

# ‘WIE KOMMT DER MENSCH IN DIE THEOLOGIE?’: HEIDEGGER, HEGEL, AND THE STAKES OF ONTO-THEO-LOGY<sup>1</sup>

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“While the critique of ontotheology would have thinking first attempt to rid itself of idols, a dramatic view of reason would have it seek instead to enter more deeply into the movement that is always-already underway, and thus this view presupposes a positive relation to God that is more fundamental than the negative or neutral.”

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The question that Heidegger raises at the end of a seminar on Hegel given in 1957,<sup>2</sup> namely, “Wie kommt der Gott in die Philosophie?” (“How does the god enter philosophy?”), has been echoing and re-echoing in theology, and even more in Continental philosophy of religion, so incessantly that it may be said to have acquired some-

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<sup>1</sup>This essay was originally published in the *Revista Española de Teología* 4 (2005).

<sup>2</sup>The concluding lecture, entitled “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics” and delivered 24 February 1957, was published together with a lecture called “The Principle of Identity” in *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1957). References in this essay will be drawn from the English translation: *Identity and Difference* (hereafter: *ID*), trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

thing like the authority of tradition.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, on its face the question simply asks after the relationship between God and human thinking, or how and to what extent God is accessible to reason, but Heidegger himself raises the question as a problem specifically within the context of his profound and extensive critique of Western metaphysics. The question, How does the god enter philosophy? he explains, “leads back to the question, What is the origin of the onto-theological essential constitution of metaphysics?” (*ID*, 56). As we will see more fully below, God’s entering—or perhaps we ought to say his being dragged—into the ambit of human thinking is the determining event in the Western metaphysical tradition.

Heidegger’s charge has provoked a variety of responses: on the one hand, the question has been welcomed by those who wish to be relieved, once and for all, of what has been experienced as the oppressive burden of religion (and specifically Christianity), insofar as its unmasking of the “theology” latent in the philosophical tradition opens up the possibility of (what presents itself as) more radical, and radically free, questioning. On the other hand, those who do not wish to be deprived of their faith by this unmasking tend either to embrace Heidegger’s “methodological atheism”<sup>4</sup> as a way of purifying faith of reason’s apparently incorrigible habits of setting up for itself false idols, or they attempt to show that Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology does not, in fact, apply to certain key figures in the Western tradition (for example, Dionysius,<sup>5</sup> Bonaventure,<sup>6</sup> and even Aquinas<sup>7</sup>) however just its judgment may be

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<sup>3</sup>Anthony Godzieba observes that Heidegger’s “analysis of ontotheology marks an epochal shift which has affected not only the intellectual history of the West but the history of the Catholic theology of God as well. It acts as a marker, dividing that history into periods of ‘before’ and ‘after,’” “Prolegomena to a Catholic Theology of God Between Heidegger and Postmodernity,” *Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 319–339; here, 320.

<sup>4</sup>See Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Ontotheology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 10; 38–39.

<sup>5</sup>Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence: On God and the Soul* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004), 93–141.

<sup>6</sup>Kevin Hughes, “Remember Bonaventure? (Onto) Theology and Ecstasy,” *Modern Theology* 19.4 (2003): 529–545.

<sup>7</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” *Revue Thomiste* 1 (1995): 31–66. See also Marion’s preface to the English translation of *Dieu sans l’être*, in which he “recants” what appears to be an initial acceptance of the charge

regarding the conventional reception of these figures. The point of excepting these figures is for the most part to enable a renewed appropriation, rather than critical abandonment, of the Western tradition.

The present essay addresses itself to those in this latter group, who seek to preserve the integrity of faith, whether it be with the *help* of Heidegger's critique or *in spite of* it (i.e., showing the limitation of his critique in relation to particular thinkers). We wish, in the following pages, to raise a question regarding the question itself—to ask, that is, whether the terms in which Heidegger poses the question permit a satisfactory response, regardless of the eventual content of the response. As is no doubt already becoming clear, our thesis is that they do not, and that the engagement with Heidegger's question of ontotheology threatens to impoverish our notion of reason and to render a genuine *Christian* faith in God impossible precisely to the extent that it allows Heidegger to set the terms of the engagement. If we seek to save the transcendent mystery of God from the light of reason by forcing him to retreat into the darkness of the unknown, we risk depriving God of intelligible significance and therefore any *real* bearing in the world; making faith ultimately arbitrary, accidental, and sentimental; and casting a shadow on the "positive" aspects of God's revelation, which include the dogmatic and institutional dimensions of the Church that have traditionally been understood to be an inseparable extension of the Incarnation. In other words, if the "true" God is the hidden one, accessible only to the mystical labors of negative theology or to the moments of non-rational ecstasis, then revelation, and the particularity of Christianity that stands and falls with it, will tend to be taken for the dispensable matter the Enlightenment considered it to be.

Our thesis, thus, is that the question, "How does the god enter philosophy?" with the critique of ontotheology it implies, is something like the one put to the young Stephen Dedalus by his jeering classmates, namely, the question whether he kisses his mother: it is a question that cannot be answered one way or the other without compromise. The question, therefore, ought to be refused, at least in the terms in which Heidegger frames it, and whatever is of genuine value in the question, we will propose, ought

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against Aquinas in the original text: *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. xxii–xxiv.

to be recast within a question that is more radical because it begins in fact with the *prius* of God: how does man enter into theology? In other words, our first question ought not to be how we keep our thinking free from (presumption regarding) God, but how God is able to raise *even our* minds to participate in the “theo-logic” of his own mystery.

To be sure, the issues we allude to here cannot be settled or even sufficiently explored in a brief essay such as this. Our aim, instead, is to set into relief some of what is at stake in the question of ontotheology, and to do so in a provocative manner, making a plea in the end for the recovery of a more robust and theologically oriented notion of reason. To that end, we will first give a very brief sketch of Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology and the significance this critique has for him in relation to the question concerning God. We will then turn to see what Hegel, whom Heidegger presents as a paradigm of ontotheology, has to say on this theme by considering his preliminary reflections on the relationship between God and human thinking that formed the introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.<sup>8</sup> While Heidegger’s criticism of Hegel needs to be affirmed, we will see that Hegel in turn shows up certain problematic implications of Heidegger’s position. We will then offer an assessment of these two critiques in relation to one another, in order to suggest that what seems to be an opposition between them—Heidegger seeks to “free God” from metaphysical thinking, while Hegel insists that shielding God from metaphysical thinking leads to a problematic dualism—is merely apparent, since their differing judgments are due to what amounts to a similar assumption regarding the nature of reason. Finally, we will describe an alternative to this assumption offered by the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar, which seems in principle able to provide a means of avoiding the pitfalls of *both* ontotheology *and* its critique.

It should be noted that the following criticism of the project of overcoming ontotheology is not intended to be a general assessment of Heidegger, who has opened up perhaps more avenues of fruitful reflection than nearly any other philosopher in the

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<sup>8</sup>We will be drawing freely from the “Introduction” to his lectures as presented in his manuscript as well as in the notes from his 1824 and 1827 series: *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (hereafter: *PR*), vol. 1: *Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

twentieth century. It is intended, instead, to be a caution regarding the "use" of his thinking in theology and the philosophy of religion. Moreover, an adequate assessment of Heidegger in this respect would require a more thorough treatment from the perspective of dogmatic, systematic, and fundamental theology; we offer here simply some initial philosophical reflections suggesting why such an assessment appears to be necessary.

### 1. Heidegger: Freeing God from being

The term "ontotheology," though apparently first used by Kant,<sup>9</sup> initially appears in Heidegger's work in the new introduction he added in 1949 to the lecture *What is Metaphysics?* first published in 1929.<sup>10</sup> In this new introduction, he is inquiring into the essence of metaphysics through a reflection on seminal texts from Aristotle. According to Heidegger, metaphysics is essentially concerned with  $\text{ὅν ἢ ὅν}$ , being qua being, which he takes to mean: the *beingness* of beings [*die Seiendheit des Seienden*], i.e., "being" understood specifically on the basis of that which exists, as a generalization of what makes a thing a being ("the οὐσία of the ὅν"). It thus seeks to grasp being, or beings, not as this or that particular being, but as a whole, which is why metaphysics can claim to be the roots for the tree of the human sciences that study beings in various particular respects.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Kant distinguishes between "cosmo-theology" and "onto-theology," as the two theological sub-branches of the transcendental theology that thinks its object, the "supreme being," through reason alone (as opposed to the natural theology that thinks the supreme being on the basis of a concept borrowed from nature). While cosmo-theology proceeds on the basis of some experience, onto-theology proceeds from a "mere concept." See the *Critique of Pure Reason* A 631–632 = B 659–660.

<sup>10</sup>This introduction was published in English as "The Way Back Into the Ground of Metaphysics" (hereafter: "Way Back"), in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 206–221. Heidegger had already made brief allusion to the concept of ontotheology in a typescript on "Nietzsche's Metaphysics," written in the second half of 1940. See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 3, *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 241.

<sup>11</sup>Heidegger begins this introduction with an illuminating reference to the image Descartes presents in a letter to the person who translated his *Principia Philosophiae* into French. Heidegger uses the image to bring to light the more fundamental

In pursuing its aim, metaphysics moves in two directions at once: on the one hand, it represents “the totality of beings as such with an eye to their most universal traits (ὄν καθόλου, κοινόν); but at the same time also the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest and therefore divine being (ὄν καθόλου, ἀκρότατον, θεῖον)” (“Way Back,” 217). There is a link, then, between the universality and “foundationality” aimed at by metaphysical thinking and its latent theological character: we might say that in seeking the “best” sense of being as a way of understanding beings as a whole it seeks being in the best sense, namely, as God. After showing the latent theological character of metaphysics in Aristotle—which indicates, as he observes, that God does not enter philosophy only with the Christian appropriation of the Greeks, but is there as soon as philosophy becomes metaphysical—Heidegger goes on to say that Christians ought in fact to have been the first to repudiate the entry: “Will Christian theology make up its mind one day to take seriously the word of the apostle and thus also the conception of philosophy as foolishness?” (“Way Back,” 218) (cf. 1 Cor 1:20).

In order to see why Heidegger thinks that Christianity ought to take a distance from metaphysics (which is not to say that metaphysics ought simply to be rejected<sup>12</sup>), it is good to turn to his more detailed account in the lecture, “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics.” It is here that Heidegger casts the issue in terms of the question we mentioned at the outset, namely, How does the god enter into philosophy? In continuity with his earlier description, Heidegger claims in this lecture that it is the very nature of metaphysical thinking to become theological; in other words, precisely because it is occupied with the thinking of being qua being (which is to be contrasted with Heidegger’s own “being-historical” thinking [*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*] that thinks the

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question regarding the ground in which the roots have their place and receive their nourishment: see “Way Back,” 207.

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, Heidegger tends to use the term “Verwindung” rather than “Überwindung” in this context, intending an “overcoming” that incorporates rather than eliminates: see “Overcoming Metaphysics” in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper, 1973), 84–110. In *Zur Seinsfrage*, Heidegger says that the “Verwindung” of metaphysics is in fact an opening into its essence, which allows us to restore metaphysics: see *Zur Seinsfrage* in *Wegmarken*, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), 385–426; here, 416–417.

*difference* between being and beings<sup>13</sup>), metaphysics is *defined* by the entry of the god into philosophy. To put it yet another way, metaphysics is the name of that manner of thinking which *forgets* its radical temporality and finitude and thereby confuses itself with what is objectified as "transcendent," i.e., elevated outside of time and change (and in that respect divinized). But if this is the case, the god that manages to fit himself into philosophy, on philosophy's terms, hardly warrants the deference due to the "godly God" [*der göttliche Gott*]. As we see here, the ontotheological god enters philosophy precisely as a means of understanding the "beingness" of beings, and thus is, so to speak, enlisted to serve the project of rendering all of being intelligible, opening the whole of reality to the grasp of (calculative) thought. As part of this project, the god is named principally by his function: *causa sui*. Because he is the "self-grounding," the god becomes the ground for everything else. In other words, the god becomes that which explains everything, and he is summoned first of all by the need for an explanation.

Though they emphasize different aspects of Heidegger's critique, we see that there is a convergence between Merold Westphal's and Laurence Hemming's summary statement of that critique: according to Westphal, "God is at the beck and call of human understanding, a means to its end of making the whole of being intelligible in keeping with the principle of reason. In order to place the world at the disposal of human theory (and practice), it becomes necessary to place God at our disposal as well."<sup>14</sup> According to Hemming,

The God of metaphysics is . . . that being who precedes, founds, universalizes, and omnitemporalizes every possible being and time that my "I" might ever be, *Ens*, but only as *ens infinitum*, God, as given in metaphysics, but nothing other than a projected and transcendent "I," myself, reflected back as wholly alien to me.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>"Since metaphysics thinks of being as such as a whole, it represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference, and without heeding the difference as difference" (*ID*, 70).

<sup>14</sup>Westphal, *Overcoming Ontotheology*, 12.

<sup>15</sup>Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 208. Cf. also his essay, "Nihilism: Heidegger and the Grounds of Redemption," in *Radical Orthodoxy*

The Onto-Theo-Logical constitution of metaphysics may thus be said to coincide with the reduction of truth—originally the event of unconcealment: ἀ-λήθεια, or φύσις—to (self-) certainty, however unrecognizable the self may have become in the transformation. In any event, the final result of the metaphysical project is a forgetfulness of the truly sacred. As Heidegger famously remarks, after his explanation of the origins of the ontotheological god, “Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god” (*ID*, 72).

When Heidegger therefore *insists* that philosophy is a-theism, it is apparently not because he wishes to *reject* God, but rather to refuse the absorption of theology into philosophy—the absorption that constitutes metaphysics—and for that very reason is able to open a sense for the holy, to open space for prayer and for faith, without, that is, deciding anything beforehand about what is to occupy this space. As both Hemming and Westphal have claimed in different ways, Heidegger’s “atheism” is essentially a repetition of Kant’s denying knowledge in order to make room for faith. In Heidegger’s own words, “The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the godly God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theologic would like to admit” (*ID*, 72).<sup>16</sup> It is crucial to note that, for Heidegger, this “god-lessness” is not a movement either toward or away from faith, but is rather the clearing of a space which would presumably allow faith to arrive, if and when it does, as more authentically itself: a more faithful faith.

This is, indeed, a powerful critique, and it is clear why Hegel would present for Heidegger a paradigm of ontotheology. Although Hegel, like Heidegger, rejects representational thinking (*Vorstellen*) as an inadequate form of thought, he nevertheless ultimately identifies being—that which is both first and last—with the Absolute Idea (*Idee*). At the same time, as Heidegger points out, Hegel remarks in his discussion of the proper starting point for the *Science of Logic* that “*God* would have the uncontested right to have the beginning made with him.”<sup>17</sup> Here we see a confirmation of

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(New York: Routledge, 1999), 102.

<sup>16</sup>In the translation, “the divine God” has been replaced by the more literal “the godly God.”

<sup>17</sup>From the Lasson edition, vol. I, 63, cited at *ID*, 53–54.



Heidegger's judgment: Hegel seeks to give an account ( $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ ) of the whole of reality in the most comprehensive way possible (*science of logic*), which leads him to seek the most original starting point, the highest standpoint, namely, Being. This standpoint, which is both first and last, origin and end, insofar as it is the highest, is at once separated from all things (perfectly empty) and for that very reason inclusive of all things (fully determinate). After determining this ultimate and primordial principle, Hegel naturally—indeed, as he confesses, *unavoidably*—gives it the name “God.” If Hemming is correct that our thinking is always inescapably *ours*, and therefore that Hegel's thinking is inescapably *Hegel's*, then Hegel's “ontotheos” is in fact the absolutization of Hegel's own finite being. The upshot of Hegel's approach, from this Heideggerian perspective, is that God, indeed, becomes a servant of the human project of rendering the world fully intelligible, so much so that, when all is said and done, even God himself ends up with, so to speak, nothing left to hide from the human need to know. In the final form of religion, which fulfills the representation of the whole of reality in order then to be taken up into reason itself, Hegel states forthrightly: “The revealed religion is the revelatory or manifest religion because God has become wholly manifest in it. Here everything is commensurate with the concept; there is no longer anything secret in God” (*PR*, 184, fn. 85).

## 2. Hegel: The rational reception of Revelation

We begin our consideration of Hegel with a concession: the enclosure of the divine wholly within the embrace of determinate reason not only undermines the possibility of faith, which by its nature has its ground beyond itself, but in fact destroys philosophy as well, ultimately subordinating it, too, to what will eventually become technological-manipulative thinking: “To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing—that is what I have set myself to do.”<sup>18</sup> There are few who would wish to defend Hegel on this point (however many there may be who nevertheless

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<sup>18</sup>Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3.

unwittingly side with him in practice). But it is precisely here that we see the potential dangers of the sort of *Destruktion* of Western thought that comes to expression in the critique of metaphysics as ontotheology, and indeed of any primarily polemical or skeptical stance with respect to the tradition.<sup>19</sup> If one's first impulse toward a thinker is negative, one tends to oppose oneself dialectically to that thinker, which means that one thereby methodologically eliminates from one's own position the essential dimension that belongs to the other's. Rather than dismiss Hegel as the representative of ontotheology and therefore of metaphysics, it is good to give him a fair hearing, in order to understand his reason for insisting on the intelligibility of revelation and on philosophy's native desire for God.<sup>20</sup>

Although he obviously is not responding to Heidegger's clearing of thought for faith, in his apologia for a *philosophy of religion*, Hegel makes regular reference to something with an apparently similar spirit: the tendency in his time to hold reason in suspicion in matters of faith and to condemn attempts to understand what necessarily lies beyond all comprehension, namely, the reality of God. Hegel explains that this tendency can take two forms: the first, milder form, holds that reason can generally cognize truths, but is unable to reach into the more-than-human authority of God's self-revelation, which "lies beyond the domain of human reason" (*PR*, 134). The second regards "reason and cognition" "almost . . . as the

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<sup>19</sup>Tradition has (virtually) always been recognized as intrinsic to theology, but perhaps less often in philosophy. A serious philosophy of tradition (and not merely a philosophy of history or a history of philosophy) remains to be written. For a philosophical reflection pointing in this direction, see Ferdinand Ulrich, "Überlieferte Freiheit," in *Gegenwart der Freiheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974), 11–72. It should be noted that Heidegger's thought, precisely because it understands itself as historical in perhaps a more radical way than anyone before him, is *not* simply polemical with respect to the tradition, but indeed embraces it. At least parts of it. One may ask whether it is possible to remain organically related to the tradition if the critique of metaphysics is a basic feature of one's thought; or perhaps we could put the question more concretely: why is it that Heidegger, who incessantly encourages one to allow the object of one's thinking to speak for itself or himself, has given rise to disciples who notoriously install not only Heidegger, but his very terminology, into a sort of seat of judgment over everything else?

<sup>20</sup>To be sure, this comment is directed, not to Heidegger himself who certainly took Hegel quite seriously, but to those who would uncritically embrace his critique of ontotheology.

focal point of the plague of the present age," and insists that "reason must forgo all claims and all attempts to grasp any aspect of the infinite affirmatively; for through comprehension the infinite is annulled and downgraded to the finite" (135). The second, then, radicalizes the first since it critically denies our cognitive grasp of *any* reality, much less God, but in any event the two forms agree in their rejection of the inclusion of God within the ambit of philosophy: "For the doctrine that we can know nothing of God, that we cannot cognitively apprehend him, has become in our time a universally acknowledged truth, a settled thing, a kind of prejudice" (86). Because to understand is to finitize, it necessarily follows that God cannot be understood in his essential nature: whatever we understand of God is by that very token not God.

Where does this "universal prejudice" lead? While, on the one hand, the ascetic gesture of restraining reason from making any presumptive claims of being able to attain to God arises from the desire to respect the holiness of God, the primary purpose of Hegel's introductory remarks on the philosophy of religion is to show how and why this desire cannot avoid betraying itself, however sincerely its intentions may be and however vigilant its efforts. The betrayal is in fact a necessary implication of the position. We must first see that it entails a separation of God and the world. If God is simply unknowable, then whatever *is* knowable is therefore without God—it is "God-less." As Hegel puts it, the assumption of strict incomprehensibility regarding God implies that whatever relationship man may have with God occupies a sphere that is defined *precisely by its opposition* to the sphere of normal rational awareness: "Without philosophical insight, the relationship of religion to the rest of consciousness is such that the two are conceived in isolation from each other. They constitute two kinds of occupation, two regions of consciousness, between which we pass back and forth only alternately" (92).

The separation of the two spheres, he goes on to say, ultimately renders each essentially *boring*, insofar as the absolute loses any relative importance (i.e., importance for us in the world) and the relative loses any absolute importance. On the one hand, the sphere related to reason collapses into what one might call sheer immanence. Detached from any intrinsic relation to God, worldly occupations become *wholly* worldly, that is, they reduce to the pursuit of what Hegel calls purely finite ends, which are at their core indifferent precisely to what transcends the finite. The things in the

world then appear only in relation to these finite ends, and thus, lacking any essential end in themselves, which would require a ground beyond the merely immanent sphere, they become submerged in the project of man's self-glorification through work. In other words, for Hegel, if reason is made indifferent to God, it will eventually but inescapably exhaust itself in the exact sciences and finally in technology: "Cognition of this kind, therefore, does not transcend, or even desire to transcend, the finite sphere. It is a universe of cognition that does not need God and lies outside of religion. These cognitions constitute a kingdom of what we call the sciences and special technical knowledge" (102).

On the other hand, Hegel explains that the critical project, insofar as it sets philosophy *against* itself in order to keep reason from trying to lay hold of God, thereby and against its purposes diminishes God's significance. Ironically, the charge Hegel brings against the *separation* of God from philosophy has some similarities to the one Heidegger brings against the *inclusion* of God in philosophy: "The consequence is that no meaning for the expression 'God' remains in theology any more than in philosophy, save only the representation, definition, or abstraction of the supreme being—a vacuum of abstraction, a vacuum of 'the beyond'" (126). The application of predicates to God, which would be the means by which reason would bring him into the light of intelligibility, would at the same time bind God to finite concepts. To preserve his transcendence, then, we remove him from intelligibility, but this means we deprive the notion of God of any meaningful content. The effort that "purports to set God exceedingly high in calling God the infinite for which all predicates are inappropriate and unjustified anthropomorphisms," in reality makes God "hollow, empty, and impoverished" (124, fn. 31).

The inference that Hegel draws from this position is crucial. If the concept "God" has *no determinate content*, then we cannot distinguish him from anything else. The very acknowledgment that God is *not* the world, or *not* me (or *not* the being of beings), is already a cognitive grasp of something of the nature of God, which immediately requires the reflective—indeed, at some point also the philosophical—assessment of whether it is in fact a proper grasp. It is in this respect impossible properly to acknowledge the transcendence of God without the differentiation of rational inquiry. To refuse this reflection is to forfeit any sense of that transcendence. If God has nothing to do with reason, according to Hegel, then our

relation to God will unavoidably reduce to my own self-relation because it reduces to the realm of *feeling*: "Because knowledge of God does not fall within the comprehension of reason, there coheres with this standpoint the view that consciousness of God is rather sought only in the form of *feeling*. . . . What is rooted only in my feeling is *only for me*; what is in my feeling is what is mine, but it is not what is his [God's?], is not independent in and for itself" (136–137). In short, if we affirm the sheer incomprehensibility of God, "Religion . . . shrivels up into simple feeling, into a contentless elevation of spirit into the eternal, etc., of which, however, it knows nothing and has nothing to say, since any cognizing would be a dragging down of the eternal into [reason's] sphere of finite connections" (103).

The core of the problem, once again, is that God is placed simply *beyond* reason, which means that the spheres of faith and reason become juxtaposed to one another as two separate realms that have, if any, only an extrinsic relation to one another. In order to overcome the problems that inescapably arise from this dualism, Hegel therefore seeks to disclose an alternative notion of reason and God, starting from the assumption that the divine and worldly sphere bear an *intrinsic* relation to one another. Thus, on the one hand, he affirms a desire for God as constitutive of the very nature of human reason, and, on the other hand, he shows that reason, so conceived, participates inwardly in God's being God, insofar as spirit is meaningless in abstract isolation, but can exist *as spirit only for spirit*.<sup>21</sup> Now, the question for Hegel will be, of course, whether he is able to affirm this intrinsic relation without collapsing it simply into identity; we will suggest in the next section that his presupposition regarding the nature of reason cannot avoid such a collapse, but we must nevertheless understand what is essential in his position.

As we have seen, one of the elements of the problematic faith-reason dualism is the assumption that reason is essentially concerned with the world alone, and is to that extent constitutively

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<sup>21</sup>It is interesting to note that an analogy thus appears between the problem that confronts Hegel (God as spirit *needs* the world, because spirit is not spirit unless it can reflect itself back to itself) and the classical problem that confronts the Christian conception of God as love: if love requires an *other*, then God would need the world in order to be God. It would be fruitful to compare Hegel's rational deduction of the Trinity to the meditation offered, for example, by Richard of Saint Victor in book 3 of his *De Trinitate*.

indifferent to what lies beyond the world. Hegel observes that such a view of reason is peculiar to modern philosophy:

There was a time when all science was a science of God. It is the distinction of our age, by contrast, to know each and every thing, indeed to know an infinite mass of objects, but only of God to know nothing. There was a time when [one] cared, was driven indeed, to know God, to fathom his nature—a time when spirit had no peace, could find none, except in this pursuit, when it felt itself unhappy that it could not satisfy this need, and held all other cognitive interests to be of lesser import. (*PR* 86, 87)

According to a transcription of the lecture, Hegel adds, “and what else, we must ask further, would be worth comprehending if God is incomprehensible?” (*PR*, 88, fn. 20). Such an aspiration is inscribed within reason, not only as a reflection of man’s God-given supernatural destiny, but also simply because reason is a desire for truth, and a desire for truth that is not also a desire for God will always turn out to rest on a fairly empty conception of the nature of truth.

The claim that reason *needs* God, of course, lies at the root of what Heidegger calls the essential ontotheological constitution of metaphysics, but, while there is certainly a point to Heidegger’s objection, as we have seen and as we will elaborate further in a moment, it is crucial to note that Hegel’s view at least in principle pushes beyond what this critique fears.<sup>22</sup> Reason’s desire for truth, at least as Hegel characterizes it here, is not a desire for conceptual mastery, which would presuppose the subordination of truth to finite ends, but is in fact the opposite: a desire to relinquish one’s immediate designs in order to become a means by which that which is greater than oneself can realize itself. As Hegel puts it in a striking formulation, philosophy in truth “is of itself the service of God” [*Gottesdienst*: worship] (84). Along these lines, Hegel makes the profound observation that there is a connection between the loss of metaphysics in his age and the disappearance of religious orders of monks whose lives were ordered around the sole object of giving praise to God.<sup>23</sup> Reason, in its most complete sense, in other words,

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<sup>22</sup>This is most clear with respect to Westphal’s characterization of ontotheology, but it is also true in a more subtle sense with respect to Hemming’s formulation.

<sup>23</sup>“Philosophy [*Wissenschaft*] and ordinary common sense thus co-operating to bring about the downfall of metaphysics, there was seen the strange spectacle of a

is not ordered to some pragmatic purpose or other, but is ordered to God’s own ends: in the experience of religion at the heart of philosophy, “we are not concerned with ourselves, with our interests, our vanity, our pride of knowledge and of conduct, but only with the content of it—proclaiming the honor of *God* and manifesting *his* glory” (85). In the contemporary idiom, we could say that, for Hegel, reason is essentially *doxological*.

Now, if it is true that reason is not indifferent to God, it is equally true, according to Hegel, that God is not indifferent to reason. The manifestation of glory is not something simply accidental to God, but it is God’s *nature*, precisely because God is Spirit. In contrast to the “dead” notion of God that thinks of him in an undifferentiated manner as “the beyond,” Hegel embraced the revealed doctrine of God as Trinity, with the claim that this revelation expresses what Spirit is in truth:

If “spirit” is not an empty word, then God must [be grasped] under this characteristic, just as in the church theology of former times God was called “triune.” This is the key by which the nature of spirit is explicated. God is thus grasped as what he is for himself within himself; God [the Father] makes himself an object for himself (the Son); then, in this object, God remains the undivided essence within this differentiation of the himself within himself, and in this differentiation of himself loves himself, i.e., remains identical with himself—this is God as Spirit. (85)

Self-revelation is therefore intrinsic to God, which is precisely why revelation is a genuine communication of God’s self and not merely an offering of something else, something other than God, and to that

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cultured nation without metaphysics—like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies. Theology, which in former times was the guardian of the speculative mysteries and of metaphysics (although this was subordinate to it) had given up this science in exchange for feelings, for what was popularly matter-of-fact, and for historical erudition. In keeping with this change, there vanished from the world those solitary souls who were sacrificed by their people and exiled from the world to the end that the eternal should be contemplated and served by lives devoted solely thereto—not for any practical gain but for the sake of blessedness” (*Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller [Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1997], 25–26). Balthasar also connects the existence of contemplative monasteries with the existence of metaphysics: see “Philosophy, Christianity, Monasticism,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2: *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 333–372.

extent *dispensable* in one's relation to him. There is a connection, then, between Hegel's understanding of God as Spirit, and the seriousness with which he takes the positive aspects of religion—i.e., the dogmatic and institutional aspects of the Church—in contrast, for example, to Heidegger's indifference toward these aspects.<sup>24</sup> However much we would need to qualify Hegel's notion in order to avoid making God's relation to the world necessary in a mechanical sense, the affirmation that self-revelation is not *extrinsic* is one we ought to embrace.

This understanding of God, moreover, has three immediate implications for the nature of human reason. First, human reason becomes not primarily that which makes a claim on God, but that by which God makes himself known, and therefore is a reflection and instrument, so to speak, of his glory. God's transcendence is therefore *magnified* by the existence of reason; his "majesty consists precisely in the fact that he does not renounce reason, [for then his majesty would be] something irrational, empty, and grudging, not something communicated in spirit and in the highest form and innermost being of spirit" (104). Second, as this passage already suggests, reason proves to be the very means by which we participate in God and not an obstacle to intimacy. Indeed, a human being can *receive* and be deeply affected by something only if his reason is involved; otherwise what is given is never "internalized" or "taken to heart," but left as an external possession: a gift must be received to be recognized as a gift, and the gift of self-communication in revelation requires the receptive inwardness of reason. Finally, it is only if revelation appeals to reason that we can say "In the Christian religion, I am to retain my freedom—indeed, I am to become free in it" (106). If revelation bypasses what is most proper to man as man, relation to God becomes a violence that cripples humanity. We might sum these three points up together with Kierkegaard's insight that the absoluteness of God is nowhere so evident as in the fact that he can create an *other* that is free in relation to him. The insight is

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<sup>24</sup>Consider, for example, Hemming's judgment: "Heidegger remains firmly within the Western tradition to which he repeatedly returns and on which his work meditates. For Heidegger, this tradition remains a Christian one, although he refuses to acknowledge it confessionally or within the terms of *die Kirchenlehre*, Church Doctrine. His philosophical atheism is simultaneously this remaining within and refusing the institutional claims of the tradition" (*Heidegger's Atheism*, 281).



richer, more complex and paradoxical, than might appear at first glance.

Affirming the dignity of reason is therefore in Hegel's eyes essential to the glory and majesty of God—indeed, even to God's *mystery*. While one typically complains that reason “objectifies” what it knows, and thus cannot but compromise the transcendence of God, Hegel argues, not that reason does not “objectify,” but—perhaps to our astonishment—that objectification of some sort is an essential aspect of transcendence. With no objectivity, he claims as we saw, our relation to God collapses into the subjectivity of feeling. It is in this respect that Hegel goes so far as to affirm the significance of the classical proofs for the existence of God: “It seems necessary therefore to show beforehand that God is not simply rooted in feeling, is not merely *my* God. The former metaphysics, therefore, always used to begin by proving that there is a God, that God is not merely rooted in feeling, that God is not merely something subjective but is something objective” (137). The point is that reason in some respect objectifies *because it mediates*, and thus *if* we eliminate reason, our relation to God becomes one of im-mediacy. But *sheer* immediacy, of course, is precisely no relation at all. By taking concepts out of religion as so many obstacles to God's divine Otherness, I paradoxically remove the means by which God's Otherness is manifest, and I reduce him simply to some feature of myself. If Hegel's judgment here carries weight, it is worth noting that the attempt to liberate God from being, made by critiques of ontotheology, to the extent that being is in fact the proper element of reason, threatens to undermine precisely the respectful distance it seeks to secure.

### 3. *False modesty and unholy zeal*

Hegel's tracing of the implications of abandoning God to the “Beyond,” no matter how piously intended the abandonment may be, is certainly sobering. On the other hand, his critique of dualism does not eclipse the force of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology. It is interesting to observe that what Hegel identifies as an essential part of resisting the collapse of religion into a kind of subjectivism, namely, conceptual proofs for the existence of God, Heidegger for his part identifies as the decisive moment of the collapse into subjectivism, insofar as the *causa sui* that results from these is God as

servant of human calculative thinking: “a proof for the existence of God can be constructed by means of the most rigorous formal logic and yet prove nothing, since a god who must permit his existence to be proved in the first place is ultimately a very ungodly god. The best such proofs of existence can yield is blasphemy.”<sup>25</sup> What then are we to do? Clearly, the only way to assess this situation properly is to see how they are both right, which is another way of saying they are both wrong. Let us consider the two positions more closely in relation to one another.

On one reading at least, Heidegger withdraws philosophy from the theological in order to avoid the presumption of human thinking determining who or what God is: “[A]ssuming that philosophy, as thinking, is the free and spontaneous self-involvement [*freie, von sich aus vollzogene Sicheinlassen*] with beings as such, then the god can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the god enters it” (*ID*, 56). The heart of the matter lies in Heidegger’s characterization of philosophy as an activity carried out “*von sich aus*,” on the basis of itself. *If*, he says, we assume philosophy to be such an activity, *if*, that is, the way Heidegger characterizes philosophy here is indeed an adequate one, then the conclusion Heidegger draws necessarily follows: the god’s entry into philosophy can occur *only* on philosophy’s terms, because philosophy itself operates, as it were, solely on its own terms. The god, we might say, has no choice but to accept these terms if he does indeed wish to give human reason access to himself—i.e., communicate himself at all in an intelligible manner.

It is in contrast to the philosophy thus described that Heidegger presents his essentially god-less thinking, which is god-less, he explains, not because it is atheistic or in other words because it has decided *against* God, but because it resolves to make no such presumption on God from the outset either way. As Heidegger clarifies in his *Letter on Humanism*, this thinking “can be theistic as little as atheistic. Not however, because of an indifferent attitude, but out of respect for the boundaries that have been set by what gives itself to thinking as what is to be thought, by the truth of

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<sup>25</sup>Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2: *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 106.

Being.”<sup>26</sup> In a word, the “truth of being,” here, is its essential finitude, which is its historicity. Thinking in this authentic sense, then, resolutely embraces its “worldliness” and does not seek to “transcend” it to some higher standpoint. It is in this respect more open to God because it does not set conditions for God, which implies that philosophy, understood as metaphysics or as representational thinking, by contrast necessarily sets its *own* conditions, that it operates “von sich aus.”

We know that Hegel is altogether determined to lead philosophy down the path opposite Heidegger’s *Feldweg*, but is this because he has a radically different conception of philosophical thinking? It is different, to be sure, but, setting aside the rich complexities of their conceptions for a moment, we can nevertheless point to something crucial that Hegel shares with Heidegger: for Hegel, too, reason operates “von sich aus.” Indeed, not only is self-grounding a feature of *Geist*, we ought to say that it is precisely what constitutes the essence of *Geist*, what distinguishes it most properly from everything else. Spirit is the culmination of reality because, even in the furthest extremities of alienation, it is no less at home with itself, it operates no less *von sich aus*. The reason that philosophy *must* take a systematic form, for Hegel, is that Spirit thus conceived stands, so to speak, as its governing principle and engine. As Hegel explains in the *Phenomenology*,

That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit*—the most sublime Notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion. The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*; it is that which *relates itself to itself* and is *determinate*, it is *other-being* and *being-for-itself*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself*.<sup>27</sup>

The perfection of the Idea consists in its complete *determination*, which means that it exists *for itself*, reflected to itself as an “other” that is nevertheless wholly “possessed” as identity. We saw above that Hegel interprets the doctrine of the Trinity in just this sense.

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<sup>26</sup>Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper, 1977), 230.

<sup>27</sup>*Phenomenology*, ¶25 (pg. 14).

That which is *not* thus mediated, i.e., that which exists only in immediacy, is either the pure internality of inert “substance” or the abstraction of simple exteriority, and is in either case not rational. Reason *determines*, and it does so by necessity “von sich aus.”

Heidegger had prefaced his judgments with the conditional—“assuming that philosophy . . .”—but it is remarkable how little attention this assumption has received, how rarely any question has been raised regarding its legitimacy. Before turning to this question, it is illuminating to consider where it is that granting the assumption puts us. Let us take the “von sich aus” character of reason to mean that it operates essentially and wholly “from below,” rather than in some sense also from beyond itself, “from above,” leaving aside for a moment what this latter phrase might mean. If we grant that reason does indeed operate wholly “from below,” we are faced with two, equally problematic, alternatives: *either* we limit from the outset the scope of reason so as to preserve the freedom of that which lies beyond—in this case, God—and thus fall prey to a faith-reason dualism, with all of the problems Hegel exposed in such a dualism; *or* we do not set any limitations to reason’s scope, we combine its *self*-determining character with its natural desire to comprehend nothing less than God, and we thereby suck dry the whole divine mystery. *Either* God is beyond our thinking, so “beyond” that he simply can’t mean anything substantial to us, and can approach us only through the superficiality of arbitrary “miracles” and bursts of enthusiasm or through the pseudo-depth of a mystical union that proves to be in the end a perverse narcissism; *or* God is, at best, only provisionally beyond us, and, because spirit is spirit (as Hegel says), whether human or divine, will sooner or later reduce to our own self-understanding. There is no escape from these alternatives if we accept that reason operates simply “from below.”

Indeed, if we reflect more deeply into the matter, we discover that we are not really faced with two alternatives, but in fact two sides of the same coin. We might think that Hegel presumes too much, and that Heidegger, by contrast, seeks to recover a modesty for reason, and thus could be said, at worst, to presume too little—though in the end, we might go on to add, presuming too little expresses the sort of humility appropriate for a Christian thinker. But this is a misunderstanding. Each position thought deeply enough turns into the other. First of all, while the totalizing embrace of self-determining reason in Hegel would seem to make the self

master over the whole of reality, God included, in fact the individual self paradoxically becomes an utterly inert moment in the movement of history. Marxist materialistic determinism in this respect at least follows naturally from Hegel's Absolute Spirit. When one is so presumptuous as to presume *everything*, one's thinking takes on an absolute character that becomes, by that very fact, wholly indifferent to the person who thinks. Pure spontaneity turns into the complete impotence, one might say nihilism, of just passively "letting be"—which, oddly, takes on all the formal features of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* or the obedience to the sending of being as history.<sup>28</sup>

More subtly, but perhaps for that very reason all the more importantly, what appears to be a modest restraint in Heidegger proves to be its own titanic self-imposition. There is a connection in Heidegger's thinking between his insistence that philosophy be godless precisely in order not to anticipate and thus constrain genuine faith, his claim that the analytic of Dasein—i.e., the interpretation of the fundamental structures of human existence—exhibits what he refers to as a "peculiar neutrality,"<sup>29</sup> and his judgment that theology represents an "ontic" science in relation to the ontological interpretation of Dasein that belongs to philosophy.<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, according to Heidegger, the alternative to the absorption of theology into philosophy, which he takes to be the essential constitution of metaphysics, is a "god-less" thinking, which is a thinking that clears the space for faith, without deciding beforehand anything whatsoever concerning "the divine." To evince a commitment prior to this opening up would be, in Heidegger's eyes, to prevent its ever opening and ultimately make the reduction to an ontotheological conception of God unavoidable. Philosophy *requires* the suspension of the question of God, and that is why Heidegger suggests, for example, that *Christian philosophy* is an oxymoron: like "wooden

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<sup>28</sup>On this point, see Hans Jonas' essential observations on the notion of "fate" in Heidegger's thinking in "Heidegger and Theology," in *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 235–261; here, 244–249.

<sup>29</sup>See Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984), 136, cited in Marion, *God Without Being*, 42.

<sup>30</sup>See *Wegmarken*, 48–49.

iron.”<sup>31</sup> Now, because the space cannot be cleared unless the question is suspended, it is essential that the inquiry into the being of Dasein be *neutral*. As Heidegger puts it in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, and then reiterates in the *Letter on Humanism*, “Through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as being-in-the-world no decision, whether positive or negative, is made concerning a possible being toward God. It is, however, the case that through an illumination of transcendence we first achieve an *adequate concept of Dasein*, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered.”<sup>32</sup> *In order to be properly open to the possibility of God, we must first have an adequate conception of Dasein.* The space must be cleared *before*—if—it is to be filled: thus, it follows naturally that theology—which Heidegger is careful to insist means *not* the study of God (since any study of God would turn out to be ontotheological metaphysics), as one might presume, but *merely* a study of faith, i.e., a study of “Dasein as believer”—will be a regional science that *presupposes* philosophy’s ontological interpretation.

As Jean-Luc Marion has brilliantly shown, the supposed *neutrality* of philosophy, or as Westphal has put it, philosophy’s “merely methodological” atheism, thus ends up necessarily presenting itself, so to speak, as the *measure* of theology, and indeed, the measure of God’s self-revelation.<sup>33</sup> Because it is *philosophy* that clears

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<sup>31</sup>*Einführung in die Metaphysik*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 9. Note that, however one resolves the excruciatingly difficult question regarding the possibility of Christian philosophy, Heidegger’s position is not adequate insofar as it presupposes a straightforward opposition between the presumed closure of faith and the open wonder of philosophy. Is the notion that faith puts an end to wonder a genuinely Christian understanding of faith?

<sup>32</sup>*Letter on Humanism*, 229–230.

<sup>33</sup>Because he focuses on the question of whether Marion interprets Heidegger as assuming God to be “a being,” Hemming’s criticism of Marion misses the essential point of what Marion is arguing, which remains valid irrespective of whether Heidegger thinks of God as a “being” or not. See *Heidegger’s Atheism*, 249–269. (Strangely, Hemming’s rejection of Marion’s interpretation hangs on his claim that Marion translates Heidegger’s phrase “Denn auch der Gott ist—wenn er ist—ein Seiender . . .” as “*when* God is,” rather than the weaker and more obviously appropriate “*if* God is.” Marion does not: see *Dieu sans l’être*, 69 [“s’il est”], as well as the English translation: *God Without Being*, 44 [“if he is”]. The weaker expression does not affect Marion’s argument.) The essential point is that Heidegger makes the ontological interpretation of Dasein *prior* to theology or indeed any encounter

the space for the possibility of faith, philosophy by that very fact establishes the parameters within which faith must occur, if it is to occur at all. Notice the essential connection: a modesty that withdraws a priori is a presumption that sets the conditions of possibility. Modesty of this sort, that is, obtrusively imposes itself. There is no real mystery in this: we encounter it every day, for example, in what the psychologists call "passive-aggressive" behavior, or in the person who frustrates and fragments a group precisely by *not* (explicitly) having any preferences. In philosophy, we see this paradoxically self-assertive modesty most especially in Kant: an unavoidable logical necessity binds his intention to deny reason in order to make room for faith, and his eventual judgment that revelation strictly speaking is impossible.<sup>34</sup> There is simply in other words no way at all to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith without by the very same gesture eliminating any room for faith. Heidegger's critique of ontotheology is the same false modesty done up in a different costume. This inversion of radical modesty into radical presumption comes to light particularly clearly, for example, in the form of man's relationship to God that emerges from Hemming's attempt to reconcile Heidegger's atheism with Christian faith: on the one hand, Hemming collapses any encounter with God into just the sort of narcissistic self-contemplation Hegel's analyses would have predicted,<sup>35</sup> while, on the other hand, he simply flips the same coin over to the other side, that of an endless striving after the

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between man and God, and therefore necessarily ensures that this interpretation sets the parameters for the encounter.

<sup>34</sup>In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Greene and Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960), 157, fn., Kant writes, "it sounds questionable but it is in no way reprehensible to say that everyone makes his own God." It is *modest* reason, in other words, that cannot avoid making idols for itself. Westphal's attempt to "save" certain figures in the tradition from Heidegger's critique of ontotheology by showing them to be proto-Kantian anti-realists is therefore misguided: see his discussion of Augustine, Dionysius, and Aquinas in *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence*, 93–141. See also *Overcoming Ontotheology*, 89–105, where he presents an argument along these lines that Christian philosophers ought to be "favorably disposed" to Kantian idealism.

<sup>35</sup>Heidegger's nihilism, he says, enables the experience of faith in which "I come about in the worlding of world to find God worlding with me and so speaking and revealing God with me and as me" ("Nihilism," 106).

absent God.<sup>36</sup> He takes for granted, in other words, that the rational reception of God's self-communication reduces God to myself, and so I must defer such a reception indefinitely. But a genuinely infinite openness, as we will see in a moment, *requires* presence and encounter, and thus rational access. The silence that is supposedly the culmination of prayer turns out to be a substitute for it. To insist a priori on the contentlessness of silence, in other words, is to refuse the words God himself gives us ("When you pray, say these words . . ."). The endless striving turns out to be a false imitation of genuine openness—it is, indeed, endless, but only because it never really begins. It is in the end the pseudo-transcendence of the snake swallowing its own tail.

According to Heidegger, fundamental ontology precedes theology, the study of faith, because whatever encounter there is to be with God necessarily "eventuates" within being.<sup>37</sup> But if being is understood without any reference to God (i.e., "god-lessly"), the horizon of this meeting place will be, as it were, determined *prior* to God, and so will impose, extrinsically, its own restrictions on God. Paradoxically, a more traditional "onto-theology"—although perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak in this context of a "theo-ontology"—allows God as it were to determine most fundamentally the medium of the encounter between God and man insofar as it takes God to be determinative of the meaning of being. This is the essential role, one might suggest, of the analogy of being: to say that being is *ana-logical* is to say that it always *also* receives its most basic sense from above. The critique of ontotheology that refuses the name of being to God is forced *either* to affirm a wholly im-mediate (and so ir-rational) relation to God, or to allow that the relation is mediated by being—as all human relations are in the end—but to affirm that this being is, as it were, determined in

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<sup>36</sup>“What does it mean that the essence of being-human *never* reaches the place of God? The human essence never reaches it, because it is always reaching out for it. The self is the horizon where God is revealed, but every revelation is a failure, a falling short of God. Such a revelation always strives forward into silence, as the place where all distance is overcome (because all giving of things is a speaking, and speaking thereby produces difference—so that overcoming speaking is at the same time overcoming distance), and yet is forced, gabbling, back on itself, only to struggle back into silence” (*Heidegger's Atheism*, 280).

<sup>37</sup>See Heidegger's famous comment in the 1951 seminar in Zurich, which is presented in an appendix to *Heidegger's Atheism*, 291–292.



abstraction from and therefore prior to God. Heidegger, it appears, takes this second option; and we will see in a moment that Marion takes the first.<sup>38</sup>

The putative “neutrality” of the philosophy Heidegger proposes as an alternative to the “ontotheologizing” of metaphysics entails a further consequence regarding the *historical* character of thinking. From the perspective of a historically grounded theology, we could say that the inclination philosophy has tended to evince toward *mastery* is due, not to the essential nature of reason, but specifically to its *fallen form*<sup>39</sup>: it would be contradictory to assume, from the perspective of Christian theology, that reason as created would be in any sense *opposed* to revelation (however much revelation would nevertheless have to remain discontinuous in some respect with the order of reason, as we will show in a moment). But *precisely because* he claims a neutral standpoint, Heidegger has no grounds from which to allude to any such distinction—namely, between reason as it is in its essential nature and as it has been affected by history—and is therefore forced to *identify* the essence of reason with its historically fallen form. It therefore becomes the essential nature of reason, its “fate,” according to Heidegger, to seek to dominate and control (*das Ge-stell*); the forgetting of being is not in any sense an accident of history, but is as it were an inextricable feature of the history of being, to which human nature essentially belongs. The response to this forgetting, however serene it may appear at one level (“*Gelassenheit*,” the “*Schritt zurück*,” and so forth), is nevertheless a kind of violence<sup>40</sup>: it is an *overcoming*, a disconcerting calling of itself into question, which oddly seems to find its governing impulse always in the end in Heidegger’s own personal authority. It is in this respect the very nature of the critique of metaphysics

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<sup>38</sup>See the insightful observation Balthasar makes in this respect regarding Marion’s project: *Theologic*, vol. 2, *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 135–136, fn. 10.

<sup>39</sup>To make a distinction between nature and history does not imply that one embraces an Enlightenment notion of essence. It is possible to say that essences are always without exception differentiated historically, and still to deny that nature reduces to history.

<sup>40</sup>It is interesting to note the preponderance of terms with a negative or violent tone that Heidegger uses to describe Dasein’s deepest mood or most fundamental openness to the event of the difference of being and beings: *Angst*, *Ent-setzung*, *Erschrecken*, *Verhaltenheit*, *Scheu*, and so forth.

and ontotheology to install itself in a position above questioning, and from which all questioning takes its bearings, that is, to install itself as what Marion would call an idol.

And here we encounter yet another remarkable irony: by proposing itself as *neutral*, and by that very gesture as the condition of possibility not only for all other philosophical thinking, but also for theology, the “ontic science of faith,” and even for faith itself—in short, for absolutely anything else that has to do with human existence—the ontological analytic of Dasein lifts itself *outside of time*, and thereby *outside* of the finitude it claims as its most essential feature. In other words, it accords itself a certain “universal applicability,” it makes itself the eternal standard by which all else is measured, it becomes the ever-valid cipher by which to illuminate . . . the totality of beings. One can see where this is going: Heidegger hoists himself on his own petard; his god-less thinking is itself an ontotheology. Indeed, precisely because of its presuppositions concerning the nature of reason, the critique of ontotheology cannot avoid becoming itself an ontotheology. Etienne Gilson understood this long ago, but put it in different terms: metaphysics invariably ends up burying its own undertaker. In this respect, Heidegger’s modesty turns out in spite of itself to be once again at least as presumptuous as Hegel’s inexorable zeal: Hegel is arguably less so since he makes no presumption of being modest. Although Hegel, too, claims a universal significance for his thinking, the *historicity* of his philosophy is in the end more concrete than Heidegger’s: history bears on the *content* of his thought, not just its form; he takes an interest in *history* (and thus, as we saw, in the historically revealed Christian dogma), we might say, rather than merely in “historicity” or “temporality” (*Geschichtlichkeit*, *Zeitlichkeit*). There is no “neutrality” in Hegel regarding salvation history—though, to be sure, he certainly falls off the other side of the horse, making Hegelian philosophy the point of that history.

We could transpose the fundamental problem into the terms of classical Christian spirituality, namely, indifference and eros. In this case it would be possible to say that Heidegger (who after all spent time in a Jesuit seminary!) affirms indifference without eros, and Hegel, eros without indifference.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>It is not an accident that there is a conspicuous absence of eros in Heidegger’s work and of indifference in Hegel’s. (The “love” that one—rarely—finds

#### 4. Philosophy and a dramatic notion of reason

As the foregoing discussion has hopefully begun to make clear, the ontotheological problematic seems to turn on a conception of reason operating essentially “from below,” and therefore as inescapably anticipating and so imposing itself on whatever reality might open access to it. Such a conception of reason has no choice but to force us to embrace one of two equally inadequate alternatives: either Hegel’s unholy zeal, or Heidegger’s false modesty. The best way to respond to this dilemma is, of course, to refuse the assumption that produces it. In order that we may more clearly see the significance of this approach it is illuminating to consider the implications of another possible response, that of Jean-Luc Marion, who proposes to criticize ontotheology even more radically than Heidegger himself. Thus, after having shown the way Heidegger’s supposedly neutral conception of the ontological analytic establishes conditions of possibility into which God must find some way to insert himself, Marion insists on the necessity of affirming an even more radically transcendent God, who lies beyond not only the being of metaphysics, but also beyond the ontological difference itself, and thus, as (unconditional) ἀγαπή, is not in any way at all bound by our conditions of possibility: a God who is, indeed, from our perspective im-possible.<sup>42</sup> Marion’s approach, however, appears to raise all over again the criticisms articulated by Hegel. To the extent that he *opposes* the God of love to being and reason,<sup>43</sup> and thus eliminates their mediating role in man’s relation to God, he surrenders all “resistance,” as it were, to the collapse into immediacy and the subsequent annihilation of the “distance” he precisely sought

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mentioned in Heidegger [cf., e.g., *Letter on Humanism*, 196] tends to resemble an “agapic” bestowal of favor rather than the generous *desire* of eros; moreover, the concept of indifference does appear in Hegel [cf., *Science of Logic*, 375–385], but principally as just the *substrate* of differentiation, i.e., self-determination.) On the other hand, we are familiar with the centrality of *Gelassenheit*, for Heidegger, a notion of “non-willing” that he appropriates from Eckhart: see *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. Anderson and Freund (New York: Harper, 1966). In Hegel, the notion of love was one of the governing ideas in his early theological writings: *Early Theological Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 302–308.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. *God Without Being*, 82.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 183–184. Faith has a logic, he says, that is “*contrary to every other logic, formal or otherwise*” (emphasis added).

to preserve.<sup>44</sup> The crux of his excellent critique of Heidegger is the latter's imposition "from below" of conditions of possibility on God. This critique requires an imposing of limits on reason and a drive to get "beyond being"—in other words, an "overcoming of metaphysics"—*only if* it is the nature of reason to impose limits from below, and, correspondingly, the nature of being to submit, as it were, to the mastery of logos. But this is precisely where the most serious question lies: such an assumption follows only if one begins with Heidegger's critique of ontotheology, and allows that critique to set the terms for one's engagement with the issue. We have been suggesting, by contrast, that it is the overcoming of ontotheology that needs to be overcome.

Our proposal is that a reconception of the traditional notion of reason in terms of a *dramatic structure* opens up a way of avoiding either problematic alternative by pre-empting the dilemma itself. It is not possible to work out in any depth the details of this proposal here, which is derived from the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, but we may at least point to its potential contribution specifically to the problem at hand.<sup>45</sup> In a good drama, the ending occurs as a kind of surprise, which means as a moment that cannot in any way have been deduced from the movement of the plot, but at the same time, for all of the unanticipatedness of its arrival, the ending brings resolution to that same movement. To tie the threads of the narrative together satisfactorily, the "surprise" ending must emerge in some respect from within the plot's inner exigencies. What must be avoided, in other words, is on the one hand a (Heideggerian/Marionian) *deus ex machina*, in which the god appears magically from

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<sup>44</sup>See *Idol and Distance*, esp., 198–253. Marion writes that "God withdraws in the distance, unthinkable, unconditioned, and therefore infinitely closer," which raises the question: is it possible for this infinite intimacy to be distinguished from simple identity without some mediating reality or concept?

<sup>45</sup>For a more extensive development of a dramatic notion of reason in relation to the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, see D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); and id., "Surprised by Truth: The Drama of Reason in Fundamental Theology," *Communio* 31 (Winter 2004): 587–611. There would appear to be rich resources in the philosophical tradition for a dramatic conception of reason. For some initial explorations in Greek philosophy, see id., "The Community of the One and the Many: Heraclitus on Reason," *Inquiry* 46 (2003): 413–448; "Going Down: Founding Reason in the *Republic*," *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2001–Fall 2003): 81–132.

the “distance” or from “out of the blue” without any immanent expectation, and on the other hand the wholly predictable (Hegelian) conclusion that simply works out the telos established at the outset. It is essential to see that the phenomenon of drama exhibits a paradoxical simultaneity of continuity and discontinuity. The dramatic moment *overtums* and *fulfills* expectations at once, it *interrupts* what one might call the immanent movement of the narrative, but its interruption is not a deadening violence, it does not “crash through” the plot line as a wholly gratuitous intrusion that remains extrinsic to that plot and thus dis-solves it into a series of unintegrated fragments. Instead, a truly dramatic moment *crystallizes* the plot into a luminously meaningful whole, the shock of surprise coincides with a sense of *necessity*: it couldn't have ended any other way. A dramatic resolution is equally distant from the rationalistic resolution typified, for example, by figures such as Descartes, Kant, Husserl, or (the early) Wittgenstein, all of whom thought they had solved the essential problems of philosophy once and for all and left others with the task of mechanically applying their solutions (a task that philosophy has never really accepted), as it is from the post-modern gesture of constant postponement and deferral. It is a resolution that closes and opens at one and the same time. Balthasar offers a lucid presentation of this paradoxical simultaneity of gratuity and necessity, which navigates between the “Scylla of extrinsicism and the Charybdis of immanentism,” in his description of the experience of a work of art and the love of another person.<sup>46</sup>

At the foundation of a dramatic notion of reason is Balthasar's insight that consciousness is “born,” i.e., it is constituted in the simultaneously interpersonal and ontological event of the “mother's smile.”<sup>47</sup> What this means is that consciousness, and therefore the “home,” as it were, of all that a person will ever perceive, think, understand, or believe, is not a pre-structured categorializing activity, but is first and foremost *given* to itself. It arises in and through the initiating gift of self that the mother communicates in her smiling on her child. If this is the case, the conditions of

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<sup>46</sup>See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 5<sup>th</sup> printing (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985), 33–39.

<sup>47</sup>The best account of this event can be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Movement Toward God,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3: *Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 15–55.

possibility that structure reason do not belong to it *prior to* its encounter with the real, but are “dramatically” constituted *in* the gift of its participation in and with the reality his mother lovingly offers to him. It therefore follows that conditions of possibility are not something that reason establishes first and *therefore has no choice* but to impose on any encounter it might have—whether with another person, with being, or with God—but instead are simultaneously received and established. Every encounter whatsoever, from this perspective, has a certain dramatic quality; every act of reason is, at some level, the coincidence of surprise and resolution, the building up of anticipations, which are then fulfilled even as they are overturned. In other words, if consciousness grows from the beginning out of the generous gift of love, reason never simply operates “von sich aus,” but *always*, without exception, at the very same time “vom Anderen her.”

The moment we accept this principle as the “heart” of reason, the ontotheological problem appears in a strikingly new light. Reason does not have to impose limits on itself (to make room for faith)—which, as we saw above, it cannot do in any event without *by necessity* imposing limits at the same time on what it is to know—but receives its limits *from* its other *precisely* in its extending itself, as it were, to meet the other, and these limits therefore do not arise as a violence that frustrates reason’s essential self-centeredness, as the critique of ontotheology tends to imply. Instead, these limits again and again bring to fulfillment what reason is in its most profound and original form: a generously appropriating encounter with its other. From a dramatic perspective, thinking is not an autonomous activity, but is at its core a “being moved by an other.” There is, then, an ecstatic or generous dimension that forms part of the constitutive structure of reason: to think, in this case, is to *pledge* oneself, to be *brought out* of oneself in a way that precisely allows one to *give* oneself. What gets criticized by the name of “ontotheology,” i.e., the enlisting of God, and therefore of everything else, in reason’s self-serving schemes, is not an expression of reason’s nature, an automatic result of every effort at conceptualization, but is rather a failure of reason, a failure to understand—indeed, a failure to comprehend.

Starting from a dramatic conception of reason, we thus discover that the integration of eros and indifference is not something we first have to achieve or construct—indeed, all such attempts at integration *methodologically* exclude the possibility of success—but

is always-already given. That is, the integration is a gift. It therefore turns out that the pursuit of the desideratum the critique of ontotheology presupposes in its best instances requires precisely the opposite movement from the one this critique itself enjoins: *true* modesty, an openness to the other that seeks always and at every moment to affirm the other *above* oneself, shows itself not in the thinking that first (negatively) withdraws, and thus "covers" itself (in the inevitably twofold sense of modestly veiling and defensively shielding itself), keeping the question of faith open and in suspense, but rather in the reason that starts from the wholly positive premise that it desires and knows it will be fulfilled by whatever it is God wishes to reveal. In this respect, we affirm Hegel's insistence, which is after all basic to the Western tradition, that reason is a desire for God, but at the same time we are able to integrate within it the awe-filled astonishment and obedience that Heidegger describes.

Perhaps we can present the contrast best in these terms: while the critique of ontotheology would have thinking *first* attempt to rid itself of idols, a dramatic view of reason would have it seek instead to enter more deeply into the movement that is always-already underway, and thus this view presupposes a positive relation to God that is more fundamental than the negative or neutral. No sophisticated reflection is needed to see that desire is far more receptive and pliable than a "pre-emptive" modesty that sets (its own) limits beforehand. Whatever needs to be overcome in ontotheology's rationalizing can be overcome, we propose, only through a profound re-integration of reason and its original aims. It is striking to compare the joyful and celebratory passion to know in, say, Plato, and Aristotle, and the Church Fathers, to the joyless systematizing of modern rationalism and the joyless prudery that sets itself up in reaction. To give primacy to the *via negativa* will lead, however subtly and contrary to one's wishes, to the sterility of an intellectual and spiritual narcissism.

A properly dramatic notion of reason allows us to situate Heidegger's question—*Wie kommt der Gott in die Philosophie?*—within the more fundamental question we have taken as the title of this essay, a question that is more fundamental because it acknowledges the primacy of the divine initiative. Theology in the strictest sense is not first of all a human science, but a divine science: it is God's knowledge of himself. The *logos* of theo-logy was there "in the beginning," with God, and identical with God. If theology is to be a human science *as well*, it can only be because God invites us into

his knowing. But man cannot be invited without ears to hear the invitation, and without a *reason* to receive it in a human way. If we assume that reason constitutes itself simply “from below,” it is impossible for man to be received into theology. God’s self-revelation will be *simply* discontinuous with human reason, and will remain such until man is transformed into something other than man, into God, so that he can reproduce in himself what such a view of reason inevitably envisions as a divine narcissism. But if reason is *essentially dramatic*, the gratuity of God’s self-revelation, the discontinuity of his unforeseeable truth, precisely because of its radical overturning of reason’s (invariably too modest) expectations, will bring reason to fulfillment. Only the absolute discontinuity of God’s self-revelation, we might say, is truly continuous with reason’s natural desire: reason wants nothing more than to be surprised by God’s truth. The thinking of being, the rational work involved in things such as natural theology, indeed, the discipline of metaphysics, is not an impediment to this surprise, but instead the distant and constant preparation for the ultimate revelation. Metaphysics in the proper sense makes reason more and more profoundly “surprisable.”

How does God enter philosophy? or better: How is philosophy taken up into God? In the light of concepts, the radiant truth of being, that quickens reason’s native desire, its thirst for grace. □

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