

Questioning and the Divine in Heidegger's *Beiträge*

Musa Duman

From early on, Heidegger had a profound interest in the phenomenology of religious life. However, the question of god takes center stage pre-eminently in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie*.¹ Forming the background to this text are lectures on Nietzsche and Hölderlin that Heidegger was delivering at the time of its composition. Nietzsche represents the experience that the theological god is dead; metaphysics has culminated in nihilism. Hölderlin calls for a restoration of the Greek sense of the divine, which means restoring beings to their primordial, i.e., “divine” sense. And the key idea that dominates the *Beiträge* is that for “the restoring [*Wiederbringen*] of beings” we need the last god whose occurrence (*Wesung*) belongs to “the extreme venture of the truth of beyng” (GA 65: 411). Arguably, the most enigmatic issue pervading the whole book is this notion of the last god located in the context of the experiences registered by Nietzsche (“God is dead”) and Hölderlin (“flight of the gods”). In a special sense, the *Beiträge* aims at arousing an “engagement and claim to an advent of the god...[and] to the experience of the flight of gods” (GA 65: 61). Here, the tone of thinking is fundamentally futural. There is the pervasive conviction that today in the modern age we have lost all sense of the divine to such a degree that any talk of god in reference to the present and past standards of the Western tradition is condemned to be devoid of real content. It is essential that we come to the awareness that we live in an age of complete godlessness. Coming to this awareness may, at least, stimulate a genuine sense of questioning

concerning god (and gods), which is what Heidegger wants to firmly maintain throughout the *Beiträge*.

As a first observation, one may well wonder whether the question of god makes any sense once it is accepted that God is dead. Clearly, there is a difference between a god which stands as a question and a god that is no longer taken seriously by questioning. For Heidegger, thinking gains its power from the sort of questioning it attempts to carry out, from the fundamental questions before which it stands. Questioning opens a space of original possibilities for the movement of thinking by turning it into an authentic engagement. In the *Beiträge* it appears that the question of god is the key dimension of the question of being.² This was especially so in view of Nietzsche's assertion: "God is dead." As we will discuss in the course of this paper, Heidegger circumvents the Nietzschean experience by holding that the metaphysical god is dead; "with the death of this god all theisms wither away" (GA 65: 411). Yet precisely upon this ground, a waiting-preparation for a divine god can be enacted from questioning in relation to being. The death of God, accordingly, did not render the question of god something empty or futile, but rather brought an added emergency and radicality to it. The death of God prepares the ground, through questioning, for the coming of a "new" god, "wholly other over against past gods, especially over against the Christian god" (GA 65: 403). The question of being is the field on which Heidegger proposes to prepare for this coming. In his late years, as is well-known, this found expression in the remark, "only a god can still save us." The *Beiträge* provides us important clues regarding how the question of being and the question of god are intimately linked in Heidegger's thought. Accordingly, in the present paper we shall explore such connections with a special emphasis on the function of questioning.

The *Beiträge*, as Heidegger views it, attempts at thinking being from out of itself and no longer in terms of the essential ontological structures that constitute human being. Heidegger employs the obsolete word *Seyn* ("beyng") to refer to the essential origin of being. Besides, as distinct from the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*, the sort

of thinking which is at work in the *Beiträge* is called “being-historical thinking” (*seinsgeschichtliches Denken*). Heidegger ties being to *Ereignis*; *Sein* has an event character.³ An entity is, but being happens, or holds sway, or takes place (*west*). In other words, being is only as *Ereignis*. This implies that being as *Ereignis* is only in relation to man. This refers us to *Being and Time* where he argues that *Sein* is dependent on Dasein; without Dasein entities will be, but not being itself, which is the meaning dimension of beings disclosed in and through Dasein’s engagement with beings. In this light, it seemed reasonable to search into the transcendental structure of Dasein to clarify the sense of being given to Dasein in its most fundamental form. Dasein contains the ultimate answer for the sense of being as buried in itself, which needs to be uncovered through a careful phenomenological “questioning.” This was actually, one might argue, another version of the Kantian project, only given an ontological or phenomenological twist. Important is the fact that Heidegger, who wants to overcome all dependence on consciousness and subjectivity, grounds his analysis on a discovery of the universal structures of human being as existence. Now what we see in the *Beiträge* is that this picture is somewhat revised. *Sein* as *Ereignis* is an original historical happening which gives the arising historical world its intelligibility and mood. *Sein* happens (*ereignet*) in the manner of Da-sein, which is not human being but the historical and temporal site into which the human being is to leap in order to appropriate and enact his “own” essence, to come to his “own.” In short, Heidegger historicizes being through and through.⁴ There is, therefore, no cross-historical position to interpret the meaning of being and likewise one cannot speak of being as an addendum to beings “that simultaneously appears as the *a priori* of beings” (GA 65: 458); in any thinking that is oriented to explore the being of beings as something inherent in Dasein, being already happens historically in advance. What is at issue is this happening (*Wesung*), which comes before and determines all disclosure of beings; beings show up in this or that sense only in a historical world. Heidegger’s question now is: how does being essentially happen? Thus, he is no longer pursuing a transcendental inquiry. In a

sense, Heidegger erases the last vestiges of Husserlian phenomenology from his way of thinking.

Grounding (*Gründen*) is one of the key notions of the *Beiträge*. It would seem to be a metaphysical term. “A grounds B” typically means “A as a causal factor is a condition of there being B” or “A is the fundamental logical condition of B.” This is certainly not what Heidegger has in mind. Heidegger uses the word in its non-terminological, everyday German sense; namely, “clearing a space,” “making room,” “preparing ground.” So he asserts the need for grounding “Da-sein as the truth of beyng” through preparedness and ultimately through a leap (GA 65: 26). Leap (*Sprung*) is the condition of all creativity, i.e., of letting something original (*ursprünglich*) come about and take place. Creative knowing, understanding and questioning alone can “most intimately experience the essential happening of the last god”; being creative means preserving and caring for the truth of beyng, i.e., its *lichtende Verbergung*, in the entities (GA 65: 24, 29). Grounding is creatively preparing the ground for the event of beyng, for beyng’s taking place. Therefore, grounding Da-sein as a site of the leap refers to gaining an appropriate sort of preparedness or openness in relation to the truth of beyng. As suggested above, questioning has a distinctive function here: it “awakens and activates history as the site of its decisions” (GA 65: 5). Hence, it underlies and gathers a radical openness in thinking towards beyng and thereby towards authentic possibilities of being to be in-stantiated (hence *Inständigkeit*) in and as Da-sein. Heidegger believes that this questioning arises from and serves for a preparedness for the futural event of beyng, for “crossing” to the other beginning. It can prepare another beginning, for the answer sought for an essential question cannot come from the questioner but from that which is questioned.⁵ Consequently, grounding is preparing the ground for the “happening of beyng” by way of questioning.

In Heidegger’s view, in this thoughtful questioning, history and the ownmost futural possibilities of beyng acquire such a deep intimacy and link that historical time-space becomes a unitary whole (*Fuge*) from which the original sound (*Anklang*) of beyng can be heard as

hinting toward a historical future in a momentary vision. If questioning has an enormous potential, and especially so when it comes to beyng as a question (since it turns thinking into an appropriating openness to that which is put into question, to beyng), the primary requirement then is one of setting the question fully to work. Beyng is the most-question-worthy (*Fragwürdigste*), for only in and through beyng as put into question can a profound preparation for the *Ereignis* (as crossing), for the other beginning, be enacted. Furthermore, inasmuch as questioning is not merely instrumental, but the fundamental attitude of thinking, the other beginning as the arrival of the divine must be a full appropriation of it.

In this connection, the following remark deserves our attention: “Questioners are true believers because they open themselves up to the essence of truth.”⁶ Here, the essence of believing is linked with questioning for it is only in questioning that opening up to what is ownmost is realized. Thus, a belief in god would not be a belief in a set of fixed dogmas, but it must be an attempt to open oneself up to what is ownmost to god, which is truly possible only as questioning. By contrast, one might say, a dogmatic belief – leaving no room for fundamental questioning and urging blind acceptance of certain propositions – closes off a genuine relation to what is believed. The same thing also applies to rational theology, because the ultimate objective here, too, is removing any need for questioning by means of devising proofs about god. All apologetics for god, ironically, face the reverse of what they strive for; they take leave of the essential realm of the Godhead.

The question of god thus stands in sharp opposition to the theological urge to come up with proofs about god. Any attempt at furnishing proofs would be reductionist in this regard; it would reduce the divine to an object of mental mastery, which in turn only signals that the divine has taken flight and is no longer alive in the human life. Hence this god would already be robbed of its divine essence. Heidegger believes that inasmuch as there is a characteristic urge in theology to put god into a rational framework, theology can never speak of god without first alienating itself deeply from the divine. The relationship with the

divine that determines inceptual thinking, namely appropriation as questioning (concerning the complete loss of the divine in the modern world), arises from such a radical immediacy that it can have nothing to do with building proofs so as to capture and secure ultimate knowledge about the divine and thereby procure a complete assurance about things related to it. Rather a relationship with the divine cannot be a matter of assurance and certainty; it concerns the time-space of *beyng*, with *Da-sein* as the site of “need” and “emergency” (*Not*).⁷ *Da-sein* can be opened up authentically, i.e., it can be “grounded” as the event-site of the essential happening of the truth of being, only in and through *Not*, which leaves behind all will and drive for control. This *Not*, however, is not a “distress” to be conceived in modern psychological terms; its source lies instead in the truth of being (GA 65: 45–46). “Question-worthiness of *beyng* compels all creativity into *Not*” (GA 65: 63). This observation is relevant to the assertion: “*beyng* needs human being in order to happen essentially, and the human being belongs to *beyng* so that he might fulfill his ultimate vocation [*Bestimmung*] as *Da-sein*” (GA 65: 251).

This point can also be read in conjunction with Heidegger’s crucial claim that the last god needs being (GA 65: 408). We might say that the divine essence has a crucial intimacy with the way beings “are,” with the way beings make sense to us in the first place. In order for a god to reveal itself in its divine essence to humans, humans first need to attain a purity and simplicity of questioning which grounds the essential happening of *beyng*, making room for the holding sway of *beyng* in its own truth. It is in this holding sway of *beyng* that beings are restored to their primordial sense in which they become question-worthy with reference to *beyng*. Heidegger believes that god can be truly divine only in light of this event of *beyng*. Or, let us say, the last god constitutes its hidden core: “In the happening of the truth of being, in event and as event the last god conceals itself” (GA 65: 24). God needs *beyng* precisely so as to reveal its “hiddenness,” which is solely what can make it divine. This “hiddenness” has implications for the kind of questioning Heidegger has in mind.

In this sense, the question of god relates to the last god as a possibility, that is, the highest possibility that can initiate the other beginning. Crucially, the question of god for Heidegger is tied to the futural possibility of the essential happening of beyng. We can prepare the space for god in its divine essence only through the question of beyng. “Beyng, however, is the emergency [*Not-schaft*] of god, in which he first finds *himself*” (GA 65: 508). The *Not* created by the fact that being has abandoned beings (*Seinsverlassenheit*, or, what amounts to the same, “God is dead”) and that humanity is lingering in the desert of “complete meaninglessness” (GA 69: 223) compels a thinking that arrives at the question of god and likewise at the leap into beyng as the most-question-worthy. It seeks the divine through the question of beyng beyond all present parameters, that is, as an inceptual thinking. One implication of this line of thinking is, as indicated earlier, the belief that any talk of the divine at present is condemned to be empty and alienating, i.e., to be a “theology” (a metaphysics, the general project of “truth of beings” by which the Western tradition is determined as a historical movement of nihilism).⁸

One needs to bracket, therefore, all theological notions and keep silent about god. This might remind us of the final assertion of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, with the only difference that the silence that Heidegger mandates here does not mean saying nothing. He contends instead that saying in its primordial essence is gathered first in silence and issues from there (GA 65: 408). Silence already has language more primordially and more authentically than any talking, a theme with which we are already familiar from *Being and Time*, where authentic talk (*Rede*), as opposed to idle talk (*Gerede*), is presented as reticence (GA 2: 392/SZ 296). Wittgenstein’s point implies that when we keep silent, language no longer functions. For Heidegger, by contrast, it is precisely in such a condition that language functions appropriately, that is, primordially. In both the factual propositions of sciences and everyday speech, metaphysics is fully operative as the historical background of intelligibility, which suggests that a contrast between the factual (or everyday) and the metaphysical language may

not be drawn as straightforwardly as Wittgenstein assumes. Stepping back from metaphysics is retreating to the silence of authentic saying, where questioning concerning the truth of beyng takes hold of Dasein beyond the domination of public standards. Dasein in this stillness of questioning gives ear to the word of beyng that prepares the other beginning. The moment, in a sense, penetrates into time (into the everyday) as beyng, or as the word of being; hence, the task of all thinking (as questioning) consists in preparing it; that is, it is something futural. The last god is the most extreme and hidden (and therefore defining) possibility of beyng which remains an absent and concealed source that determines all forms of metaphysical presence (beingness) as the modes of its absence. Heidegger's later meditations on language revolve around the belief that language plays a key role in the historical domination of metaphysics. The crucial part of the trouble is that metaphysically structured languages deeply preclude the essential functioning of language in relation to beyng, which is the moment of silence. In a sense, inauthenticity is metaphysically (i.e., being-historically) rooted. The other beginning then must involve a profound transformation of language. We should meanwhile note that both for earlier and later Heidegger there cannot be such a thing as "authentic dialogue."

Let us explore now in more detail how Heidegger relates beyng (as a question) to the (last) god. First, I would suggest that beyng is the opening-up of a world, a historical space of meaning which announces the mystery proper to being and beings. World is a deeply unitary space which is the precondition of any possibility of meaning, of any possibility that we can encounter beings, including ourselves. Humans are thrown into a world and they stand in it by way of throwing themselves into a future. We *are* in this historical world, in the midst of beings, always by way of "moods."⁹ Therefore, the disclosedness of being always happens in the form of an attunedness. Heidegger pays much attention to a "fundamental mood" (*Grundstimmung*) in some of his lectures after *Being and Time*.¹⁰ *Grundstimmung* is the way a historical world, as a space of meaningfulness, is disclosed to a historical people (*Volk*)

in a unitary and holistic manner. *Grundstimmung*, then, is crucial for a turning of history, since the other beginning can only come as a change of heart, as a turn in a *Grundstimmung* (GA 65: 20–23). Besides, because it is not up to us humans to effect this global change of mood, Heidegger’s talk of the other beginning as the beginning of the last god (GA 65: 405–17) is not utopian. When it comes to the flight and arrival of the last god, human beings can do nothing (GA 65: 20). As indicated, “only a god can save us.” Again, what we can do is only gain preparedness for this *Ereignis*.

Accordingly, *beyng* is the essential happening of a historical world, and in this sense, it is *Geschehen* as the founding event of a *Geschichte* (GA 65: 494). It is, furthermore, a historical world where the divine hints (*winkt*) to humans, introducing a deep mystery and awe to the heart of life. In a sense, it is the moment this historical world takes place (*west*). Because history is always grounded by a momentous beginning, the present metaphysical world can only be overcome by a new beginning as the *Ereignis* of a turn, that is, by the other beginning of the last god. The historical event that has established the Western tradition is the beginning ventured by the ancient Greeks, what Heidegger calls “the first beginning.” The argument goes that this original happening (ἀλήθεια, i.e., the emerging of “beings as a whole” from concealment, or φύσις, i.e., shining forth of “beings as a whole” that provokes wonder and questioning) has been lost in the Western tradition even though its initial echo (*Anklang*) can be heard here and there (GA 65: 188–91). These observations should remind us of *Being and Time*’s discussion of “tradition” as covering up, and the theme of “inheritance” (GA 2: 27–36, 505–17/SZ 19–27, 382–92). This original happening (*Wesen*) needs to be appropriated as historical action and creativity, as a break from tradition, which can eventuate the original (*das Ursprüngliche*), what is given in the *Ursprung*, as a leap (*Sprung*). Therefore, the other beginning is the re-appropriation of *alētheia* in a more fundamental way and an opening up of an authentic space for history. Only in the ether of genuine history can a supremely divine being show its radiance on things, can it bring the ownmost radiance of beings back. This might

have led Heidegger to the belief that a truly historical people alone, a people venturing the most dangerous but indispensable leap into a post-metaphysical historical future (that is, grounding the truth of being), is capable of having and celebrating the truly divine (GA 65: 113–14, 190–91). But, correlatively, a historical people can be a historical people in finding its god (GA 65: 398–99). This was actually “the historical mission of the German *Volk*” for the spiritual (metaphysical) salvation of the West as Heidegger contends in the *Rectoral Address*. Thus, the paradigm shift (so called *Kehre*), after *Being and Time*, “from the being of the individual Dasein to the Da-sein of be[y]ng,” in Bret Davis’ words,¹¹ does in a sense bring the *Volk* to the foreground as the event-site (*Da*) of being. One virtue of this way of reading Heidegger’s god (the last god) is that it also casts some light on Heidegger’s infamous involvement with National Socialism. It seems almost uncontroversial that Heidegger waits for a new god (or “religion” taken in the broader sense) for the German people, a “waiting” in terms of which he accords Hölderlin a crucial significance, as is fairly apparent even in the very late views expressed by him in the *Der Spiegel* interview.

Thus Heidegger understands his philosophical enterprise as having a preparatory character in relation to the other beginning, in the context of the German spiritual mission which, he believes, consists in giving ear to Hölderlin’s futural poetizing “reaching furthest ahead” (GA 65: 204). Yet is it legitimate to attribute to fundamental thinking solely a preparatory function for the other beginning as a world-historical transformation? Is it acceptable to direct all attempts of thinking to an uncertain futural happening (for which thinking-questioning is to clear the ground) while thereby bracketing the urgency of “the here and the now”? For Heidegger, this is something “necessary” because all frames of reference presently at work in the modern world are determined by metaphysics, that is, by the “abandonment of being.” But if so, how possible is it to undertake a primordial futural thinking (i.e., “inceptual thinking”) through the question of being? Given Heidegger’s radical historicism, is it truly possible to leap ahead into the other beginning, into the fully revolutionary moment of history?

Yet this may justify in part Heidegger's process of confining thinking solely to a preparatory function and referring to a possible god needed to give a new beginning, a different "fundamental mood" (as a different understanding of being) to modern humanity. At any rate, it seems inescapable that for Heidegger "the here and the now" cannot express any true urgency until the present frames of reference are put entirely into question.¹²

Heidegger situates the need for raising the question of beyng against the threat posed by machination and lived-experience. This threat in turn is tied to a danger of losing history. Consider the following:

The *organization* of lived experiences is the highest lived experience in which "they" find themselves together. Beings are merely an occasion for this organizing, and what place is beyng then supposed to occupy? Yet mindfulness [*Besinnung*] now gains a view of the decisive point of history, and knowing becomes attentive to the fact that only by traversing the most extreme decisions can a history still be saved in the face of the gigantic lack of history.

It is therefore futile to search through history, i.e., through its historiological transmission in order to encounter beyng itself as pro-jection [*Entwurf*]. An intimation of this essence of beyng could strike us only if we were already equipped to experience ἀλήθεια as in the first beginning. Yet how far removed are we from that, and how definitively? (GA 65: 450, tm)

The roots of the Western historical world are grounded in the founding-event, ἀλήθεια as a beginning (*Anfang*) which is so crucial that everything belonging to this history becomes essentially intelligible through it. Therefore, in order to penetrate into the historical world as a whole, we need to experience this beginning (i.e., ἀλήθεια) which is buried over in the tradition. This implies that understanding the Western historical world is not only something necessarily philosophical – it is what philosophy essentially is. As he puts in a later text, the

phrase “Western philosophy” is a tautology (GA 11: 9–10/WP 30–31). In the *Beiträge*, questioning had the mission of paving the ground for a new beginning. The challenge here was to free ourselves from “the already established direction of questioning,” because “a manifold leap into the essence of beyng itself had to be ventured, that required in turn a more original insertion into history: the relation to the beginning, the attempt to clarify ἀλήθεια as an essential character of beingness [*Seiendheit*] itself... Thinking became ever more historical [*geschichtlich*]... Beyng itself announced its historical essence” (GA 65: 451). Given that there is no history-free way to approach this historical occurrence (beyng itself) (GA 65: 451), it seems that we need to make a leap, the leap of inventive thinking (*Erdenken*), or of inceptual thinking which can ground Da-sein as the site of the event of beyng, and thus turn it into Da-sein. Heidegger brings questioning and the leap together, and, arguably, questioning (as the question of beyng) appears to be the authentic site of freedom. A further stage of questioning comes as a leap.

This leap, however, is only possible upon a historical ground. The reverse would be a Cartesian position, which presupposes the possibility of “seeing from nowhere,” of independence from history. To say that we are in being is to say that we are in history and we can make sense of things only on that basis. In other words, in the distance *through* which we can see things history occurs. If beyng is the opening-up of a historical world, being (*Sein*) is the established openness (i.e., the holistic space of meaning) as the gift of this event, through which we are humans and through which god manifests its concealment. Thus, beyng establishes an inter-space between god and man, through which man can receive beings and can “stand” amidst beings. “Beyng takes place [*west*] as the between for god and man, but in such a way that this inter-space [*Zwischenraum*] first grants to god and man a place for the possibility of their essential occurrence” (GA 65: 476, tm). *Lichtung* is another name for this inter-space (GA 65: 485).

Sein is a *Zwischenraum*, thus a historical world, which is “immediately” operative in all understanding and thinking and which cannot be reified either as “culture” or as a “worldview.” It cannot be reduced

to a constitution of “ideas” or to a transcendental structure of facts of consciousness. Rather this *Zwischenraum* precedes all reflective relation with beings. Heidegger’s being is a historically established openness that stands in relation to a historical possibility, namely, the essential happening of beyng.¹⁵ This possibility is basically the possibility of the advent of the last god, its “passing-by” as the fundamental moment (*Augenblick*) that sets the stage for a different historical world. Therefore even though being is the already prevailing structure of presence, it is to be thought in terms of a possibility which remains futural: neither being nor beyng can be made sense of in reference to anything present and actual. It is precisely this supreme ontological status accorded to possibility that makes questioning key for our relation to the essential happening of beyng as *Ereignis*. Da-sein becomes the site of questioning where questioning itself is the enactment of the openness to beyng that characterizes Da-sein.

This questioning faces the urgency associated with “the metaphysical diminution of the ‘world’ [which] brings about the erosion of man” (GA 65: 495). Because man stands in the world (in the openness of beings), and man and the world are co-referent, any metaphysical impoverishment of the world means the impoverishment of man. Heidegger also understands this impoverishment as the historical movement of nihilism which marks the Western tradition. Remember that only a ground-breaking event (*Ereignis*) can save humanity from this process of being hollowed-out. To repeat, this event is the momentous advent of the last god as “passing-by,” whereby beyng essentially happens: god “gods” only through (*durchgottet*) *Seyn*. It represents “the ground and abyss of god’s availing of the human being or, conversely, of the availability of the human being for god. But this availability is withstood only in Da-sein” (GA 65: 256). Ground is the *Da*, the openness, the between (*Zwischen*) as the site of strife between earth and world. Accordingly, this ground, as an open space, is not a ground in the metaphysical sense; rather, metaphysically considered, it is *Abgrund*, an abyss, a space altogether lacking the capacity of offering any absolutely firm and stable basis. Expressed otherwise, the abyss is temporality,

the space-time where man resides. Man and god relate to each other as the happening of beyng which is abyssal and to which man *as* man is exposed. But here we do not speak of human being as an “individual” or “person” which somehow involves the metaphysics of subjectivity. Da-sein is the whole communal possibility which is historically thrown and, as such, it is a historical project (*Entwurf*) to which human beings find themselves belonging. In other words, Da-sein is a people (*Volk*) in its historical self-projection, and thus not something objectively present (“society”). We receive the call of the divine not as individuals but as belonging to a community and to a historical world. It is this historical world which today stands in danger of being extinguished due to the domination of rationality (metaphysics). What is imperatively needed is a radically new beginning which can induce silence and awe in us before the mystery (GA 65: 262–63). Accordingly, it is only out of man’s enacting his belongingness to the historical world, only by “being there” at that moment of history that beyng can open up as the between through which god “gods.”

But, as indicated above, the only way Da-sein can be activated in respect of its most authentic possibilities is questioning. Questioning (as the question of beyng) steers man from the ground up and opens for him the highest possibilities of his being; man’s “being there” happens first of all as a site of questioning. This implies that beyng needs questioning, given that it is grounded in Da-sein. But if Da-sein is a communal-historical project tied to a *Volk*, Heidegger’s talk of the other beginning involves a fundamental socio-political dimension. Part of the lure of the Nazi movement for Heidegger was perhaps the fact that he dreamed that it held this kind of promise. This also casts some light on his obsession with “the future ones” (GA 65: 395–401) for the spiritual leadership of this ontologico-political leap; the future ones are the questioners and, what is the same, “the seekers” (GA 65: 398). They stand before the hints of the last god (GA 65: 83). Then the last god demands the openness of questioning. In any event, the emphasis laid on questioning (as a sort of ground) is, in fact, in direct opposition to the metaphysical experience of “grounding” (as certainty and security). The last

god can neither be accorded the function of a metaphysical ground nor be approached in terms of rational grounds we might devise. In fact, when Heidegger says that the last god is “over against all past gods, especially over against the Christian god,” he is arguing that the last god cannot be thought in terms of the sort of metaphysical grounding function that informs the theological perspective (GA 65: 411). Admittedly, the traditional god has a couple of specific functions; it provides security, it grounds certainty (as the absolute being) and it is a creator god. Heidegger writes:

A *metaphysical* consideration must represent god as the highest being, as the first ground and the cause of beings, as the un-conditioned, the infinite, the absolute. All these determinations arise not from what is godly about god but from the essence of beings as such, insofar as this essence, conceived purely and simply in itself as constant presence and objectivity and as what is clearest in representational explanation, is attributed to god as ob-ject. (GA 65: 438)

The above quotation concerning the metaphysical god has some implications about the idea of god as producing and governing the world, and, as such, as the absolute and constant power that grounds the world and all beings. This theological determination of beings as *ens creatum* in the Middle Ages is, to be sure, prepared by Greek ontology modeled on *tekhne*, on *epistēmē poiētikē*.¹⁴ In the medieval ontology, the interpretation of beings as *ens creatum* is underpinned by the doctrine of *analogia entis* which asserts a hierarchy of entities leading up to and grounded in the most-being (as *deus*). Beings *are* not in the same sense as God *is*; there is only an analogical relation between these senses of being. Heidegger believes that the modern technological understanding of being descends from this model as its final expression. Heidegger insists that even though the productionist metaphysics has its roots in Greek metaphysics, it has assumed an authoritative form

with the Judeo-Christian appropriation, leading to the hardening of the forgetfulness of being.

What is at issue here, among other things, is that this creation metaphysics covers up the ties between world and earth, the way in which earth and world stand in relation. Earth and world are tied together by strife (*Streit*) and history occurs in the realm of this strife; Beyng as *Ereignis* belongs to this strife. If history is to be understood from out of *Ereignis*, what is essential to it, namely earth and world in strife, must be situated at the focus. Da-sein must be experienced as the ground of this strife. By contrast, in the idea of creation, world and earth are isolated from and contrasted to one another as “culture” and “nature.” The natural world, in turn, is objectified as a realm for the assertion of man’s subjective powers (Descartes), a realm standing only as an obstacle to the growth and self-recognition of the subject (Hegel), a realm to be subjugated and transformed (Marx), and ultimately, a realm of technological exploitation and manipulation – a “resource” (*Bestand*). Accordingly, Western history can also be read as man’s growing violence toward and alienation from earth (and to that same extent, man’s growing homelessness).¹⁵

To restore beings to their original (*ursprünglich*) sense, we need to experience them “in the openness of the strife between world and earth” (GA 65: 7), to which man, too, belongs; the earthly (being more originary than the natural) can never be bracketed.

World is “earthly” (earthy), earth is worldly. Earth, because it is related to history, is in one respect *more originary* than nature. World is higher than merely “created” things, because it is *formative of history* and so lies closest to the *Ereignis*. (GA 65: 275)

In a sense, the Cartesian subject-object model is impossible because the background of the so-called “subject” always remains earth. This also contrasts with the dogma that man is created “in the image of God” as a spiritual essence and is categorically separated, in this regard, from all other creation. Pascal would speak of a “corrupt nature.” Man’s ties

to earth are only accidental, and history is construed as a progressive emancipation from these ties. From Plato's *Phaedo* to later Husserl's reflections on a "worldless ego," this dimension of earth is left out.

Likewise, the human world (as eventually a technological world) attempts to establish itself as triumphant over the earth. "Certainty" – which underscores this quest of absolute foundations (from Descartes to modern science) that will "render us masters and possessors of nature"¹⁶ – offers us a key in the representation of natural phenomena and is, in this sense, prerequisite for the mastery and manipulation of beings. Heidegger asks:

What does it mean that Descartes still attempts to justify certainty itself as *lumen naturale* on the basis of the highest among beings as *creatum creatoris*? (GA 65: 337)

God as the supreme being and the creator served as metaphysical bedrock here, and in this sense pushed metaphysics to its ultimate conclusions, to its modern form (i.e., certainty as self-certainty of the subject) as the whole framework of objectifying reason. As Heidegger will later say, metaphysics is an onto-theo-logical project.¹⁷ So, one basic result is what I would call the "banalization of beings"; beings were not able to be exploited wholesale before they were thoroughly banalized, for which theology rendered a crucial service.

Nonetheless, the banality to which the world is reduced by metaphysics leads to a drive to seek enchantment by creating and dealing with machinations.

The unfittingness [*Unmaß*] of mere beings, of non-beings as a whole, and the rarity of being, for which reason the gods are sought *within* beings. If someone seeks and does not find and therefore is compelled into forced machinations, then no freedom for the restrained waiting of an encounter and an intimation... (GA 65: 400, tm).

"The unfittingness of mere beings" (*das Unmaß des nur Seienden*) might also suggest the complete lack of luster among beings, their turning

out to be like “a monstrous pile,” like non-beings. The metaphysical search for the structure of beings, for their “generality” and “universal validity,” ends up forgetting being as such, and thereby losing beings, too; metaphysics can never experience a tree as that tree.¹⁸ This loss of being and beings leads to a search for gods among beings, as if to compensate the loss. Perhaps there is a certain enchantment promised by technology. Heidegger believes that this search is part of mankind’s drive for machinations, part of the emergence of a technological relation to oneself (*Erlebnis*) and to other beings, which “turns everything upside down, exhausts beings in exploitation” (GA 65: 417). How is it possible that we can experience beings *as* beings and that beings can provoke in us “the question-worthiness” of being? How can beings be restored and saved? We alluded above that only divine intervention can revolutionize history, as “the stillest transition into the other beginning” (GA 65: 98), that it alone can save humanity from destruction. We cannot by ourselves overcome this power-driven relation to beings (machination as mastery and exploitation of the earth). That is, we need *a* god’s occurrence in history, even if this occurrence can only be understood only as a “momentary happening,” an occurrence which demands from us our questioning preparedness. Questioning here is tied to becoming open to intimations of the last god.

Heidegger argues that this last god would be a god of intimations and thus would maintain the most intimate relationship with the human essence.

The last god has its *presencing* in hinting. . . The last god is not the *Ereignis* itself, but rather is needy of the *Ereignis* as that to which the one who grounds the “there” belongs. (GA 65: 409, tm)

Ereignis here is the moment in which “the passing-by of the last god” happens. This happening is preserved as the essential experience of the new historical world, that is, as the memory (*Gedächtnis*) in which the new historical world as a space of meaning is anchored. In this historical world, the last god takes place (*west*) essentially through “hinting,”

through the deep intimacy which hinting involves. This intimacy grounded in the intimations of the last god serves to shelter the truth of beyng (i.e., *lichtende Verbergung*) in beings, and in this sense, is imbued with the care to preserve beings. This preserving of beings restores them to the strife between world and earth, and thus to their mystery. The last god hints through this strife that springs from “the excess of intimacy belonging to beings and beyng” (GA 65: 46). It appears that the other beginning would be a history of this hinting.

Naturally, this intimating god should correspond to a kind of awareness and knowing in the receiving human beings; intimation means making something known by suggesting or gesturing (*intimus*, the innermost). This innermost revelation through intimating and the knowing awareness (*Wissen*)¹⁹ issuing from it finds expression only in the form of silence and holding-back (*Verhaltenheit*) as a retreat from the language of propositions. Thus, Heidegger speaks of the possibility of the knowing awareness of the last god, but it is a possibility tied to the decision, a decision appropriated by the need of beyng; the last god and its knowing awareness are inseparable from *Not*, which necessitates “the most extreme decision about the highest” (GA 65: 406–7). Decision here is not an act of choosing between alternatives done by a free agent pursuing her interests. Heidegger resists this subjective interpretation of decision. Instead, an essential decision is *seynsgeschichtlich*; it appears when subjective concerns (i.e., self as individual) are no longer at play, when one lets the need of beyng be decisive. In other words, it becomes possible when selfhood (*Selbstheit*) leaps into Da-sein, into the historical space of emergency transcending all that is associated with merely individual concerns. This decision must be ventured because what is at stake here is history, that is, our essence as historical beings (GA 65: 508). The first beginning now ends in nihilism and all the ontic decisions that we presently make in this metaphysical-technological world derive from the decision that determined the first beginning. The new founding decision comes as a break from metaphysics, as “the essential happening of the truth of beyng in the form of the last God” (GA 65: 96). It seems that we do not decide but nonetheless participate in this decision.

Questioning is simply the proper form of this participation in the sense that it alone grounds a path of thinking leading to an openness for this decision. The passing-by of the last god signifies the moment of “the most extreme and briefest decision about the highest” (GA 65: 405). The passing-by of the last god as the founding moment of the history will be the ground of the knowing awareness of the last god. “The last god is the beginning of the longest history on the shortest path of that history,” i.e., in its passing-by (GA 65: 414). It is last because it “raises to the highest the essence of the uniqueness of the Godhead” (GA 65: 406). It is in this way that the last god remains surpassing (*Überholende*): it surpasses all representation and calculation (GA 65: 405). Indeed the last god shows itself as “the highest form of refusal” (GA 65: 416). This only means that questioning never overcomes itself, but gets purer and purer in each new step because it grows out of the divine mystery announcing itself by the refusal.

Heidegger suggests that an understanding of the last god is closely tied to an appropriation of our relatedness to death. Thus, he asks: “If we have such a poor grasp even of ‘death’ in its extremity, then how will we ever measure up to the rare intimation of the last god?” (GA 65: 405) This question recalls *Being and Time*’s discussion of death. *Being and Time* argues that we are only *as* mortal movement; without a relatedness to death we could not make sense of things, thus there would be no Dasein. An appropriation of our essential belonging to this movement confers on Dasein “a freedom towards death” (GA 2: 353/SZ 266). This “freedom towards death” underlies a freedom towards “the intimation of the last god” in the *Beiträge*, which is thus the occurrence of the uttermost and ownmost possibility of transcendence in Da-sein. The concept of fissure (*Zerklüftung*) is also relevant to the occurrence of this transcendence in Da-sein.²⁰ Death reveals the fissure, Da-sein’s groundlessness, the abyss in which Da-sein stands (i.e., ek-sistingly). Fissure is experienced in such a way that it lays bare the abyss which conceals itself in all absorption in the present-ness of entities and *a fortiori* in any metaphysical quest for ultimate grounds. This experience is *entsetzlich*; it displaces Dasein from the familiar realm of entities

(determined by metaphysics) into the claim of the unfamiliar by which original historical possibilities for Dasein become manifest. This claim happens as the hint of the last god. Death (as enacted temporality) opens up the shortest pathway (i.e., *Zerklüftung*) to the truth of beyng as “clearing concealment” or as refusal. The time-space of beyng, history, within which man exists is essentially abyssal (GA 65: 282–84). Fissure then should be seen as the disclosure of beyng (through the disclosure of ontological difference) as this time-space in which “occurring essentially. . . are the plummetings of the god and the ascent of the human being as the one grounded in Da-sein.”²¹

It follows that freedom towards death means standing before the fissure and thus standing open to the claim of the unfamiliar. Fissure as “the middle” of the essential occurrence of beyng is something enacted principally in being-towards-death.²² It is in this way “that openness for beyng might be disclosed – fully and out of what is most extreme” (GA 65: 283). So we can think of fissure in relation to “the law of the last god” as “the law of the great individuation in Da-sein, of the solitude of the sacrifice, and of the uniqueness of the choice regarding the shortest and steepest path” (GA 65: 408). In this sense, beyng can be understood only “out of its original essential occurrence in the full fissure” (GA 65: 75). Heidegger also believes that freedom is the gift of this abyssal character of beyng, but metaphysics hinders the authentic enactment of freedom, and, therefore, covers up the original possibilities of freedom because metaphysics is closed to this abyssal character of beyng. This suggests that the metaphysical experience of time (i.e., time as the infinite succession of neutral now points) is irreconcilable with the kind of temporality through which god is (hints) in history, which originates from momentariness arising in the face of death. The last god’s hinting requires that Da-sein is enacted, or grounded, that is, man is there, as moment-site, since the moment is “the time of beyng” (GA 65: 508) as something far more profound than the entire empty eternity of metaphysics. It then requires that we become questioners and seekers vigilant enough to correspond to its time. Being human is, above all, being concerned with the question

of being, the very asking of which is our “Seinsmodus” (GA 2: 10/SZ 7). And in the *Beiträge* questioning becomes the unique enactment of human freedom whose roots lie in our mortal movement. Correspondingly, death and (the last) god are brought into an intimate connection. It is only when we experience this intimacy that being can emerge as an authentic question for us. “And in its silence, as the inception of the word, the god answers” (GA 66: 353/314, tm).

Erices University, Kayseri, Turkey

ENDNOTES

I owe special thanks to Karsten Harries with whom I discussed many of the issues taken up in the present paper. I also should express my gratitude to Richard Polt who made generous comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

- 1 For quotations of this text, I mainly consulted Rojcewicz/Vallega-Neu’s translation: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of The Event)*. In one instance, identified below, I had recourse to Emad/Maly’s translation: *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*.
- 2 As far as Heidegger is concerned, one can always wonder whether the question of god is dependent on the question of being or the other way around. One may well make the case (though here is no place for that) that the question of being has arisen in his mind first on the basis of the question of god. It seems that, from very early on, Heidegger is keenly interested in the question of god, which is quite understandable given his theological background. As he states in 1953: “Without this theological background I should never have come upon the path of thinking. But origin always comes to meet us from the future” (“A Dialogue on Language,” GA 12: 91/OWL 10). George Kovacs puts it nicely: “The God-question in Heidegger’s philosophy is not a limited or an isolated problem, but in a certain sense, it is the whole of his thought from an important point of view.” George Kovacs, *The Question*

- of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 22.
- 3 As Heidegger retrospectively states in a marginal note to “Letter on ‘Humanism’”: “For ‘*Ereignis*,’ ‘event of appropriation,’ has been the guiding word of my thinking since 1936” (GA 9: 316na/241nb).
- 4 Heidegger stresses this break from the *ontologische Analytik des Daseins* of *Being and Time* in the *Beiträge* I, §49 clearly enough: “In general: to rethink – in terms of the history of being (but not ‘ontologically’) – the whole essence of the human being as soon as it is grounded in Da-sein” (GA 65: 103).
- 5 GA 65: 437. In his “Postscript to ‘What is Metaphysics?’” (1943), Heidegger suggests that this answer is not a set of assertions, but the development of questioning itself in a more primordial direction (GA 9: 304/232).
- 6 GA 65: 12. See also GA 65, §237 for a similar train of thought.
- 7 *Not* signifies both need and emergency. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, in their new translation of the *Beiträge*, render it as “plight”, which I find inadequate. In the *Beiträge*, Heidegger raises the question, somewhat rhetorically, whether *Not* is the truth of being (GA 65: 46). Likewise he speaks of “*die Not der Notlosigkeit*” as the highest *Not* (GA 65: 107) which, in turn, refers to *Seinsverlassenheit* (GA 65: 234). Heidegger wants to lead us to the experience of this concealed ontological characteristic (“consummate nihilism”) of the age, which, he suggests, can come only as a shock (*Er-schrecken*), the shock of the *Seinsverlassenheit* that constitutes the basic mood of the other beginning (GA 65: 46).
- 8 See “Das Wesen des Nihilismus” (GA 67: 206–11), “Nietzsche’s Word ‘God Is Dead’” (GA 5: 217–18/163–64), “On the Question of Being” (GA 9: 413–15/313–14).
- 9 See SZ, §29, “Das Da-sein als Befindlichkeit.”
- 10 Notably in GA 29/30, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929/30).
- 11 Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 79.

- 12 Even later Heidegger's remark that "here and now and in little things, that we may foster the saving power in its increase" ("The Question Concerning Technology," GA 7: 54/QCT 33) remains questionable, because any sense that things may convey to us is determined, from the outset, by the metaphysical-technological world.
- 13 GA 65: 475: "beyng is possibility, something that is never objectively present and yet is always bestowing and denying itself in refusal through ap-propriation."
- 14 See, for instance, GA 33: 136-48/116-26. Here Heidegger states: "What the Greeks conceived as *epistēmē poiētikē* is of fundamental significance for their own understanding of the world" (GA 33: 137/117).
- 15 In "Building Dwelling Thinking" (GA 7) and "Poetically, Man Dwells" (GA 7), both dating from 1951, Heidegger argues, somewhat dramatically, that modern humanity has grown unable to dwell on the earth thus experienced. Likewise he had identified the *Grundstimmung* of Nietzsche's thought (as the mouthpiece of consummate modern humanity) as homelessness and its *Grunderfahrung* as godlessness and worldlessness (GA 50: 105-127/IP 15-35).
- 16 R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part VI in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 142-43, tm.
- 17 See "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics" in *Identity and Difference* (GA 11); also "Introduction to 'What Is Metaphysics?': The Way Back Into the Ground of Metaphysics" (1949) in *Pathmarks* (GA 9).
- 18 One should recall here Heidegger's ruminations on thought's (scientific and philosophical) relation to a tree in *What Is Called Thinking?*: "To this day thought has never let the tree stand as it stands" (GA 8: 46/44).
- 19 I follow Emad/Maly's rendering here.

- 20 “The Origin of the Work of Art” makes the same point with the
notion of *Riß*.
- 21 Earlier, in “What is Metaphysics?” (1929), Heidegger describes
Da-sein in a similar way as “being arrested in the nothing”
(*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*) (GA 9: 115/91). But already in
Being and Time Dasein is characterized in terms of “*Grundsein*
einer Nichtigkeit” (GA 2: 376/SZ 283) and of the resulting terror
of groundlessness.
- 22 See GA 65: 280 and GA 65: IV, §160.