affairs of the intellect.<sup>2</sup> The mind operates in a discursive manner, in a way that it incessantly searches about cause and effects, possibilities and necessities, and creation and termination, further directing it towards an Absolute Being, an Indubitable Truth, the anchor of all existences – A Divine Being: GOD. The question of God is like any other philosophic problem, although it transcends the limits and scope of a strictly scientific investigation.

Longstanding debates and intellectual debacles have prospered rendering the subject matter a parody of meaningless talks and a display of trivialities.<sup>3</sup> The celebrated arguments of St. Anselm<sup>4</sup> and Rene Descartes<sup>5</sup> opted for a fool-proof, self-sustaining argument that elevates the discourse on God beyond the realm of doubt. On

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, together with other French theologians who are deeply influenced by phenomenology, represents a significant shift in the course of 20<sup>th</sup> or modern theology. Speaking from a standpoint of a "New Theology" or *Nouvelle Theologie*, they argue that God must be thought of through the pure reception and expression of his word, which, they strongly held, gives the opportunity of God giving Himself. Notice that this strictly theological assumption requires no foundations from philosophy, and it further presupposes that metaphysical categories are not proper to attribute to God, not even the metaphysical notion of Being. Thus, for Jean-Luc Marion, God is without Being. Cf. John Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics" in *New Blackfriars*. Vol. 76, No. 895 (1995): p. 325-341.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant argues that the problem of God, together with the problems of Freedom and Immortality, has been the constant preoccupation of the philosophers since time immemorial. God, he argues, is the conditioned unity of all categorical concepts and notions present in the idea of an absolute being. This he strongly argue because the mind, according to Kant, has a natural tendency to raise such problems. Such may be the case, but Kant neither wishes to eradicate nor attempts to disregard this tendency. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. N.K. Smith (tr.). (London: n.p., 1933), p. 39-45.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, among many others, was the first one to attack seriously the claims of philosophy, theology, and religion about the existence and nature of God. In his critique of culture,

the other hand we see St. Thomas Aquinas questioning the very integrity of St. Anselm's position while opting for a cosmological argument.<sup>6</sup> And also, there is no lack of philosophers who argue on the contrary. David Hume and Immanuel Kant who strongly argued in their works the impossibility of a rational process to demonstrate the existence of a something that is placed, by supposition, outside the world of the appearances, that is, of the phenomenal world.

A veritable branch of philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, is a recent development in the study of religious phenomena and the relevance of a belief in God. Heidegger himself recognized this in his early work "Phenomenology of the Religious Life". Interest in this particular discipline is definitely at a constant growth. In his lectures, Heidegger enumerated three tendencies of the philosophy of religion, namely, the Psychological, the Epistemological, the Philosophy of History, and lastly, the Metaphysical.<sup>7</sup> In the Psychological tendency, the religious phenomenon is treated as a phenomenon, a moment, free from any social or theological theories. They are to be considered apart from any liturgical activities, cults, and even religious figures, preachers or reformers. The moment is to be characterized in their transcendental and primal conditions.<sup>8</sup> The Epistemological on the other hand investigates the rational lawfulness or reasonableness of any religious ideas and its formation. Heidegger holds on to the fact that this is the tendency of Catholic and Protestant Theology because both systems work to speculate and within their own tradition an understanding of the message of Christianity. "It is their (Catholic and Protestant Theology) prejudice to think that they are able to settle the problem of theology with a quick sweeping hand."<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, Philosophy of History regards the realization of the religious a priori in the history of spirituality and the spiritual life. In this tendency, not

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Nietzsche emphasizes how the very idea of God corrupted man and his culture. He used to believe that Christianity is certainly one of the purest manifestations of an impulse towards true culture, towards the production of a Creative Genius (the unity of the Dionysian and the Apollonian), towards the ever renewed production of the Saint. However, Christianity, though a massive force, is already a spent one. Nietzsche strongly believes that such a force has been used by the State and, in the process, became hopelessly degenerate. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Clifton P. Fadiman (tr.). (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), p. 64-67.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Proslogion*, St. Anselm constructed an argument for the existence of God which is at once philosophical and spiritual. The bishop in Anselm moved him in incessant prayers that prepared for an argument on God's existence that even the fool would understand.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Meditations*, Descartes argued that existence is a predicate of God. We cannot think of God as non-existent. It is like thinking of a triangle devoid of three sides. Such assertions were able to invite much controversies instead of putting to rest the issue. In fact, the talk about an "Ontological Proof" was inaugurated by Descartes himself.

<sup>6</sup> Like the monk Gaunilon, St. Thomas Aquinas argued the insufficiency of St. Anselm's proof. The shifting of the premises from the realm of ideas to the reality is unacceptable for Aquinas.

<sup>7</sup> The Phenomenology of Religious Life, p. 13-21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

only the mere facts are considered, but more so, the laws according to which religion develops historically.<sup>10</sup> “But only on the basis of the separation of the psychological from the a priori can one trace the historical necessity of what is religious.”<sup>11</sup> And lastly the Metaphysical idea of God which, for Heidegger, is the basis of all of our experiences in the world. The demand to posit the existence of God “arrives from the teleological context of (transcendental) consciousness to one last meaning.”<sup>12</sup> For Heidegger, the last one, the Metaphysical, is the authentic Philosophy of Religion. Not only does in the metaphysical where all three regions of the psychological, epistemological, and historical meet but more so it speaks of the relevance of God as intimately related to Dasein’s ownmost facticity.

The Problem of God is intimately related to the problem of man. For certain, there are dimensions of the human person that directly relates him to the problem of God. Perhaps no other philosophical framework has succinctly pondered on the relation of the human person and his openness to reality as Phenomenology. As Ferguson puts it: “Man is not an entity enclosed within himself: he is being open to the universe. We do not experience the existence of the universe as something added to the experience of the subject.”<sup>13</sup> It is phenomenology that puts to rest the problem of reality and expression that plagued philosophers across the centuries by stressing the eminence of intentionality. It is possible to have things without men, however, it is impossible for men to exist without things. “Men without things”, Finlayson continues, “would be like contra-human beings. The reality of things constitutes thus the formal constitutive of a human dimension.”<sup>14</sup>

Martin Heidegger’s approach to the problem of God proved to be a unique one in philosophy. Immersing himself in the study of phenomenology under the guidance of no less than Edmund Husserl himself and the traditions of Scholasticism, Heidegger was able to re-evaluate the validity of concepts and philosophico-theological systematizations about Being. Even before the publication of “Being and Time” in 1927, Heidegger rose to prominence in Germany on the basis of his reputation as a professor of philosophy. A number of his former students, like Karl Lowith, Hannah Arendt, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, to name a few, have praised him for his originality to disengage

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. 17. Heidegger points to us that Hegel was the first philosopher to envisage this objective, but the grand narrative and constructive method of the German Idealist has to be rejected.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Clarence Finlayson. “*The Problem of God*”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 9, No. 3, “Second Inter-American Congress of Philosophy”. (March 1949), p. 423.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

interpretation of the seminal thinkers of the past from conventional assumptions of the contemporary academia.<sup>15</sup> Barash reports of Heidegger's former students saying that his "critical appraisal of traditional, culturally oriented contemporary philosophy was warmly received among students and younger professors who, following the devastations of World War I, questioned the soundness of the Western cultural heritage and the purport of any attempt to evaluate philosophy in relation to its contemporary cultural significance."<sup>16</sup>

Heidegger is neither a theist<sup>17</sup> nor an atheist,<sup>18</sup> because for him theism and atheism discourses made possible within the ambit of a metaphysical tradition that he, first and foremost, wished to surpass. Heidegger's thinking first develops from an attempt to lay the foundations of metaphysics, only to go beyond it in the end. Being is hiddenness, as defined and constricted in this technological age, and it is a must that we must no longer seek the answer to the question "What is Being?" from traditional ontotheological answer that God is the ultimate cause, the ultimate end, and the ultimate ground of everything. Heidegger, as evidenced from his later writings, strongly suggests that metaphysics and theology are interrelated for they both arise from the desire to conceal the question of Being by concentrating on beings.

The later writings of Heidegger focused on expressing The Holy (das Heilige) without, even for a single moment, discussing the existence of God.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in the Heideggerian framework, God must not be thought of as being, no, not even a supreme being, as his predecessors have done. He believes that such metaphysical way of understanding about God redirects the mind from an authentic thinking of Transcendent and the Holy. The Holy, Heidegger believes, is a manifestation of Being, and his discussion on the "flight of the gods" speaks about the oblivion of Being that arises from man's attempt to master technologically all beings. He puts this most emphatically in his letter to Ingeburg Bottger.

<sup>15</sup> A detailed treatment of Heidegger's prominence as a teacher was discussed by Jeffrey Andrew Barash in "Martin Heidegger in the Perspective of the Twentieth Century: Reflections on the Heidegger Gesamtausgabe." *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 64, no. 1. (1992).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54

<sup>17</sup> In his letter to Fr. Engelbert Krebs he unhesitatingly told him that it has become problematic for him to accept the doctrines of the Church. To quote a passage from the letter: "Epistemological insights that pass over into the theory of historical knowledge have made the system of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me – but not Christianity and metaphysics, although I take this latter in a new sense." Cf. Charles Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 71-72. Sheehan, the contributor, quoted this letter wholly from Hugo Ott's Martin Heidegger *Unterwegs zu Seiner Biographie*. (Frankfurt: Campus, 1988), pp. 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger protests vehemently when Jean-Paul Sartre, in his lecture entitled "Existentialism and Humanism", categorized him as an atheist existentialist. Heidegger remarked that Sartre failed to understand his philosophy.

<sup>19</sup> "Hölderlin's questioning proximity to German Idealist philosophy gives his work the singular status of being other than metaphysical thinking in a way that directly feeds into Heideggerian destruction." Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of Martin Heidegger to Ingeburg Bottger dated 25 February 1968. Cf. *Ibid.*, 97.

In that letter, Heidegger says: “Behind the technological world there is a mystery. This world is not just a creation of human beings. No one knows whether and when humans will ever experience this emptiness as ‘sacred empty’. It suffices that this relation remains open.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the statement “God is dead” means a lot more different for Heidegger. The Holy is not yet “revealed” to us the mystery of the divine indispensable for our own facticity.

### On the Essence of Poetry: Heidegger’s Holderlin

For the Greeks, particularly Plato, beauty was that radiant light that encompassed all things, and to quote, “it is that mystery which is rightly accounted blessed beyond all others.”<sup>21</sup> Inseparable from being, beauty was something integral in understanding the consciousness of the ancient world. Indeed, for Plato, “love of transcendent beauty even guided the actions of the gods; all true love (*eros*) was nothing other than the love of beauty.”<sup>22</sup> Heidegger even reminds us saying: “for the Greeks being and beauty meant the same thing (presence is pure radiance).”<sup>23</sup> However, for Heidegger, the modern world has lost this sight of beauty, the beauty that is inseparable from Being. Beauty is no longer the supreme radiance of beings, but rather “the beautiful is that which reposes and relaxes; it is intended for enjoyment and art is a matter of for pastry cooks.”<sup>24</sup> Even modern aesthetics is another example of the oblivion of Being. It has manifested the forgetfulness of the radiant emergence of Being from concealment into unconcealment. Moderns fail to understand that beauty is a “lofty manner of Being, which here means the pure-arising-on-its-own and shining.”<sup>25</sup> He maintains that beauty is not a property, that is, something that can be added to a being as a mere attribute, rather he insists that it is the “supreme radiance” of a thing. But we may now ask, what is the meaning of these reflections in the context of the problem of Being pronounced in “Being and Time”?

It cannot be denied that Heidegger’s most monumental work, *Sein und Zeit*, made an immediate and powerful impact upon the philosophic public. The book seemed to be prelude to a grand new metaphysical system, and philosophers alike expected subsequent works to complete this grand metaphysics. The expectation of the public was even heightened when Heidegger announced that the

<sup>21</sup> “Phaedrus” in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, 250b.

<sup>22</sup> “Symposium”, *ibid.*, 201a.

<sup>23</sup> Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 200.

published part of “Being and Time” was only a first part of a projected work. Philosophers are excited. When would the promised “Second Part” appear? And of course, what would be the systematic results for philosophy after the dramatic and sensational analyses of “Being and Time”? As we all know, these expectations were never fulfilled. The second part of “Being and Time” was never published and the very nature of Heidegger’s later thinking came to preclude any possibility of a grand metaphysical system. As we have seen in our previous discussion, the seeds of the dissolution and destruction of metaphysics was already very pronounced in “Being and Time.” Yet a work that claims to re-open the ancient question of the meaning of Being did not quite properly seem to promise a new system of metaphysics. If the question of the meaning of Being is to be raised once more, why not then give some comprehensive answer to the question?

While the philosophical public waited in vain for such a system, Heidegger in the early 1930’s turned instead to a study of poetry, particularly of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. In one of his essays Heidegger asked: “And why poets in a desolate time? . . . Today we hardly understand the question. How are we ever to grasp the answer that Hölderlin gives?”<sup>26</sup> The first essay on Hölderlin appeared in 1937 to be followed throughout the 1940’s by a series of other studies of this poet. In fact, we can conclude that his concern for poetry, far from being a passing fad, has become a more consuming involvement over the years. No wonder he wrote in the Preface to the fourth edition of “Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry: “the present elucidations do not claim to be contributions to research in the history of literature or to aesthetics. They spring from a necessity of thought.”<sup>27</sup>

It is beyond doubt that Nietzsche and Hölderlin, the solitary thinker and the solitary poet, are the two great individuals that has occupied the thinking of Heidegger after “Being and Time.” These two, the thinker and the poet, are akin to each other. In fact they share the same destiny. Both are passionate lovers of anything that is Hellenistic, they have been dazzled by the light of Greece, and both eventually succumbed to the darkness of psychosis. His reading of Nietzsche culminates in the claim that Nietzsche is the last thinker of Western metaphysics. It was he who brings together the motives and aims that have driven the history of metaphysics. His will-to-power bears testimony to this. Hölderlin on the other hand, whom he regarded as the “Swabian Nietzsche,”<sup>28</sup> is open to a new and original future “beyond” metaphysics in a way Nietzsche is not.<sup>29</sup> Thus for Heidegger, Hölderlin’s poetry is for us a fateful destiny.

<sup>27</sup> Elucidations to Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. li.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 205.

Heidegger's involvement with Hölderlin is no departure from philosophy but it signals the entrance into his most real philosophic problems. And what, we may ask is the role of the poet Hölderlin? His role is that of a guide. He leads from one place to another. He is a bridge. The artist, as Heidegger himself explained in one of his essays: "The artist is not an origin because he is also a craftsman but rather because of the setting-forth (*Her-stellen*) of works and the setting-forth of equipment happen in that bringing forth which allows beings, by assuming an appearance, to come forth into their presence."<sup>30</sup> But even apart from Hölderlin's themes, the philosophic quest of Heidegger would have led him to think about poetry. For the poet, he said, gives voice to Being;<sup>31</sup> and for Heidegger the beginning and end of philosophy is always the problem of Being.

But why focus on Hölderlin? Why, in unveiling the essence of poetry, choose Hölderlin as the essential poet? Heidegger himself posits these questions asking: "Why choose Hölderlin's work if our purpose is to show the essence of poetry? Why not Homer or Sophocles, why not Virgil or Dante, why not Shakespeare or Goethe? Surely the essence of poetry has come to rich expression in the works of these poets, more so indeed than in Hölderlin's creation, which broke off so prematurely and abruptly."<sup>32</sup> For Heidegger, the choice of Hölderlin is an arbitrary one. He regarded the persona as the one whose poetic mission is to make poems solely about the essence of poetry. In this sense, he is the poet's poet.<sup>33</sup> Quite a few philosophers greeted with suspicion this original adventure into the realm of poetry. Heidegger seems to be laying aside the concerns and problems of philosophy which he himself posited in order to indulge himself in the sensuous and emotional luxuries of poetry. But this is not the case. In fact, what Heidegger saw in Hölderlin is the capacity for language to speak of Being.

*Man's being is grounded in language; but this actually occurs in conversation. Conversation, however, is not only way in which language takes place, but rather language is essential only as conversation. What we usually mean by "language," namely a stock of words and rules for combining them, is only an exterior aspect of language. But now, what is meant by "conversation"? Obviously, the act of speaking with one another about something. Speaking, then, mediates our coming to one another. . . . We are a conversation, that always signifies we are one conversation. The unity of conversation consists in the fact that in the*

<sup>29</sup> In his commentary of "Remembrance" he wrote: "We must, on the contrary, learn to understand Hölderlin's distinction as presaging in the overcoming of metaphysics." *Elucidations to Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> "Why Poets?" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 52-53.

*essential word there is always manifest that one and the same on which we agree, on the basis of which we are united and so are authentically ourselves. Conversation and its unity support our existence.*<sup>34</sup>

Nothing could be more traditional than this assertion against Heidegger and the suspicion that thinking loses its rigor if it deals with the poets and poetry. At the very dawn of Western philosophy we saw Plato relegating poetry to the realm of unreality in comparison with philosophy. This denigration of poetry is definitely not Plato's propaganda against poetry, rather, it is an inevitable consequence of Platonic dualism between the World of Ideas and the world of the senses. The former consisting of eternal ideas while the latter of the fleeting and the changing data of the senses, with which, as we all know, the practicing artist, and the poet for that matter, is involved. Since that which endures, the eternal, is more valuable compared to what is fleeting and transitory, the temporal, the realm of ideas has a fuller reality than the world of sense. Hence, having this kind of dualism, all art, in opposition to what is rational and demonstrative, traffics in the shadowy and unreal world of the senses. This Platonic doctrine, sometimes more openly and sometimes more subtle, has infected the philosophic view of poetry since the beginning of Western thought.<sup>35</sup>

Contrary to what Plato held, for Heidegger poetry is essentially a revelation. Every human reality, because it is temporal, is also historical; and for him, poetry, as a historical reality, has raised the fundamental problem of man and his destiny in a manner that is at once startling and astonishing. No wonder, in his readings of Hölderlin, he reflects: "Whatever man brings about and pursues is earned and is merited by his own efforts. 'Yet' – says Hölderlin is sharp opposition – all this does not touch the essence of his dwelling on the earth, all this does not reach into the ground of human existence. Human existence is 'poetic' in its ground."<sup>36</sup> This insistence on man's dwelling on earth as "poetic" resounds in Hölderlin in its most extreme and uncanny form. That is why Heidegger has singled him out as the poet of the poets: "the poet of poetry itself in the sense that he is involved with the very fate of poetry."<sup>37</sup>

In highlighting how the poet was able to express the spirit of the age, of what Heidegger referred to as the age of nihilism, he quoted a passage from Hölderlin's poems:

*Much has man experienced.*

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<sup>34</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed explanation of Plato's attack against the arts and its relation to Heidegger, see William Barrett, *What is Existentialism?* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 127-129.

<sup>36</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 54.



*Named many of the heavenly ones,  
Since we have been a conversation  
And able to hear from one another.*<sup>38</sup>

Heidegger explained the passage saying:

*Since we have been in a conversation – man has experienced much and named many gods. Since language has authentically come to pass as conversation, the gods have to expression and a world has appeared. But again it is important to see that the presence of the gods and the appearance of the world are not merely a consequence of the occurrence of language; rather, they are simultaneous with it. And this to the extent that it is precisely in the naming of the gods and in the world becoming word that authentic conversation, which we ourselves are, consists. . . . Only because the gods bring our existence to language do we enter the realm of the decision concerning whether we are to promise ourselves to the gods or whether we are to deny ourselves to them.*<sup>39</sup>

What Heidegger refers to the “promise of ourselves to the gods” is actually what the poets saw in the age of nihilism. Since the presence of the gods and the appearance of the world are not merely consequences of the occurrence of language, the divine sign, so to speak, must be discovered within the world by surprise. “The gods who ‘once were here’ ‘return’ only at a ‘proper time’ and in immediacy—namely, when there is a turn among men in the right place and in the right way.”<sup>40</sup> The divine sign, in all its rigor and complexity, does not make sense for the thinker. Yet, as one commentator says, “if only to be taken as a sign, it is already received and thus, if not understood, at least translated into language, that is the language of signs.”<sup>41</sup> The poet expresses not the sense of words nor of language actually pronounced by a god who would already speak a language similar to the common language of mortals, but the sense of being a sign of what is addressed – the passing-by of god as the sign of god. Heidegger himself pointed this out in his interpretation of another passage from Hölderlin:

*They are, you say, like the wine-god’s sacred priests,  
Who roamed from land to land during the sacred night.*<sup>42</sup>

For Heidegger, this passage speaks of poet’s capacity to detect this passing-by of god which happens in a flash. In his commentary he said: “Poets are mortals who gravely sing the wine-god and sense (*spüren*)

<sup>38</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 201.

<sup>41</sup> Marc Froment-Meurice, *That is to Say: Heidegger’s Poetics*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 90.

<sup>42</sup> “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 202.

the track (Spur) of the fugitive gods; they stay on god's track, and so they blaze (*spuren*) a path for their mortal relations, a path toward the turning point."<sup>43</sup> Situating himself between men and the gods, the poet can thus be described as a "demigod," not half god and half man similar to a mythological character, by someone in-between, so that for the first time the dimension in which men and the gods turn toward and against each other thus inhabit the same region is opened.<sup>44</sup>

Heidegger too speaks of intimacy, the intimacy of the poet to the gods, men, earth, and sky. In his elucidation of fragmentary draft of Hölderlin dating from 1800 which reads:

*But man dwells in huts and wraps himself with a modest garment, for the more intimate he is,/the more attentive too, and that he preserves the spirit as the heavenly flame./Everything is intimate.*<sup>45</sup>

Heidegger comments upon the phrase saying:

*Who is man? Who is the poet? He is the one who must bear witness to what he is. To bear witness can signify to testify, but it also means to be answerable for what one has testified in one's testimony. Man is he who is precisely in the attestation of his own existence. . . . But what should man and the poet testify to? To his belonging to the earth. This belonging consists in the fact that man is the inheritor, and the learner of all things. . . . The attestation of belonging to this intimacy occurs through the creation of the world and through its rise, as well as through its destruction.*<sup>46</sup>

What the passage means is that without the poets no one can perceive the signs of the gods. However, without an other who would perceive and receive the language of the poet, it would fall into nothingness. This other must not himself be a poet, yet he must be sensitive to poetry. These others, as Heidegger emphasized, are not only a people or individuals. They are first and foremost exceptional individuals who are meditative and patient, who would be companions on the voyage, neighbours who are nonetheless different from the poet.<sup>47</sup>

With his constant evocation of the "need" of the gods, Heidegger recognized in Hölderlin the fundamental experience of a longing of man for the coming of a new god. Towards the end of his essay on "The Essence of Poetry", he remarked:

<sup>43</sup> "Why Poets?" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 202.

<sup>44</sup> Froment-Meurice, loc. cit.

<sup>45</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 53-54.

<sup>46</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 58-59. Froment-Meurice, in his study of Heidegger, pointed out that these "meditative individuals" are the Germans, whom Heidegger considered as "people of poetry and thought." Froment-Meurice, op. cit., p. 91.

*Hölderlin puts into poetry the essence of poetry – but not in the sense of a timelessly valid concept. This essence of poetry belongs to a definite time. But not in such a way that it merely conforms to that time as already existing. Rather, by providing anew the essence of poetry, Hölderlin first determines a new time. It is the time of the gods who have fled and the god who is coming. It is the time of need because it stands in double lack and double not: the no-longer of the gods who have fled and in the not-yet of the coming.*

*The essence of poetry which is founded by Hölderlin is historical in the highest degree, because it anticipates a historical time. As a historical essence, however, it is the only true essence.<sup>48</sup>*

This experience goes well beyond the simple nomination of the gods or the divines. Not only are the divine and sacred names lacking, but also they give no feeling at all if they are coming once more. This is the kind of nausea that the poet Hölderlin was able to present and he was able to present it within time and temporality – within the course of human history. Hölderlin is “the poet of the night of the world,”<sup>49</sup> this present stage to which history has brought to us: the night from which all the gods have departed and where the god to be has not yet arrived, the night in which man must stand in somber and lucid courage before nothingness, before the age of nihilism that Nietzsche himself prophesied. So too for Heidegger, the thinker and philosopher, nothingness is not a meaningless word, a mere negative concept, or just a passing emotional vapour. Rather, it is a real historical and philosophical problem that man faces now as never before in history.

### **Heidegger and Holderlin’s *Das Heilige***

As was already propounded in the previous discussion, Heidegger’s choice of Hölderlin as the essential poet is a most crucial one. Hölderlin was able to express in the language of poetry what nihilism is, and this was expressed most clearly in his reference to the “flight of the gods”, the “passing-by of god, and the god’s impending “return.” We all know very well that the metaphysical problematic formulated in “Being and Time” insists at the uncovering of the fundamental structures that determine the Being of all beings qua being, his most devoted articulation on the ontical and the ontological. Insofar as one can talk of a major shift in Heidegger’s thinking, away from “philosophy of existence” or of *dasein* and towards a kind of poetic-meditative thinking of the history of Being, towards a paradigm for which the Pre-Socratics, namely Parmenides and Heraclitus, and

<sup>48</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> Barrett, op. cit., p. 132.

the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin provided the main source of inspiration. Gone is the angst-ridden individual who takes up upon himself the experience of nothingness and guilt, of his own death and the struggle for care and authenticity.<sup>50</sup> In the place of *dasein*, now we have the wanderer on forest paths, pondering the mysteries of the German landscape and rivers, meditating upon the words of poets and waiting upon for a new revelation of Being.<sup>51</sup>

Heidegger in fact is very careful in equating Being with God. His philosophic acumen during the 1930's up until the 1940's is devoted to a negative attitude against Christian philosophy and theology.<sup>52</sup> Heidegger himself would have almost resisted to the idea that what he was attempting to think and develop through was a topic within the realm of Christian theology. However, in a study conducted by Karl Lowith, he remarked that the Being of that has such a prominent role in the philosophy of Heidegger, particularly in his later writings, behaves in a manner very similar to the biblical God.<sup>53</sup> It dwells in mystery and cannot be explained but only evoked: it is the ultimate ground for there-being something rather than nothing. It is that which disposes the epochs of history, it is that which we have forgotten but which we may hope, will reveal itself again in a new, future advent.<sup>54</sup>

However, although Heidegger himself resisted the assimilation of his way of questioning to the agenda of theology and Christian philosophy, he would have no problem acknowledging that the aims and methods of his way of thinking were very different from those of academic conventional philosophies. In a pursuit of essential thinking, Heidegger employed different methodologies. One of the most striking is his radical re-reading of the Pre-Socratics, a re-reading that generally involve bold translations of the original texts that have greatly scandalized classicists.<sup>55</sup> Another is his use of poetry as a source of philosophical reflection. Amongst the poets, Hölderlin has this singular pre-eminence. However, he made it very clear that despite the essential proximity between the domains of thinking and poetry, they were, first

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<sup>50</sup> This is most pronounced in *Being and Time*, but, to the surprise of those philosophers waiting for the second half, Heidegger seemed to have abandoned his project.

<sup>51</sup> In the untitled first page of *Off the Beaten Track* (*Holzwege*), Heidegger assumes a poetic stance in explaining why he gave such a title. "Wood is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where wood is untrampled. They are called *Holzwege*. Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*." *Off the Beaten Track*, p. V.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 8-15.

<sup>53</sup> This remark given by Lowith was discussed substantially by Hemming. Cf. Laurence Paul Hemming, "Heidegger's God" in *The Thomist*. Vol. 62, (1998): p. 375-377.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>55</sup> Safranski expressed the distrust of some scholars on the translation given by Heidegger on the Greeks. Cf. Safranski, *op. cit.*, p. 149-150.

and foremost, essentially distinct. In 1951, he wrote in the Preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Elucidations* the following:

*These attempts at the elucidation of several of Hölderlin's poems, published separately until now, are gathered together here in their unaltered form.*

*These elucidations belong to the dialogue of thinking (**Denken**) with a form of poetry (**Dichten**) whose historical uniqueness can never be proved by the history of literature, but which can be pointed out by the dialogue with thinking (**Denken**).<sup>56</sup>*

Heidegger is very clear here. As a thinker, never did he affirm to himself that he is a poet or that he is thinking poetically, rather, in the manner of a thinker, to think through the poetic language of the poet. And he is thinking only on those things that the poet had to give.<sup>57</sup>

Hölderlin's poetry has such a decisive significance for Heidegger. It has to do with the understanding of poetic identity and of the poetic word that the poet is given to speak that Heidegger finds most articulated in a very unique way in Hölderlin.

*As the founding of being, poetry is bound in a twofold sense. In viewing this most intimate law, we must grasp its essence and its entirety.*

*"...and hints are, from time immemorial, the language of the gods."*

*The poet's saying is the intercepting of these hints, in order to pass on to his people. The intercepting of these hints is a receiving, and yet at the same time, a new giving: for in the "first signs" the poet catches sight of what has been completed, and boldly puts what he has seen into his word in order to foretell what is not yet fulfilled.<sup>58</sup>*

This understanding is embedded in the complex themes of Hölderlin's own poetic realm which includes the identity and fate of the German nation, the flight of the gods, the rivers of the German landscape, the place of man's dwelling on earth, and the "Event" (*Ereignis*) of human understanding. He summarized the content of the Hölderlin's poetic word in the introduction saying: "It's word is: the Holy (*das Heilige*). It speaks of the flight of the gods. It speaks of the protection that the gods who have flown give us until we are minded to and capable of dwelling in their proximity. This word is what is most characteristic of home (*Heimat*)."<sup>59</sup>

Two of Heidegger's lectures lecture series on Hölderlin involves the latter's poems about the river, the Rhein (*der Rhein*) and The Ister

<sup>56</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Elucidations to Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 176-177.

(*der Ister*), a title which involves the Latin and Greek name of the River Danube.<sup>60</sup> These poems have such a prominent place in Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poems because there is an inner affinity between the essence of the rivers and the poet himself.<sup>61</sup>

In these poems, the rivers are presented, according to Heidegger, as demigods, descending from the mountains to the land below, shaping it and watering it and making it fit for habitation by mortals.<sup>62</sup> Yet, in performing this task, the river is only something that is constantly in flux, "the state of wondering,"<sup>63</sup> as Heidegger refers to it. As such, it both articulates the endless flow of time itself and the wandering of those human tribes that have not found, or have been uprooted from their homeland. Yet the river is not a mere flux, not a sign of mere homelessness. Even in its onward flow it retains the connection to its divine source.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, Heidegger saw in *der Rhein* a reversal in its movement. This reversal in the river's flow bespeaks a twofold link between the river's divine origin in the mountains on the one hand and, on the other, the openness of the ocean into which it flows.<sup>65</sup>

In *der Ister*, this same double movement also hints at the unity between East and West, between the *Morgenland* and *Abendland*, the "ancient" youth of civilization (its morning) and its decline (its evening).<sup>66</sup> This is, according to Heidegger, between a world in which gods communed with mortals and a technologized world from which the gods have fled. "Just as the river binds together a sequence of profound and powerful polarities, so too its seeming backwards flow discloses that, though constantly in flux, it is also a figure that abides in the midst of flux."<sup>67</sup> The vision of the two rivers thus inaugurates, mediates, and connects the manifold possibilities of human dwelling on earth, and of course this includes that mortals' fundamental relatedness to the world of the gods.

Yet, at the same time, everything that can *be* said about the rivers may, without reducing it to mere allegory, can also be said of the poet. The rivers, Heidegger insists, are the poets, although he adds that it must be seen as a "poetic word" and not a philosophical definition." He explains:

<sup>60</sup> According to Pattison, Heidegger highlights and Latin and Greek names of The River Danube so as to emphasize the connection between Germany and Antiquity and the East. Cf. Stephen Mulhall, ed. *Martin Heidegger*: (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p. 394.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 182.

<sup>62</sup> The mountains are the dwelling-place of the gods and of the divine attributes of thunder and lightning. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 182.

<sup>63</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 182.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 183-185

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 185.

<sup>66</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p.201.

<sup>67</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 203.

*But the rivers are the poets, who establish what is poetic, on the ground in which humans dwell. The poetic river-spirit makes habitable in an essential sense, preparing for the ground of the hearth of the house of history. The poet opens up the chronotope within which belonging to a hearth and being at home become at all possible.*<sup>68</sup>

Thus, like the river, the poet may be spoken of as a demi-god, as one situated between the world of the gods and the world of men. But it may seem as if the poet does something that the river does not. For the poet speaks, he names what is Holy for the benefit of both gods and men, says Heidegger. He brings the river into language or makes of it a sign. But, once again, we must insist, this is not simply to turn the river into an allegory or to see it as no more than a sign or something else. The river itself needs to be understood as a sign, as meaningful in the way that it is meaningful. The river is not what it is except as the sign that it becomes the poetic word.

“The poet speaks of the Holy.” What does this mean for Heidegger? In turning our attention to the Holy (*das Heilige*), we can find the linkage between Being and the divinity. Once again, Heidegger tells us, “The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy.”<sup>69</sup> He is not here making a distinction between Being and Holy, as if apportioning reality, one for the philosophers and one for the poets. Daigler pointed out that “Being and Holy are intimately related for Heidegger to the extent that when philosophers neglect this dimension of Being, they also neglect Being itself.”<sup>70</sup> What then is the Holy? Heidegger gave us a clue saying:

*The wholesome and sound (**das Heile**) withdraws. The world becomes without healing, un-holy (**heil-os**). Not only does the holy (*das Heilige*), as the track of the godhead, thereby remain concealed; even the track to the holy, the hale, and whole (**das Heil**), seems to be effaced.*<sup>71</sup>

The Holy (*das Heilige*) is derived from *das Heil* which can mean either the whole or else well being. We can read this in Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s “As when on a Holiday.” He said: “It (*das Heilige*) is the primordial, and it remains in itself unbroken and ‘whole’ (*heil*). This originary wholeness gives a gift to everything that is real by virtue of its all-presence: it confers the grace of its own abiding presence.”<sup>72</sup> However, Heidegger also said somewhere that the holy is a “dimension.” He wrote: “The holy alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn affords a dimension for the gods and for God.”<sup>73</sup> By this Heidegger means that the holy is the condition or sphere for

<sup>68</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 204.

<sup>69</sup> “What is Metaphysics? Postscript” in Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 360.

<sup>70</sup> Daigler, op. cit., p. 381.

<sup>71</sup> Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 117.

<sup>72</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 85.

<sup>73</sup> “Letter on Humanism” in Basic Writings, p. 218.

the possibility of God's appearance – for his epiphany. No wonder for de Vries: “(the holy) is the inaugural light, that native soil that makes possible the advent of God or of the gods.”<sup>74</sup>

Heidegger gives us another clue in understanding the essence of the Holy. In his essay “Building, Dwelling, and Thinking” he alludes to the unity of the Fourfold (*Geviert*). These Four expressed the primal oneness of Earth and Sky, Divinities and Mortals. “(The word) ‘on the earth’ already means ‘under the sky.’ Both of these also mean ‘remaining before divinities’ and include ‘belonging to men’s being with one another.’”<sup>75</sup>

*Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. When we say earth, we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.*

*The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes, the light of the dusk of the day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether. When we say sky, we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.*

*The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws in his concealment. When we speak of the divinities, we are already thinking of the other three along with them, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.*

*The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before divinities. When we speak of mortals, we are already thinking of the other three along with them, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.”<sup>76</sup>*

The earth is that which is “blossoming and fruiting.” Mortals are human beings because they can die. It is also in the nature of mortals to stand and dwell before divinities. And who are the divinities? Heidegger tells us that they are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. From these reflections, Heidegger came to a conclusion that “this technologized world is”, according to Heidegger, “man’s spiritual distress, his destitution.”<sup>77</sup> Modernity is age of the flight of the gods, it is a spiritual decline.<sup>78</sup> Only by dwelling in “the sight of the gods” can man become historical, to become immerse in the simple unity of earth and sky.

Reaffirming the intimate connection between Being, the Holy, and divinities, Heidegger writes in his “Letter on Humanism”:

<sup>74</sup> Hent de Vries, “Theotopographies: Nancy, Hölderlin, and Heidegger: *MLN* (Vol. 109, no. 3, 1994), p. 491.

<sup>75</sup> Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 149-150.

<sup>77</sup> Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 91.

<sup>78</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 204. We can also find the same theme in another work of Heidegger. Cf. Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 38



Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the Holy be thought. Only from the essence of the Holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify.<sup>79</sup>

This passage establishes the following sequence: The Truth of Being, the essence of the Holy, the essence of the Divinities, and lastly, the proper signification of God. But what then does Heidegger tell us about God himself? What is the most proper way to signify God?

In his interpretation of Hölderlin's poem "As when on a Holiday. . ." Heidegger provides one of his most explicit statements on the nature of God:

Hölderlin names nature the holy, because it is "older than the ages and above the gods." However, "holiness" in no way is a property belonging to a fixed God (**festehenden Gott**). The holy is not holy because it is divine, but rather divinity is divine because it is in its own way "holy."<sup>80</sup>

Out of the oneness of the four (earth and sky, mortals and divinities), described by Heidegger as the "Holy", the divinities appear and become named. As was already mentioned earlier, he assigned the task of naming the gods to the poets. "The writing of poetry is the fundamental naming of the gods."<sup>81</sup> This explains why Heidegger thinks that the concept "nature", which is so prevalent in Hölderlin's poetry is explicitly identified with the Greek *phusis*.<sup>82</sup> *Phusis* is prior to the gods, for it is only in the emergence of Being that there is something to which the term "god" might apply. Heidegger approves that the Greeks subordinated their gods to Being, and consequently even understood this subordination to fate. No wonder, he wrote somewhere that: "Fate (*Moirai*) holds sway of the gods and men, whereas in Christian thought, for example, all destiny is the work of the 'divine providence' of the Creator and the Redeemer."<sup>83</sup>

As a rejoinder, let us emphasize that for Heidegger Hölderlin's poetry is permeated by a deep sadness, a most profound sense of loss and absence – of the presence and the flight of the gods. The "fundamental mood" or what Heidegger refers to as *Grandstimmung* is his "holy mourning" (*heilige Trauer*), a mourning for the departure of the gods.<sup>84</sup> This is not supposed to be understood as a psychological phenomenon, rather it is a "*geistige*", a spiritual-intellectual phenomenon. It is not

<sup>79</sup> "Letter on Humanism" in Basic Writings, p. 230.

<sup>80</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 95.

<sup>81</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 55.

<sup>83</sup> Parmenides, p. 110-111.

<sup>84</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 65.

simply an “inner state” but the way the world is disclosed as a whole.<sup>85</sup> In Hölderlin, our world is disclosed, a world permeated by absence. “Holy mourning,” (*heilige Trauer*) according to Heidegger, should not be confused with nostalgia. Rather, it is essentially “creative and productive” (*schöpferisch-erzeugend*). It is creative in thinking of the flight of the gods, there is also a projection of coming.<sup>86</sup>

## CONCLUSION: GOD IN HEIDEGGER’S THOUGHT

Central to Heidegger’s philosophic excursus is the problem of Being, that one and single problem that has dominated his works from his earliest essays down to his interviews. However, his immersion in theology and the Sacred Sciences, combined with his intimate relation with Scholasticism, has provided confusion on the place of God in his philosophy. Indeed, Heidegger’s reflection on Being and God is one replete with ambiguities and vagueness. On the one hand, he is questioning the integrity of Christian Theology and philosophy, and in another occasion you can hear him speaking about the Sacred, the Holy, the divine. In more than one occasion, he is elevating atheism as the fundamental stance of the thinker – the philosopher, and in another, he is speaking of atheism as an authentic path towards God. Amidst these confusions, we ask the question, what is really the place of God in Heidegger’s philosophy? And if there is really a God in his thought, how does it emerge in his problematization of Being?

The Eternal Recurrence of God as a conceptual problem in metaphysics was thrown away by Martin Heidegger. He delegates a primordial reflection empowered by thinking and made clearer by Dasein’s multi-faceted Transcendence towards Being. This is an ontological appreciation, our attunement, whose very ground is our worldviews. Heidegger writes: “It (metaphysical thinking) is guided by the *anthropological* mode of thinking which, *no longer comprehending the essence of subjectivity*, prolongs modern metaphysics while vitiating it. Anthropology as metaphysics is the transition of metaphysics into the final configuration: ‘worldview’. (*weltanschauung*)”<sup>87</sup> It is true that “the relationship of man to Being is obscure. Nonetheless, we everywhere and continually stand within it and wherever and whenever we comport ourselves towards beings.”<sup>88</sup> This is the reason why

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 67-70

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry, p. 65-67.

<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, vol. 4, p. 149.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

*"The truth of beings contains a projection of the Being of beings. But, insofar as man, himself a being, maintains himself in the projection of Being and stands in the truth of beings, he must either take the truth of beings as a measure for his being-himself, or must give a measure for the truth of beings out of his own being-himself."*<sup>89</sup>

For Heidegger, theology has yielded to the temptation to be relevant and scientific. It is because of this that it has perverted itself into a form which is in competition to philosophy. No wonder Heidegger said:

*someone who has experienced theology in his own roots, both the theology of the Christian faith and that of philosophy, would today rather remain silent about God when he is speaking in the realm of thinking.*

*... causa sui: This is the right name for the God of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God. Man can neither fall to his knees in awe before the causa sui nor can he play music and dance before this God.*<sup>90</sup>

No wonder, rarely do we hear the name of Heidegger in the theological circles. But we can see clearly here the reason why he is not really considered in theology is that he chose to bind himself to Being, to metaphysics, which, for him, is not suited for speaking religious themes. Heidegger has obviously devoted his acumen insisting that metaphysics is judged as ineffectual of speaking about God. Rather, the metaphysician thinks conceptually and abstractly. He expressed this most explicitly in the "Contributions to Philosophy":

*For being is never a determination of God himself, but is that which the divinization of God needs, to remain nonetheless completely distinct from being. Being is neither (like the beingness of metaphysics) the highest and purest determination of **theion** and **Deus** and the "Absolute," nor is it – a notion which goes with this interpretation – the most general and emptiest covering term for everything that is not nothing.*<sup>91</sup>

As we have already seen previously, for Heidegger, Being is the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*), and this event is the source of God and gods. In that case, it is distinct from the "beingness" which, according to Heidegger, is essential to the notion of Being as a name of God (e.g. *ipsum esse*). The point here is not that metaphysics cannot speak something about God, rather, Heidegger maintains Western metaphysics has a fundamental commitment to Being which blinds it to this experienced meaning. However, there is a sense of the "Holy" which the experience of thinking, of philosophical reflection, points to.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>90</sup> Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Contributions to Philosophy, p. 240.

Now, a very crucial dimension of Heidegger's thought was his involvement with the poets, and not just any poet, but the poet Hölderlin. It was Hölderlin's notion of the "Holy", the *das Heilige*, which provides for us a viable direction in our path to answer the question posited above. Heidegger's references to "The Holy" seems in consonance with the qualities of "*Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*" as properties of what is meant by "The Holy". Yet "The Holy" is not a property, it is not a quality of objects, and the reason for this lies on the fact that Heidegger was against any form of value thinking.

The basic premise of value thinking is that the fundamental level of the phenomenon disclosing itself is its present-before-us as thingliness.<sup>92</sup> The ontologizing of values, which is for Heidegger can be traced back to ontologizing the essences, assumes that we have to perceive the thing, the phenomenon, and then eventually affixed some value or significance to it. Through the appreciation of something as a value, what is esteemed is permitted to become merely as an object standing in correlation to the approval of the person. This is, in fact, what Heidegger would eventually refer to as "the subjectivising of what is valued."<sup>93</sup>

Now the treatment of God as the "highest value" is actually a degradation of the essence of God. Furthermore, it is the "highest blasphemy against the meaning of Being."<sup>94</sup> Any discussion of God in terms of value is a distortion, of how concealment becomes manifest. However, it must be noted that certain modes of presencing enables unconcealment to become manifest thereby it makes possible the presencing of the Holy. Heidegger is of course referring to art. Now, if the unconcealment within the province of art happens, Heidegger reflects:

*Dignity and splendour are not properties, next to which and behind which the god stands, but in the dignity and in the splendour the god becomes present. In the reflection of this splendour there radiates, that is, there is lighted up, what we have called world.*<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, in a different occasion, Heidegger speaks of nihilism which is summed up in Nietzsche's word: "God is dead". Heidegger did not interpret it not as personal attitude or character to be refuted on the sole basis of church attendance or even apologetic proofs regarding the existence of God. It is, first and foremost, an event, an unfolding of Western metaphysics which is nearer to us than all the things in our everyday life. Moreover, nihilism too is the condition for that possibility. Man has forgotten his place, in history, his dwelling in the earth, and the Holy is not in the

<sup>92</sup> Being and Time, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Being and Time, p. 101.

<sup>94</sup> "Letter on Humanism" in Basic Writings, p. 232-233.

<sup>95</sup> Poetry, Language, and Thought, p. 44.

established places. The projection of the really real supersensible reality has lost its influence and life-giving powers. And for Heidegger, Christianity has contributed most to the withdrawal of the Holy by becoming onto-theo-logical and a worldly cultural power:<sup>96</sup> Man's propensity to dwell in the proximity of the divine is so obfuscated that even the absence of god is not even discerned properly. An explication of this can be read in one of Heidegger's study of the poet Hölderlin. He explains:

*The world's night is spreading its darkness. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, by the "missingness of God." But the missingness of God which Hölderlin experienced does not deny that the Christian relationship with God lives on in individuals and in the churches, still less does it assess this relationship negatively. The missingness of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The missingness of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time, because it becomes ever more destitute. It has already grown so destitute it can no longer discern the missingness of God as missingness.<sup>97</sup>*

For Heidegger, Hölderlin's poetic word is the event of the Holy (*das Ereignis des Heiligen*),<sup>98</sup> where Being gives itself as a sparing nearness. However, once the word is spoken, it slips away from the care of the poet himself. "Therefore", Heidegger concludes, "the poet turns to the others, that their commemoration (*Andenken*) helps the poetizing word to be understood, so that in understanding, the homecoming (*Heimkunft*) occasions itself for each as is appropriate to him."<sup>99</sup> Having been spoken, the poetic word must be properly interpreted, that is, appropriated.

Appropriation is the task of the thinker, who, like the poet strives to bring Being to word. But the thinker must interpret the resonance of the word with a view toward understanding Being as a ground for beings. This calls for a discursivity and a reflective orientation within a tradition not required of poetry. Nevertheless, the two are mutually dependent. Where thinking needs poetic utterance as a point of departure into the concealed history of Being, poetry needs ontological interpretation, or appropriation, to sustain and further determine its voice. In its appropriation of the word, thought traces the history of Being insofar as Being spares itself from utterance. The thinker must, therefore, cleave to the unspoken resonating through the presence of the word, and, in doing so, preserve the word as "saying". Thus Heidegger attunes his discourse to the poetic voice of Hölderlin.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Philosophical and Political Writings, p. 142.

<sup>97</sup> Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, p. 193, also, refer to "Why Poets?" in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 205.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 72

<sup>99</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 73-74

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