

## *Gottwesen* and the De-Divinization of the Last God: Heidegger's Meditation on the Strange and Incalculable

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A critical component of Heidegger's *Denkweg* after the *Kehre* of the 1930s was his speculation about the last god.<sup>1</sup> Heideggerian scholars have duly noted the importance of this motif, which marks the transition from the end of metaphysics to the other beginning through the twofold movement of being's bestowing withdrawal, *the self-concealment that is the unconcealment of the refusal*.<sup>2</sup> It has even been suggested, correctly in my view, that the sending of being, which heralds the advent of this new beginning, bears the imprint of Heidegger's religious upbringing and, in particular, an earlier phenomenological interest in the theological belief in the second coming of Christ.<sup>3</sup> In the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, composed between 1936–1938, Heidegger delineated six junctures—the echo (*Anklang*), the playing-forth (*Zuspiel*), the leap (*Sprung*), the grounding (*Gründung*), the ones to come (*Zukünftigen*), and the last god (*letzte Gott*)—that express the essential congruence of what is thought without being compressed systematically into a unifying whole. The six junctures disjunctively convey the unity of the sovereignty of the questioning way of belonging by reverberating the same about the same out of distinct and dissonant domains, each one a disclosure of the 'sheltering truth of the event', a truth—identified by Heidegger

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as the strife (*Streit*) of world and earth—that is the ‘grounded structure (joining) of the “there”, a structure of transport-captivation [*gegründete Entrückungs-Berückungsgefüge (Fügung) des Da*]’.<sup>4</sup> My aim in this chapter is to shed light on the last of these junctures by a close reading of passages from the recently published *Black Notebooks*, which preserve Heidegger’s private meditations covering the years 1931–1948.

To set the analysis, let me begin with a passage from the *Contributions*, in which Heidegger writes about the fissure (*Zerklüftung*) ‘in virtue of which beyng is the realm of decision for the battle among the gods. This battle is waged over their advent [*Ankunft*] and absconding [*Flucht*]; it is the battle in which the gods first divinize and bring their god into decision. Beyng is the trembling of this divinization [*die Erzitterung dieses Götterns*]’.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in the *Contributions*, Heidegger writes that the refusal ‘is the highest nobility of bestowal and is the basic trait of the self-concealment *whose* manifestness constitutes the originary essence of the truth of beyng. Only in this way does beyng become estrangement [*Befremdung*] itself, the stillness of the passing by of the last god’.<sup>6</sup> From this we may deduce that the bestowal itself is a refusal to bestow; what is bequeathed must be held in reserve to be bequeathed—the concealment of the concealment cannot be revealed unless it is revealed as that which is concealed. Heidegger’s insistence that ‘as refusal, beyng is not mere withholding and seclusion’, and hence the ‘refusal is the intimacy of an allocation’,<sup>7</sup> well expresses the fundamental paradox that informed the path of his thinking focused on the self-refusing appropriation of beyng, the ‘still illumination of self-concealment [*Sichverbergens*], which liberates the human being from the mere rational animal into the grounder of *Da-sein*’.<sup>8</sup>

In the same tenor, Heidegger wrote in the notebooks, ‘*Beyng* – self-refusal as the trembling of the divinizing of the last god [*die Verweigerung als die Erzitterung des Götterns des letzten Gottes*]. The trembling is a keeping open – indeed even the openness of the spatiotemporal field [*Zeit-Spiel-Raums*] of the “there” [*des Da*] for *Da-sein*’.<sup>9</sup> The portrait of being placed before us by Heidegger is decidedly belligerent: the primordial fissure inflames the spirit of struggle (*Kampf*) among the gods in which they divinize and bring their god into decision, that is, the self-refusal of being mythologized—or anthropomorphized—as the *trembling of the divinizing of the last god*.<sup>10</sup> On the surface, the word ‘divinizing’ seems redundant, but the redundancy underscores that the combat itself is essential to the act of decision, which results in the

flight of the calculable gods (*Götter*) and the dawning of the inestimable essence of divinity (*Gottwesen*),<sup>11</sup> a double concealment in virtue of which the nonbeing of beyng dissembles as the being of nonbeing—an effect of the metaphysical effacing of the ontological difference between beings and beyng, which is the nothingness (*das Nichts*) that is higher and deeper than nonbeings (*Un-seiende*).<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of the dissimulation of the nullity (*Nichtiges*) of beyng as something negative, apparent divinities become indistinguishable from true divinities, the one as the other are present only in the absence of their presence—in the vacuity, or literally the spiritlessness (*Geistlosigkeit*), that is the flight of the gods (*Flucht der Götter*)<sup>13</sup>—and thus are manifest in the nonappearance of their appearance.<sup>14</sup> The trembling results, moreover, in the openness of the spatiotemporal field—the abyss as timespace—that makes possible the ‘appropriating event’ (*das Ereignis*) that ‘destines the human being to be the property [*Eigentum*] of beyng’.<sup>15</sup>

The last god, I propose, is the semiotic marker of that which is always subject to being surpassed and therefore can never be last chronologically; as such, it is ‘the inceptual one in the essencing of beyng’.<sup>16</sup> Temporally, the notion of the last god is an instantiation of Heidegger’s open circle, the return to the beginning that never was, the genuine iteration of the again that is altogether otherwise.<sup>17</sup> The last, Heidegger informs us in the *Contributions*, ‘is what not only needs the longest ante-cedence [*Vor-läuferschaft*] but what itself is the most profound beginning rather than a cessation, the beginning which reaches out the furthest and catches up to itself with the greatest difficulty. What is last is therefore withdrawn from all calculation and for that reason must be able to bear the burden of the loudest and most repeated misinterpretation’.<sup>18</sup> The most conspicuous misinterpretation, I submit, is to understand the last god theistically.

We can infer from Heidegger’s elucidation that the idea of the last god entails an unambiguous rejection of teleology and eschatology:

*The last god* – is not the end – but is instead the other beginning of the immeasurable possibilities of our history. For the sake of that beginning, the previous history must not perish but must indeed be brought to its end; i.e., its transfiguration [*Verklärung*] must be set into the transition [*Übergang*] and into preparedness [*Bereitschaft*]. The last god – the preparation of his appearance is the extreme venture of the truth of beyng; only in virtue of this truth can the retrieval of beings succeed for humanity.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than viewing the last god as the end, Heidegger asserts that it signals the other beginning, the ‘oscillation of the beginning in itself’ and thus ‘the highest form of refusal, since what is inceptual eludes every attempt to grasp onto it and essentially occurs only in protruding beyond all things that, as futural, are already incorporated into it and are delivered over to its determining power’.<sup>20</sup> The end and the last are sharply distinguished: the last, as the most primordial, withdraws unremittingly from the end. The last can appropriate its inceptuality, however, only by transfiguring the first beginning and bringing it to its end. The realization of the beginning in the end does not presume that the end is naught but the rotation back to the beginning. The beginning whither one returns in the end is not the beginning whence one set forth towards the end. From the beginning, then, we can discern the end, albeit from an inverse perspective. That is, the end can only be imagined as the terminus that can never be terminated. In this sense, the preparation of the appearance of the last god is branded the extreme venture of the truth of being, a venture prompted by the appearance of what cannot appear but as nonapparent.

Expressed in a different terminological register, the ‘nearness of the last god eventuates when the event, as the hesitant self-withholding [*das zögernde Sichversagen*], is elevated into *refusal* [Verweigerung].’ The latter, however, is not ‘sheer absence’ (*die bloße Abwesenheit*), that is, the renunciation of presence; it is rather the absence of absence and presence, the nihilating nihilation—the concealing self-concealment—that belongs to the ‘originary essence of being as lit up in the thinking constitutive of the other beginning.’<sup>21</sup> The breach of being—the resonating of the event as refusal linked to the grounding of the truth of being as the timespace of the stillness of the passing by of the last god<sup>22</sup> in the nearness of its extreme remoteness, ‘a relation that must not be deformed or eliminated by any “dialectics”’<sup>23</sup>—intimates a form of alienation of the same in the guise of the other that is, in truth, the other arrayed in the guise of the same. The last god, accordingly, is ‘wholly other than past ones and especially other than the Christian one’.<sup>24</sup> Replying to the question whether speaking of the last god is not a degradation of God or even blasphemy, Heidegger writes that the ‘last god must be so named, because the decision about the gods ultimately leads under and among them and so raises to the highest the essence of the uniqueness of the divine being [*das Wesen der Einzigkeit des Gottwesens*].’<sup>25</sup> What is implied by the term *Gottwesen*? A clue is

offered by Heidegger's contention that the notion of last should not be understood as 'sheer stoppage and ending', but rather in the 'sense of the most extreme and most compendious decision about what is highest'; that is, the connotation of the term 'last' is ultimate, the paramount aspect that is impossible to comprehend and for which it is impossible to wait, since the finality of this last god cannot be calibrated by a chronological sequence of gods. Indeed, the last god is the god that can never arrive, the end that can never stop ending, the endless end, the future that is perpetually impending.<sup>26</sup> As Heidegger put it in the draft for *Koivón: Zur Geschichte des Seyns* (1939–1940):

Yet the god – how so, the god? Ask beyng! And in its silence, in the inceptual essence of the word, the god answers. You may wander through each and every being. Nowhere does the trace of the god [*die Spur des Gottes*] show itself. You can arrange all beings, never will you encounter a free place for housing the god. You may go beyond your beings and will find only the beingness once more of that which already counted as beings for you. ... Yet how are you to become a questioner who asks beyng rather than investigating a being? Only through the voice of silence that tunes [*anstimmt*] your essence to steadfast insistence within Da-sein and raises what has been attuned to a hearkening to the coming. For the coming alone is capable of fulfilling the essence of godship [*Gottschaft*] in an inceptual manner.<sup>27</sup>

Heidegger instructs the reader to ask beyng in order to discern the nature of god. The response will be heard in silence, which is the inceptual essence of language. What does one hear in that silence? That god can be grasped only from within the ontological difference: god is not to be found in beings but only in the beyng. Heidegger thereby undermines the theistic idea of the immanence of the divine in the world: *the trace of god shows itself nowhere*. But it is precisely in the nonshowing that the essence of the godship shows itself. In a way intriguingly reminiscent of the Jewish belief that the possibility of the Messiah's coming is predicated on the impossibility of the Messiah's arrival, the hope in the return of what is interminably still to come, the quintessential event of the nonevent,<sup>28</sup> Heidegger maintains that the lastness of the last god consists of the fact that the god is constantly coming, which engenders a state of continual waiting. 'He brings nothing, unless himself; yet even then only as the most coming of that which comes. Ahead of himself, he bears the to-come of the future [*Zu-kunft*], his time-play-space is beyng,

a time-play-space that itself waits for the god, in coming, to fulfill it and in coming to come. Thus is the god, of his necessity choosing beyng, the most extreme god, who knows no making or providence'.<sup>29</sup>

The god affirmed by Heidegger is neither the creator nor the one who exercises providential care over history. Thinking about *Gottwesen*, literally, the being or essencing of the divine, is thus not a 'matter of calculation', but 'an attempt at meditation [*umzubesinnen*] on the danger of something strange and incalculable'.<sup>30</sup> But what is the strange and incalculable something? This should not be construed ontotheologically as if Heidegger was reverting to the apophatic source of the kataphatic God of Christian faith, a God beyond God à la Eckhart, the Godhead (*Gottheit*) through which the divinizing of gods is accomplished,<sup>31</sup> the primal experience of *theos* that precedes translation into the theological criteria of specific religiosities.<sup>32</sup> Nor, in my judgment, is there justification to implant in Heidegger 'the seeds for a postmodern theology which can restore a sense of the divine mystery, or reaffirm the religious experience of the "wholly other"'. By taking Heidegger's lead, we can determine that there is more than a superficial resemblance between the thought of being and the mystery of God. Indeed, *his thought enables us to address what is distinctive of the divinities as much through the modality of their absence as through their presence*'.<sup>33</sup>

I concur with the final sentence, but I would argue that the modality of absence is not akin to a mystery of God linked to an inscrutable transcendence, whether understood ontologically as the transcendental or theologically as the transcendent<sup>34</sup>; the mystery avowed by Heidegger is the mystery of being (*Geheimnis des Seins*)<sup>35</sup>; that is, the essence of the absent (*das Abwesende*) that is the 'unpresently present' (*ungegenwärtig Anwesende*), which is to say, the presencing in unconcealment (*anwesend in die Unverborgenheit*) of the present that can never be represented as presence.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Heidegger comments on the alienation and the essence of history, an affiliation that can be experienced when historiology is dismissed as a mode of calculative thinking: 'What always remains absent [*Ausbleibende*] – is not, however, something emptily selfsame – but is instead what is unfathomable [*Unergründliche*] of the richest ground of beyng, in the midst of which beings are struck and abandoned by the divinization of the god [*der Götterung des Gottes*]'.<sup>37</sup> According to Heidegger, history can be understood in one of two ways: either as 'that which is still unfathomed and still entirely strange to us and as the abyss of the rarest and most unique divinization of the still undecided

god of gods [*unentschiedenen Gottes der Götter*]', or as the 'complete overturning [*Umsturz*] of beings and the transformation [*Verwandlung*] of beyng'.<sup>38</sup> In my judgment, the second possibility explicates what is insinuated by the former: the divinization of the still undecided god occasions and is occasioned by the overturning of beings and the transformation of beyng, which would render erroneous the reversion into traditional theology:

We need a new god! No! This 'no' is not because the old god would still suffice and could still be a god – but because this god is not at all the one that is in need of us. The other god needs us. That is not a simple reversal [*Umdrehung*] of the previous relation – instead, it is the sign of something completely strange [*Befremdlichen*], a divinization, for whose articulated domain the past gods – the 'ancient' ones as well as the Christian one – are of no help, especially if we take them as ordinarily interpreted.<sup>39</sup>

The new god needs humanity, not in a theurgical sense of unifying or enhancing the divine nature, but insofar as the future ones (*Künftigen*) 'hold beyng open and urgent and developed in the truth of its essence', and beyng, consequently, 'discloses itself as the appropriating event of Da-sein, whereby the latter is then appropriated and its truth (the "there") is itself grounded'.<sup>40</sup> That the god needs us does not refer to 'some sort of unification and improvement' of the divine on the part of human beings; it relates rather to the grounding of Dasein related to 'the pursuit of the truth of beyng *on the basis of* beyng', that is, reacting to the abyssal character (*Ab-gründigkeit*) of beyng rather than entreating the transcendence of god as the supreme being or the immanence of that transcendence in beings. Hence, the statement that 'the other god needs us' can be reformulated as 'beyng, moving out into its truth as the event of appropriation, and as the "between" for the divinization [*das Zwischen für die Götterung*] and so for "beings", compels humans to a displacement into Da-sein and into its stewardship. ... In this regard, to be needed is higher than "needing" (requiring). The other god needs us – requires the grounding of Da-sein and dispenses this grounding into the shortest path of a sheltering of beings in the simplicity of their structure'.<sup>41</sup>

It is in 'the simplest stillness in the "between" of world and earth'—not some transcendental city of God or kingdom of heaven—that 'beyng might tremble in its clearest intimacy and, as the event, might appropriate

all beings and thus the god. ... For this, however, the decisiveness of the repudiation of everything halfway and leveled off must also be hard enough and must not shirk from intensity and rage, due to a false concern with a long-since-empty “superiority” in every usual “treatment” of the “spiritual”.<sup>42</sup> The authentic spiritual goal, for Heidegger, is the downgoing (*Untergang*) that ‘can be endured only on the basis of decisiveness toward the mystery of being itself, i.e., on the basis of restraint and diffidence toward the essence of being’.<sup>43</sup> The ‘intimation [*Wink*] of the god’ will come to the ‘waiting ones’ when there is a cessation of the idolization of the antidivine (*Widergöttliche*), that is, the sway of technological machination, but such a cessation seemingly is dependent on the appearance of that very god. Responding to this dilemma, Heidegger exposes more of the secret of his atheology as it relates to the quandary of the between: ‘Both – the god *and* the confusedness – must break forth and appear – and for *that* to happen the field of *such* appearance must have previously acquired a unique breadth and depth of openness – i.e., *the truth of being* must be experienced and the preparedness for that truth awakened. We must enter into the unique plight of that *between* for the god and the confusedness – indeed must first open up the plight and ground it’.<sup>44</sup>

To be awakened to the truth of being requires that one is conscious of the coexistence—that is, a mutual belongingness (*Aufeinanderzukommen*) that is the source of the strife without dialectical resolution of the antinomies<sup>45</sup>—of god and the confusion in the openness of the between, a state of affairs that Heidegger illustrates by citing an older maxim, ‘*one must be a god in order to know who is the devil* [ein Gott muß einer sein, um zu wissen, wer der Teufel ist].’<sup>46</sup> Conversely, the ‘verge of extreme despair’ is the site for ‘the full light of the beacon of being, the light in which the last god is concealed’.<sup>47</sup> The tarrying and passing by, the flight and absence of the gods in the open realm, occurs in one stroke.<sup>48</sup> Analogously, in the *Contributions*, Heidegger comments on how the ‘intimation as intimation is preserved in restrained reticence, and how such preservation always stands at the same time in departure and in arrival, in sorrow *and* in joy, in that basic disposition of those who practice restraint, to whom alone the fissure of being opens and closes itself’.<sup>49</sup> This concurrence—as opposed to coincidence—is the distinctive plight of the between, the centre (*Mitte*) ‘in which the discord [*Zwietracht*] of the god and of confusedness stand in and against each other’,<sup>50</sup> and in that respect, the intimation of the god is concealed and therefore revealed in the abyss of the between (*Abgrund*



*des Zwischen*).<sup>51</sup> Heidegger demarcates the centre of that abyss—obviously a self-subverting metaphor insofar as the abyss can have no midpoint—as the place where the trembling of being transpires. This trembling is identified as the passing by of the last god. However, since, as we noted, the last god is continually on the way to coming, the passing, too, must be ongoing; a god that passes is not the god that is passing.

Karl Löwith astutely noted with respect to what he calls the existential ontology of *Being and Time* that Heidegger was undoubtedly impacted by the rhetoric and symbols of his religious upbringing, but he translated the theological into a *godless theology*.<sup>52</sup> In a similar vein, Hans Jonas argued that the fact that the ‘secular thinking’ in *Being and Time* embodies elements from Christianity does not justify postulating an ‘autonomous parallel’ between Heidegger and Christian theology. The real challenge, therefore, is not to find validation or corroboration in what Heidegger has borrowed from his Christian heritage, but to examine the philosophical validity of this secularized appropriation.<sup>53</sup> Summarizing his critique, Jonas wrote, ‘The being whose fate Heidegger ponders is the quintessence of this world, it is *saeculum*. Against this, theology should guard the radical transcendence of its God, whose voice comes not out of being but breaks into the kingdom of being from without’.<sup>54</sup> Jonas does not disavow that the gods reappear in Heidegger’s thought; he contends nonetheless that *where the gods are, God cannot be*.<sup>55</sup> If this is true about the early Heidegger, how much more so is it applicable to the contemplation of the later Heidegger, which is fuelled by an atheological pathos to transcend theology, even the idolatry of natural theology,<sup>56</sup> or as George Steiner put it, ‘Heidegger’s poetics of pure immanence are yet one more attempt to liberate our experience of sense and of form from the grip of the theophanic’.<sup>57</sup> In the final analysis, for Heidegger, the sanctioning of scientific knowledge by faith is the very opposite of philosophical overcoming (*Überwindung*) and transformation (*Verwandlung*).<sup>58</sup> The overcoming and transformation would induce undermining the theological to the point that the unconcealment of the gods is disclosive of the concealment of God in the same manner that being withdraws as it is disclosed in beings. Rendered phenomenologically, the possibility of the appearance of the inapparent coincides with the horizon of the *nonphenomenolizable*, the givenness that can be given only as ungiven.

It is apposite to note as well the hypothesis of Susan Taubes that there are suppressed currents of Christian theology—and, more specifically, currents of a gnostic nature—that come to expression in Heidegger's antitheology:

The suggestion is not so strange if we consider that his attack on Christian theology is not at all on naturalistic grounds. ... Heidegger's antitheological polemic is thus directed from a more radical theological position. We must recall that Christian theology is syncretistic. We are confronted with a tradition originating in a (gnostic) Jewish heresy which not only absorbed in itself the heterogeneous elements of Hellenistic mystery cults but had to reconcile itself with systems as incompatible with each other as they were alien to itself, first with the Old Testament and then with Aristotelian metaphysics. Heidegger's polemic is directed against the biblical and metaphysical compromise of Christian theology and is thus carrying on a secret, esoteric, heretical, 'Christian' tradition.<sup>59</sup>

Although Jonas does not express his views in precisely these terms, he did independently note the residual of gnostic elements incorporated into Heidegger's atheistic thinking.<sup>60</sup> Most importantly, from Jonas's standpoint, an unbridgeable gulf separates Heidegger's thinking and the faith of theology inasmuch as the biblical conception of God as the self-revealing being obstructs the unveiling of being as that which cannot be hypostasized ontically in compliance with the ontological difference. Since the thinking of being transcends all particular beings, including the transcendence of the divine being understood as the ultimate reality or supernatural agent, the primal thinking is emphatically a 'thinking away from God' or at the very least a 'thinking beyond God',<sup>61</sup> expressions that should not be misconstrued as articulations of an apophatic theology that posits a being that transcends predication except for the predicate of being beyond predication, which implicates one in a form of metaphysical speculation envisioning the impersonal ground of being as the personal being that exercises purposeful and providential agency in the world. The last god—the god that may save us—will not appear in the 'lived experience' (*Erlebnis*) of either a 'personal' or a 'massively shared' nature; the god 'appears uniquely in the abyssal "space" of being itself. All previous "creeds", "churches", and the like cannot in the least become the essential preparation for the encounter of god and the human being in the midst of being'.<sup>62</sup>

But what does Heidegger mean when he says that god will appear in the abyss of being? Consider this statement in the *Black Notebooks*, ‘Clearer: not “origin”, but instead *happening of being and happening of truth* [Sein- und Wahrheit-geschehnis] – not “transcendence” only, but *the world’s becoming world* [Ver-welten der Welt], its beginning and existence’.<sup>63</sup> What is the clarity that Heidegger attained in this moment? That he is not seeking a transcendental origin (*Ursprung*)—or an origin that, metaphysically conceived, is transcendent—but rather the beginning (*Anfang*) and existence (*Existenz*) of the world; that is, there is no appeal to any metaphysical ground but only attending to the happening of being and the happening of truth, the event that is the world becoming world. As he reiterated in another passage from the notebooks with the heading ‘*The concept of the world*’: ‘To bring the world as a world to a worlding [Welten] is to venture the gods once again. Yet this venturing must conceal itself as a venture and long be silent “about” the gods—the bringing to a worlding, as an act of violence, is simply a deed to do’.<sup>64</sup> What is it to venture the gods once again, a venturing that must conceal itself as a venture and maintain the silence about the gods? The second beginning of which Heidegger speaks provokes an obfuscation of god—a gesture that is referred to as violence (*Gewalt*)—so that there should be no confusion about escaping the finitude and immanence that is part and parcel of bringing the world as a world to a worlding. ‘The age is not without gods *because* we are too “worldly” and so have become godless [*gottlos*]; on the contrary, it is because we have *no world* and only a confused understanding of being’.<sup>65</sup> Godlessness is not the privation of gods but the absence of world. The matter is expressed linguistically as well: the deed of worlding ‘must be the demolitional, interrogative, thoughtful swing into an apprehending discourse – the latter as a bursting in [*Einbruch*] and a bursting forth [*Ausbruch*] placed into language [*Sprache*] – the Grounding jointure of the “there” [*die Gründende Fügung des Da*] – everything in a simple – hard – strange – reticent consummation [*Vollzug*]. The capacity to forgo much that could be said; a reticent discourse which silences a surrounding world still in its twilight’.<sup>66</sup>

The accomplishment of this apophatic unsaying—the reticent discourse that foregoes what can be said and silences the encompassing world—is possible only when one can properly discern the *absence of affliction* through being: ‘The distorted essence [*Unwesen*] of being has rubbed away all being. What has remained: the transience of all beings

and, in correspondence, this easiest capacity to get hold of the most arbitrary things. – Nothing stays, but also nothing escapes'.<sup>67</sup> The relevance of this radical finitude to theology is made explicit in several other entries to the notebooks: 'We first find God again when we lose the *world* no longer and truly exist in the power of world-formation [*Weltbildung*]'.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, 'The world must first world as the partitioning of the "there" [*Zerklüftung des Da*] – only in that way is prepared the hour of the suddenness of the unascertainable *overfissure* [*Über-Klüftung*] – the tearing away into the proximity of the gods'.<sup>69</sup> Or again, 'Experience the overwhelming power of this assignment! And thus keep open for the gods a spatiotemporal field!'<sup>70</sup> These dicta should not be interpreted pantheistically or panentheistically, as if Heidegger were affirming either that divinity is nature or that nature is divinity. To speak meaningfully of God, one must fully embrace the worldhood of the world without any recourse to transcendence, and this alone allows one to exist in the power of world-formation, the being-there, which, for Heidegger, is primarily an act of *poiēsis* conferred upon the there-being of *Dasein*, a gesticulation that manifests the world through the occlusion of its manifestation.<sup>71</sup>

But there is also another aspect to the reclaiming of the world from the perspective of the inceptual thinking to be achieved by *Dasein* in the new beginning, and that is the surpassing (*Übersteigerung*) of beings, which does not presuppose divine transcendence, itself a consequence of experiencing beings as present at hand (*Vorhandenen*), but rather a leap (*Einsprung*) into the truth of *beyng* as the event.<sup>72</sup> 'This truth', muses Heidegger, 'so little *is* a god, or even only vouches for a god, that precisely the essential occurrence of *beyng* must become and must long remain the site of the decision regarding the absence [*Ausbleib*] or advent [*Anfall*] of gods'.<sup>73</sup> As we see in the following passage, Heidegger's casting of this motif assumes an unmistakably gnostic tone with his portrayal of the thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) of human beings, who break into world against which they must do battle,<sup>74</sup> a theme we have already encountered: 'The *world* as the abyssal ground and the grounding of what is ungrounded [*der abgründige Grund und Gründung des Ungroundes*]. *Dasein inhuman* [*unmenschlich*] – as the thrown breaking in [*der geworfene Einbruch*], which quarrels with – beings (partitioning)'.<sup>75</sup> The unexpected juxtaposition of the terms *unmenschlich* and *Dasein* highlights the antagonism that Heidegger attributes to the human being confronting the beings of the world. To embrace the world as the abyssal ground, the human being must become

inhuman, that is, disaffected from the commonplace disposition of being human. The degree to which Heidegger was informed by the gnostic myth of estrangement—at least as it was formulated by the German *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and particularly Richard Reitzenstein,<sup>76</sup> whose perspective was utilized by Rudolf Bultmann in his presentation of the unfolding of Hellenistic Christianity by means of gnostic terminology,<sup>77</sup> and continued by his students, including Hans Jonas in his portrayal of the image of the alien<sup>78</sup>—is made even more explicit in the subsequent entry in the notebooks:

The alien (*the human being*) and the great fortuitiveness (*being*). The throwing into being and the trembling of the thrownness into the essence as *language*. *Language: the hearth of the world ... Here the uniqueness of the revealing-concealing isolation in the simplicity of the aloneness of Dasein. (The unison.)*<sup>79</sup>

In Heidegger's philosophical translation of the gnostic myth, the human being is labelled the alien (*der Fremdling*) vis-à-vis the great fortuitiveness (*der große Zufall*) of being (*das Sein*). The existential state of this alienation is further described as the 'throwing into being' (*der Wurf in das Sein*) and as 'the trembling of the thrownness into the essence as *language*' (*das Erzittern der Geworfenheit in das Wesen als Sprache*).<sup>80</sup> Language is the hearth of the world wherein one finds 'the uniqueness of the revealing-concealing isolation [*entbergend-verbergenden Vereinzlung*] in the simplicity of the aloneness of Dasein'. Paradoxically, language is the home that is the place of isolation and aloneness but also the place of unison (*Ein-klang*), the haven of solitude and the womb of relationality.

The underlying triangulation of god, world, and human is reiterated in another aphorism: '*Along with losing the gods, we have lost the world; the world must first be erected in order to create space for the gods in this work; yet such an opening of the world cannot proceed from, or be carried out by, the currently extant humanity – instead, it can be accomplished only if what basically grounds and disposes the opening of the world is itself acquired – for Da-sein and for the restoration of humanity to Da-sein*'.<sup>81</sup> The dwelling of divinity is emphatically the world, not in the mystical sense of God being present in the world from which God is absent, but as the place of conflict between the showing of the nonshowing and the nonshowing of the showing, the clash between the visibility

of the invisible and the invisibility of the visible, an opening that is disclosed through the self-revealing concealment of the language of Dasein. Heidegger, I surmise, had this in mind when he wrote in the notebooks, 'The attaining of the god by way of struggle – the preparation of his abode – in the existence of poetizing and thinking. In this way, truth first happens, as a lonely forest ridge sweeping through the valleys of humans'.<sup>82</sup>

Heidegger touches on the same point in another passage in which he opines that the entanglement 'in the massiveness, boundlessness, and hastiness of what is present at hand and in its operative coherence ... is not supposed to be unravelled—instead, the god requires that the basic happening [*Grundgeschehnis*] be opposed to it—while increasing and exaggerating the entanglement—toward a downgoing [*Untergang*] or a *complete* inversion [*Umkehr*]; but as usual ... need to place into Dasein the knowledgeable questioning of *reticent* waiting and the world-configuring thinking of the basic happening'.<sup>83</sup> The god has no ontic referentiality, let alone ontological substantiality; it is rather a mythopoetic marking of the tension between the entanglement with beings present at hand and the basic happening of *beyng*; that is, the god signifies the chasm or the space of the ontological difference, the clearing in which *beyng* is concealed in the disclosure of its being. To humanity is assigned the specific roles of the knowledgeable questioning, which depends on a *reticent* waiting, and the world-configuring of the rudimentary event. By fulfilling this mission, Dasein augments and amplifies the very entanglement he is supposed to oppose.

Here it is worth recalling Heidegger's statement concerning the god of philosophy understood as the generative ground of being or as the *causa sui*:

Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god. The god-less thinking [*gott-lose Denken*] which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God [*göttlichen Gott*]. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.<sup>84</sup>

The passage reads like an Eckhartian interpretation of Nietzsche's statement regarding the death of the God of Western metaphysics; that is to say, the atheistic thinking of Nietzsche's madman, predicated on denying

the ontotheological conception of the deity, affords one an opportunity to have a closer connection with the ‘divine God’.<sup>85</sup> The import of this oddly redundant locution may be gleaned from what Heidegger writes elsewhere, ‘All metaphysics and every art that is grounded in metaphysics ... poeticized and thought gods as beings, at most as being itself. However, those who prepare must first come—those who, after all, are capable of thinking be-ing [*Seyn*] and this alone as the distressing need of the godhood of gods. How undisturbed and owned will be then the path of the futural man to the last god; how completely devoid of all detours into the escape routes of the transformation of the hitherto will this path be, and how unconfined will it be by the prospects of the calculated?’<sup>86</sup>

The path of futural thinking culminates with the last god; indeed, the *future human being* is identified as ‘the steward of the stillness of the passing by of the last god – the grounding preserver of the truth of beyng’.<sup>87</sup> The passing over ‘eventuates in that space-time which determines the clearing of the “there”. And it can eventuate only if the *event* prevails as the essence of beyng – which in turn happens when the truth of beyng is grounded inceptually, and it comes to that only if truth itself and its essence have become a plight and the oblivion of beyng is shaken’.<sup>88</sup> However, this leap of the future human being into *Da-sein* can be attained only when one is liberated from the distressing need of the godhood of the gods (*die Not der Gottschaft der Götter*), a theological necessity that has triumphed in traditional Western metaphysical speculation with its contemplation and poeticizing of the gods as beings and the eternal creator-God as being.<sup>89</sup> In the future, by contrast, exemplified by giving oneself up to the distant injunction to relate to the thoughtful poeticizing of the beginning,<sup>90</sup> we will be capable of thinking *Seyn* without concealing everything essential by unconcealing nothing essential.<sup>91</sup> Thus, as Heidegger ruminated in another notebook entry, the forgottenness of beyng (*Seynsvergessenheit*) is overcome through the question of beyng (*Seynsfrage*), a questioning that ‘concerns the essential truth of beyng – concerns that origin [*Ursprung*] which is, and alone *can* be, the *pre-playing* of beyng [*Vor-spiel des Seyns*] in our all-knowing godlessness [*alleskennenden Gott-losigkeit*]: art – which means: knowledge of the necessity of art’.<sup>92</sup>

It is beyond our interest to make explicit all that is implied here, but suffice it to underline the connection between *Ursprung* and the *Vorspiel* of beyng, which is further linked to our all-knowing godlessness enacted in the knowledge of the necessity of art. The aesthetic process,

it seems, is the means by which we emulate the foreplay of the origin, the prelude overshadowed by godlessness, which, as we already noted, means the state of the worldlessness. From the reference to art, which Heidegger understands in a Nietzschean sense as a perspectival letting radiate or bringing forward into appearance, a domain, that is, in which semblance is reality,<sup>93</sup> I suggest that the *Vorspiel* may be illumined from the following annotated gloss of Heidegger on his referring to ‘an origin [*Herkunft*] of what is present from out of presencing [*des Anwesenden aus dem Anwesen*]: ‘In the radiance of presencing, that which presences appears, *comes forth*. The radiance itself never appears!’<sup>94</sup> The foreplay, the playing before, figuratively alludes to this radiance of presencing that brings forth all that appears but itself can never appear, the nonphenomenalizability that is the epis-temic condition of all phenomenality, the unseeing that enframes every act of seeing.

The *Seinsfrage*, which gives us access to this foreplay, is not restricted by previous diverting paths of transformation or by the prospects of what can be calculated. One is, in fact, nearer to the ‘en-opening of the most remote’ in the ‘hardly revealed “time-space” of the truth of be-ing’, that is, the last god, when the ‘gods will be more difficult and more rare, but therein more in sway, and yet thereby nearer in their swaying remoteness ... The last god is inflamed to the highest distress by be-ing as the abysmal “in-between” [*abgründige Inzwischen*] of beings’.<sup>95</sup> If we attend carefully to these words, we can discern with clarity that Heidegger’s last god is not a god in a theological sense—not even in a post-theological sense—but the abyss that is the between, the clearing or the opening, the beyng that is the empty nothing that bestows and withholds all beings, ‘the “unblend- edness” and the “stillness” out of which all things proceed together in their most intimate self-belonging’.<sup>96</sup> Heidegger’s intention is expressed straightforwardly in the following comment in the *Contributions*:

The most intrinsic finitude of beyng reveals itself here: in the intimation of the last god. ... The last god has his own most unique uniqueness and stands outside of the calculative determination expressed in the labels ‘mono-theism’, ‘pan-theism’, and ‘a-theism’. There has been ‘monotheism’, and every other sort of ‘theism’, only since the emergence of Judeo-Christian ‘apologetics’, whose thinking presupposes ‘metaphysics’. With the death of this God, all theisms wither away. The multiplicity of gods is not subject to enumeration but, instead, to the inner richness of the grounds and abysses in the site of the moment for the lighting up and concealment of the intimation of the last god.<sup>97</sup>



Those who would use Heidegger as a foundation to construct a new theological edifice have not grasped the collapse of the polarity of theism and atheism intimated by the intimation of the last god and thus they have not taken to heart the deep-rooted and far-reaching finitude disclosed by this god, an epiphany of nothing to see that imparts knowledge of ‘the *most concealed* essence of the “not” [Nicht], as the “not yet” [*Noch-nicht*] and the “not any longer” [*Nicht-mehr*],’ the site of the moment that bespeaks the concealing-revealing of the ‘intimacy and pervasiveness of the negative [*Nichthaften*] in beyng’, the ‘truth of the *not* itself, and consequently also of *nothingness* [Nichts]’.<sup>98</sup>

Needless to say, Heidegger on occasion uses language that could easily mislead one into thinking that he was advocating for something akin to a postmetaphysical theology. Thus, in one passage in the *Black Notebooks* in which Heidegger distinguishes ‘the many’, who identify the beyng (*Seyn*) beyond beings as a nonbeing (*Unseienden*), and the ‘creative ones’, who know that beyng is not a nonbeing but the nothing, he concludes: ‘Consequently, for the many, there must always be “*religions*” – but, for the individuals, there is *God* [*für die Einzelnen aber ist der Gott*]’.<sup>99</sup> Allegedly, Heidegger is attributing to the elite belief in God and to the masses conformity to institutional religions. A careful glance at the context, however, reveals the insurgent implication of Heidegger’s words: *der Gott* is synonymous with *das Seyn*, and the latter is placed ‘under beings’ (*unter das Seiende*), which is to say, god is the beyng that is the strange and incalculable surplus, the event that is neither being nor nonbeing.

Another striking example is in the passage from the notebooks in which Heidegger reflects on the meaning of culture as it relates to the idea of struggle (πόλεμος): ‘The struggling structure [*kämpferische Gefüge*] of the historical Dasein of a people and its destiny, a Dasein exposed to the gods [*gottausgesetzten*]’.<sup>100</sup> The nexus between history, peoplehood, god, and world is expanded in another passage in the notebooks: ‘*The concept of world* – a questioning that pushes itself to its limits, where it experiences itself exposed to what is most question-worthy: where the “there” opens up abyssally [*abgründig*], where the need of preservational disputation necessitates the “there” (constancy), and history [*Geschichte*], i.e., a people [*ein Volk*], becomes itself; history is the venturing of the gods [*das Gewagtwerden der Götter*] out of a world and for a world [*aus einer Welt für sie*]; this happening [*Geschehnis*] is intrinsically individuation [*Vereinzigung*]’.<sup>101</sup> What constitutes the worldhood

of the world is that which is most worthy of questioning, the ‘there’ of Dasein that opens up abyssally, that is, opens up to the abyss of the groundless ground, the ground that is ground by pulling away from the ground (*Ab-grund*). In and through that clearing, the concealment-exposure of language, a people becomes itself and professes its place in history, which is further described as a venturing of the gods that are, paradoxically, both out of and for the world; that is to say, the happening of the historical partitioning, the individuating event that is the essence of being,<sup>102</sup> is completely immanent and without any transcendental Archimedean frame of reference. As the venturing of the gods, history discloses the ‘abyssal character of the gaining through strife – sacrifice and consecration’.<sup>103</sup> Through an ‘act of violence of the creating person’, the gods ‘are compelled to their individuation – and a people is – as history. The gods indeed only those of a people: no general god for everyone, i.e., for no one’.<sup>104</sup> For Heidegger, the gods are not transcendental beings outside of history; they are historical forces individually apportioned to a particular people in the struggle to ground being in the truth of beings.<sup>105</sup> This is the import of the directive: ‘Need to create (the event) of those gods with whom we can be friends and to whom we need not be slaves’.<sup>106</sup> Most significantly, *there is no general god for everyone and therefore there is no general god for anyone*. The meaningfulness of the concept of godhood is dependent on the correlation of the god and a particular ethno-nationalist community active in the plane of history. The matter is elaborated in the *Contributions*:

A people is a people only if it receives its history as allotted to it through finding its god, the god that compels this people beyond itself and thus places the people back amid beings. Only then does a people escape the danger of circling around itself and of idolizing, as its *unconditioned*, what are merely conditions of its subsistence. ... The essence of a people is grounded in the historicity of those who belong *themselves through* their belonging to the god.<sup>107</sup>

The nature of Dasein is linked to the essence of a people, which is determined by the god allocated to that people. Only by finding that god can a people flee the danger of a solipsistic self-encircling and the consequent idolization of the conditional as unconditioned. Heidegger’s elitism comes to the fore when he asserts that a people finds its god through the few seekers, the future ones of the last god, ‘who in reticence seek on

behalf of this people and who ... must apparently even stand *against* a “people” that is *not yet* properly a people’.<sup>108</sup>

It would take us too far afield to unpack this statement and to delve into Heidegger’s discussion of the strife that is essential to the future ones in particular and to the people guided by them more generally. What is of most concern for our immediate discussion is the comment posed as a question:

Will the time of the gods then be *over and done* and a relapse into the mere life of *world-poor* creatures commence, ones for whom the earth has always remained only something to be exploited? Restraint and reticence will be the most intimate celebration of the last god and will attain for themselves the proper mode of confidence in the simplicity of things and the proper stream of the intimacy of the captivating transport of their works. Furthermore, the sheltering of truth will leave concealed what is most concealed and will thus lend it a unique presence.<sup>109</sup>

Through the contestation that arises from the strife, the future ones become cognizant of the ‘most diffident and most distant intimation of the last god’ by means of which they have access to the incursion of the event of *beyng* wherein truth assumes presence in its remaining concealed. This mindfulness creates the unrest that is ‘the restful enduring of the fissure’.<sup>110</sup> The last god signifies this fissure of *beyng*—the space of oscillation—that opens and closes itself in relation to those who practice restraint. Most notably, the epoch of the last god signifies the time when *the gods will be over and done*, which does not, however, justify the exploitation of the earth, since the primary characteristics of this last god and its seekers are restraint and reticence.

With this in mind, we better understand the following observation in the notebooks: ‘It is now coming to light that we have already long been living, and will still long live, in the age of the departing gods [*Weltalter der scheidenden Götter*]. The question is whether we will experience in this departure the course of the gods and thus their nearness, one that moves us while escaping from us’.<sup>111</sup> To be in the age of the departing gods—the period between the termination of the first beginning and the commencement of the second beginning, ‘the abode of the plight – in which the flight of the gods can be experienced and the waiting for the ones who will come can be carried out’<sup>112</sup>—means to experience the nearness of the gods as they are passing and becoming ever

more remote. ‘*World* – the opening up of the counterplay [*Widerspiels*] between remoteness and nearness, beenness and future: the gods’.<sup>113</sup>

The term ‘god’, for Heidegger, is a mythopoetic way of naming both the spatial void marked by the vacillation between proximity and aloofness and the temporal expanse marked by the fluctuation between past and future. Those who would try to elicit from Heidegger an argument for the revitalization of theology are at an even greater distance from the gods to whom one can be attached only by being detached. Heidegger categorizes the philosopher as the ‘questioner exposed to the tumult of the nearness of the gods’.<sup>114</sup> To be sure, there is the risk that the philosopher ‘can still misinterpret everything, and make everything empty ... But one can also possess the vocation of bearing the actual tradition of philosophy from peak to peak and of preparing the trembling of the future through one’s divinely compelled work [*götterhaft erzwungenes Werk*]’.<sup>115</sup> The divinely compelled work is ascribed to the philosopher, who interrogates every presupposition, a questioning that is fuelled by the tumult of the nearness of the gods. What is the clamour caused by this contiguity? The expiring beliefs in whose wake our knowledge of the world is severely destabilized.

The interpretation is corroborated by the following passage that delimits the philosophical calling: ‘*Philosophy* – will not deliver, will not discover things (through research), will not (after the fact) raise any worldview to concepts – instead, philosophy will again know the πόλεμος – *the event* – and will fathom the ground [*Grund*] and the abyss [*Abgrund*] and the nonground [*Ungrund*]<sup>116</sup> and thus will become a plight and the necessity – to seize what has been given as task [*Aufgegebene*] and to conquer what has been given as endowment [*Mitgegebene*] – to bring history to a happening = to venture the gods once again’.<sup>117</sup> The gods to whom Heidegger refers are not to be interpreted theistically but as a component of the relational fabric of beings, the emptiness within which the conflictual event that brings about the historical happening takes place. The task to appropriate the endowment of the relationality of all being receives its fullest formulation in Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold (*das Geviert*), which consists of the earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Consider Andrew J. Mitchell’s succinct account of this theme:

The fourfold provides an account of the thing that is inherently relational. Thanks to the fourfold, these things unfold themselves ecstatically,

opening relations with the world beyond them. Unlike the self-enclosed object of modern metaphysics, the thing is utterly worldly, its essence lying in the relations it maintains throughout the world around it, the world to which it is inextricably bound. The world becomes the medium of the thing's relations. The fourfold is the key to understanding this streaming, mediated, relationality of finite, worldly existence.<sup>118</sup>

The emphasis on the correlationality of the worldly existence provides the critical element to understand Heidegger's invocation of the gods prior to his articulation of the fourfold as a means to get beyond the theopoetic confabulation of an anthropomorphic and anthropopathic deity. In a stark and evidently Nietzschean assessment, Heidegger writes, 'God is gone; things are used up; knowledge is in ruins; action has become blind. In short: *being is forgotten* – and a semblance of beings is raging or is fleeing into what was hitherto'.<sup>119</sup> The Christian God does not exist and it is only the idols, which are constructed by our calculating ratiocination, that allows us to continue to attribute activity to that God.<sup>120</sup> On this score, Heidegger juxtaposes the 'Godlessness of Bolshevism' (*Gottlosigkeit des Bolschewismus*) with the 'moribund state of Christianity' (*Abgestorbenheit des Christentums*), since both are 'great signs that we have actually and wittingly entered the epoch of the abandonment by being'.<sup>121</sup> In another passage, he goes further and labels the 'forms of *modern Christianity*' as 'the genuine configurations of Godlessness [*die eigentlichen Gestalten der Gottlosigkeit*]'.<sup>122</sup> Even Nietzsche's celebrated proclamation that 'God is dead' is, according to Heidegger, 'spoken in the *Christian* manner, precisely because it is *un-Christian*. And that is why the "eternal recurrence" is merely a Christian expedient – to give the inconsequential "life" once again the possibility of importance. And this remains an attempt at salvation in "beings" versus nihilism of beings'.<sup>123</sup>

Heidegger's intent can be illumined from a passage in *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, where he noted that the term 'theology' first evolves within philosophy and not 'in the framework and service of an ecclesiastical system of faith'. From that standpoint, every philosophy 'is theology in the primordial and essential sense that comprehension (*logos*) of beings as a whole asks about the ground of Being, and this ground is called *theos*, God'. In that context, Heidegger reiterates his view that Nietzsche's philosophy, too, is to be considered theological in spite of his declaration of the death of God. Rather than

viewing modern philosophy as a ‘secularization of Christian theology’, it is more accurate to characterize the latter as the ‘Christianization of an extra-Christian philosophy’. All theology is possible only on the basis of philosophy, even if the latter is identified as the work of the devil. Heidegger concludes, therefore, that the questioning of philosophy ‘is always and in itself both onto-logical and theological in the very broad sense. Philosophy is *Ontotheology*. The more originally it is both in one, the more truly it is philosophy’.<sup>124</sup>

Heidegger’s last god is his way of coming to terms with Nietzsche’s death of god, which signifies ‘the abandonment of being in the current appearance of beings’<sup>125</sup>; that is, the last god is the god after there are no more gods,<sup>126</sup> the god depleted of godhood, the god that signals the overcoming of ontotheology and hence the setting of philosophy on the new course of thinking about the open concealedness of the essential occurrence of being, a mode of contemplation that is positioned in contrast to calculative reasoning and to which he refers by various names, to wit, ‘originary meditation’ (*ursprünglichen Besinnung*),<sup>127</sup> ‘thoughtful meditation’ (*denkerische Besinnung*),<sup>128</sup> and ‘thoughtful configuration’ (*denkerische Gestaltung*).<sup>129</sup> In a liminal epoch between the presence of what is absent and the absence of what is present, Heidegger saw his task as preparing the ‘future ones’ to stand in the ‘remotest proximity of the last god’ by remaining silent about what is essential,<sup>130</sup> but the last god is, as I noted above, the god that is always to come, and therefore can be proximate only by being infinitely remote. In that respect, the last god is the symbolic enactment of the demise of god. Hence, as Heidegger observes in another passage, the ‘advancing secularism’ of the ‘disempowerment of the beginning’, which proceeds from the inceptual entanglement in being, requires the ‘pushing away of beings’ and this ‘will then carry over even to God – as the creator’.<sup>131</sup> The god is manifest when what is manifest is no longer a god. One is curiously reminded of Gershom Scholem’s quip that the atheistic religion brought forth by the secular world endorses the ironic belief that *God will appear as non-God*.<sup>132</sup>

The implications of the last god as an overcoming of the Christian God, and by extension all theistic representations of divinity, are further clarified by this description: ‘A god who would like to raise himself beyond being, or indeed is thus raised and made into the source (cause) of being (not simply of beings) “is” no god and can *be* no god [» ist « *kein Gott und kann kein Gott sein*]. More inceptual than *every*

god is beyng [*Anfänglicher denn jeder Gott ist das Seyn*].<sup>133</sup> The last god is so called because it is no god at all, the god released from being godly; it thus names the beyng that is beyond being, the source or cause of being that is more inceptual than any god. *Seyn*, therefore, is no longer thinkable as the otherwise than being either as the transcendental or as the transcendent. The use of the term *Gottwesen* is meant to subvert the positing of an alterity understood in this manner. What Heidegger intends is something far more radical and paradoxical: the absence of the gods is not to be interpreted either as the absence of presence or as the presence of absence. The absence, in other words, does not mean that the once visible gods are now hidden and therefore invisible; it suggests rather that the unconcealment of the concealment is itself concealed by the unconcealment. There is no reality beneath the veneer of appearance; being is nothing but the appearance behind which there is nothing but the appearance of being.

The force of the last god as ultimate, therefore, insinuates an atheological surpassing of the ontotheological demarcation by attributing to this being the sense of being that is separate from any being and hence from any nonbeing that would simply be the negation of being. In one passage, after depicting *Seyn* as the trembling of divinization, Heidegger notes that the ‘trembling expands the temporal-spatial playing field in which the trembling itself comes into the open as refusal. ... Beyng must be thought out to this extremity. It thereby illuminates itself as the most finite and richest, the *most abyssal* of its own intimacy. For beyng is never a determination of the god as god; rather, beyng is that which the divinization of the god needs so as to remain nevertheless completely distinct from it’.<sup>134</sup> Heidegger’s rejection of the theological determination of *theōn/deus* could not be clearer: the divinization of the god needs the very beyng—to be distinguished from the beingness of metaphysics—whence it must remain completely distinct! The refusal of beyng—the trembling that comes into the open of the spatiotemporal field—is thus designated as the ‘most intimate compelling of the most originary and ever-inceptual plight, a compelling into the necessity of defense against the plight. The essential defense is not supposed to ward off the plight so as to get rid of it. In resisting it, the defense must instead precisely preserve the plight and extend it into its being carried out in accord with the diffusion of the trembling’.<sup>135</sup> In the same manner that the ever-inceptual plight coerces the necessity of defense against the plight by preserving the plight, the divinization of the god dictates the evasion

of godliness through the enowning of the trembling of divinization that necessitates the temporal-spatial playing field for its own decision.<sup>136</sup>

By *Gottwesen*, Heidegger intends this refusal linked to the mystery of appropriation (*Geheimnis der Ereignung*) that is inexplicable and immeasurable, the sheltering-clearing that grants the open to the time-space wherein the being of truth is manifestly concealed as the truth of being. Heidegger's statement that the 'most extreme god needs beyng' (*der äußerste Gott bedarf des Seyns*) implies that this beyng is nothingness, not because it is emptied of beings but because it is the delimitation of the withholding that makes possible the bestowal of beingness from the beyng that is the consummate threshold crossed by the constant turning (*Kehre*) that is invariably a counter-turning (*Wider-kehre*), the event that is 'the highest reign over the advent and absconding of past gods'.<sup>137</sup> The same point regarding the apposition of *Seyn* and *Nichts* is made with respect to the transformation of the relation of the human being to the truth of beyng: 'Beyng as the innermost "between" is then akin to nothingness for this moment; the god overpowers the human being, and the latter surpasses the god .... Yet both are only in the event, and the truth of beyng itself *is* as this event'.<sup>138</sup> The intimation of the last god thus beckons 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'.<sup>139</sup> The last god portends—allusively rather than representationally—the sense of individuation of the self as long as the latter is understood as the solitude of sacrifice by which one embarks on the path wherein 'lies the mystery of the unity of the innermost nearing in the most extreme distance, the traversal of the broadest temporal-spatial playing field of beyng. This extremity of the essential occurrence of beyng requires what is most intrinsic in the plight of the abandonment by being'.<sup>140</sup>

In another passage from the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger insists that the questioning appropriate to the second beginning is not the metaphysical query *par excellence*, 'Why is there at all something rather than nothing?' The posing of the question in this way blurs the difference between beyng and beings. What is most egregious is to advance a theological response to this imprudent inquiry:

Not to give a reassuring-theological 'proof' that explains God—not to eliminate the alienation as something extraneous—instead, to make even everything *familiar* seem alien. Where is God? The prior and more proper



question: do we have a ‘where’? And do we stand within it, such that we can ask about God? The alien character of the ‘there’ as perseverance of the ‘where’.<sup>141</sup>

The text confirms that the theological—or even the post-theological—arrogation of Heidegger’s language about the godhood, the gods, or the last god, is misguided. Discourse about God’s existence or the seeking for a proof thereof—a proposition that Heidegger considers to be absurd<sup>142</sup>—remains bound to the metaphysical worldview that has dominated thinking since the first beginning, a pathway predicated on estranging that which is estranged, that is, alienating the alienation, instead of discerning the familiar in the unfamiliar, the ordinary in the extraordinary, the habitual in the mysterious.<sup>143</sup> As we noted above, it is specifically the stillness of the passing by of the last god that Heidegger identified as the *beyng* that is foreign and potentially discordant. The use of the theistic term is meant to render the homely as eccentric, the mundane as holy, not in an otherworldly sense, but as deterring the lure of the customary (*Gewohnheit*) so that one might ‘transform everything difficult into an impelling and thus into a repelling toward the uncustomary [*Ungewöhnliche*]. The latter is the space for the nearness and remoteness of the god’.<sup>144</sup>

Inasmuch as the other beginning is ‘the opening for the time of *the last god*’,<sup>145</sup> the future history of humankind is delegated as ‘the concealed history of the great stillness in which the sovereignty of the last god opens up beings and configures them [*das Seiende eröffnet und gestaltet*]’.<sup>146</sup> The last god is thus functionally on a par with Heidegger’s *Lichtung*, the clearing in which beings are disclosed in the concealment of their being:

*Beyng* – the trace of the divinization of the absconded gods [*der Götterung der entflohenen Götter*], a trace that broadens a clearing. This clearing sets free the self-refusal [*die Verweigerung*] as an assignment of Da-sein, whereby the clearing is grounded [*gegründet*], humans are transformed [*gewandelt*], and beings come to be more fully. That tracing of the divinization [*Spuren der Götterung*], the tracing that in itself is this assignment, may be grasped as the appropriation. – To name *beyng* means to ‘think’ the *event of appropriation*.<sup>147</sup>

In place of the metaphysical conception of being as a durable and self-subsisting substance, and nonbeing as the lack thereof, Heidegger

portrays being as the trace of the divinization of the gods that have fled. This originary trace presumes that the origin is an event or happening of being, a presence that can never be present and therefore is erroneously described as absent.

What Heidegger intended here is developed at greater length in his argument in 'Anaximander's Saying' (1946) that not only does the origin remain hidden, 'but even the relation between presence [*Anwesen*] and what presences [*Anwesendem*] is still unthought. ... Unintentionally, presence itself became something present. ... It is taken to be only the most universal and highest of present beings and hence as one of them. The essence of presence together with the difference between presence and what is present remains forgotten. *The oblivion of being is oblivion to the difference between being and the being*'.<sup>148</sup> Heidegger goes on to say, 'Oblivion of being belongs to that essence of being which it itself conceals. It belongs so essentially to the destiny of being that the dawn of this destiny begins as the unveiling of what presences in its presence'. The beginning is an unveiling of what has been veiled in what Heidegger calls the *event of metaphysics*, that is, the self-veiling essence of being, the forgetting of what has been forgotten, the critical difference between presencing and that which has been present. Indeed, Heidegger goes so far as to say, 'even the early trace of the difference is extinguished through presencing, appearing as something present and emerging as the highest of beings that are present. ... The difference between being and the being, however, can be experienced as something forgotten only if it is unveiled along with the presencing of what is present; only if it has left a trace, which remains preserved in the language to which being comes. ... Illumination of the difference, therefore, cannot mean that the difference appears as the difference'.<sup>149</sup>

Just as in the notebooks Heidegger referred to being as the trace of the divinization of the absconded gods, so in this later essay on Anaximander, he speaks of the origin of being as a trace of the presencing occluded in what is present, the oblivion of being that forgets the ontological difference between being and beings, an obfuscating of the obfuscation that can be uncovered through the recovery of language, that is, the naming of the being that is nameless. Derrida thus commented on the aforementioned Heideggerian text:

What Heidegger wants to mark is this: the difference between Being and beings, the forgotten of metaphysics, has disappeared without leaving a trace. The very trace of difference has been submerged. If we maintain that *différance* (is) (itself) other than absence and presence, if it *traces*, then when it is a matter of the forgetting of the difference (between Being and beings), we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace. ... Since the trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site – erasure belongs to its structure. ... The paradox of such a structure, in the language of metaphysics, is an inversion of metaphysical concepts, which produces the following effect: the present becomes the sign of the sign, the trace of the trace. ... It is a trace, and a trace of the erasure of the trace.<sup>150</sup>

Derrida's deconstructionist reading of Heidegger sheds light on the latter's depiction in the *Black Notebooks* of *Seyn* as the trace of the divinization of the gods who have fled. The gods of which the clearing is the trace are neither present nor absent, neither being nor nonbeing; the trace is a trace of the erasure of the trace—what Derrida elsewhere calls the arche-trace<sup>151</sup>—that disappears in its appearance and appears in its disappearance. The trace of the origin that Heidegger placed at the beginning is not a phenomenal trace of a plenary presence, but a nonphenomenal trace of what can never be present, a trace of a trace of the being that is otherwise than being, the erasure that is the inception of writing, not as a token of difference but as a stroke of *différance*, the originary repetition of the non-self-identical other that cannot be reduced to the same.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, as we noted above, the tracing opens the clearing that endows Dasein with its assignment, the self-refusal that is expressed in the naming of *beyng* or contemplating the event of appropriation. This self-refusal mimics the dynamic that Heidegger attributes to the truth of being as unconcealment:

But this concealing of its essence and essential origin is the trait in which being's primordial self-illumination occurs ... so that thinking can precisely *not* pursue it. The being itself does not step into the light of being. ... By revealing itself in the being, being withdraws. ... In this way being, with its truth, keeps to itself. This keeping to itself is the way it discloses itself early on. ... By bringing the being's unconcealment, it finds, for the first time, the concealment of being. Concealment remains, however, the characteristic of the refusal that keeps to itself.<sup>153</sup>

The elusive nature of the trace of divinization calls attention to the fact that the gods cannot be reified as objective beings ascertainable by thought or classifiable by language; at best, they are disappropriated in the appropriation of the timespace of the world as vestiges of what is most proximate because most remote. Rather than focusing on the whereabouts of the divine, therefore, it is necessary to ascertain the contours of the world within which we stand as the ‘there’, the open place of nature (φύσις),<sup>154</sup> within which we are destined to ask the question of the ‘where’, the unconcealment (ἀλήθεια) that grounds the origin beyond—and occluded by—the beginning. Dasein is most question-worthy, but this status is determined in relation to the domain of nature, ‘the *genesis of the gods*, this genesis [*Entstehung*] not meant as production – rather, to come into position [*Stand*] as to emerge and to rise up [*Aufstehen*]; not causal derivation; nor out of misconstrued “affects” and their impact’.<sup>155</sup> Nature is aligned with the genesis of the gods, which does not imply causal production but the coming into position, emerging and rising up from the state of concealment.

What is foreshadowed in Heidegger’s notebooks is developed further in the essay ‘Why Poets?’ (1946), where he elicits from Hölderlin’s elegy ‘Brod und Wein’ that to be a poet in a desolate time is ‘to attend to the track of the fugitive gods [*die Spur der entflohenen Götter*]. This is why the poet, at the time of the world’s night, utters the sacred’.<sup>156</sup> The uttering of the sacred is proportionate to the augmentation of nocturnality—symbolized by midnight—to the point that the desolation has become so desolate that it hides its own essence as desolation. ‘It is not only that the sacred is vanishing as the track of the godhead [*die Spur zur Gottheit*], but that even the tracks to this lost track are almost erased. The more the tracks are effaced, the less an individual mortal who reaches into the abyss can still attend to a hint [*Wink*] or instruction [*Weisung*].’<sup>157</sup> The overpowering of technology, and the privileging of self-assertion in a world that is allowed to be only will—in my opinion, we can detect in these words an implicit critique of Nazi Germany—has triggered the withdrawal of the whole (*das Heile*) and the world has become hopeless (*heil-los*). ‘As a result, not only does the holy [*das Heilige*] remain hidden as the track to the godhead, but even what is whole, the track to the holy, appears to be extinguished. Unless there are still mortals capable of seeing what is unwhole and unhealing threaten *as* unwhole and unhealing [*das Heillose als das Heillose*].’<sup>158</sup>

A proper attunement to Heidegger's words intones that the gods are no gods at all, at least not in any conventional connotation. What is lost is not only the trace to the godhead, but the trace of the trace that is lost. Heidegger thus depicts the 'basic movement of beyng (a movement which trembles qua modernity)' as a process of '*de-divinization*' (Entgötterung), which comprises 'the unfolding all the way to the end and the entrenchment of decisionlessness about the god'.<sup>159</sup> De-divinization is a process of suspended belief in which one remains decisionless about god. But this decisionlessness is what opens the door to the atheological beckoning of the future:

A *god* is only the one and the ones that tear humans away from 'beings' and that compel beyng as the 'between' for themselves and for humans – those gods that must have first arrived if a people is to find its essence. But the god is never an 'object' of Christian tactics or of political expedients or of 'incantations' drunk on 'lived experiences', incantations in which such 'objects' could perhaps become 'perceptible'.<sup>160</sup>

The gods are not transcendent to the world, but they are rather the dimensions of the world that create the space between beings and beyng; it is in this sense that the arrival of the gods facilitates the people finding its essence, since the latter is not possible unless there is the willingness to question the truth of being in the pursuit of the being of truth. To interpret the arrival of the gods theistically is to obscure Heidegger's resolve that god is not an object that we perceive through a lived experience of a theological, political, or magical nature.

What Heidegger wished to communicate is clarified by a comment in the *Contributions*, 'The inventive thinking [*Er-denken*] of beyng leaps into beyng as the "between" in whose self-clearing essential occurrence the gods and humans come to mutual recognition, i.e., decide about their mutual belonging. As this "between", beyng "is" not a supplement to beings, but is what essentially occurs such that in its truth they (beings) can first attain the preservation proper to beings'.<sup>161</sup> Heidegger thus emphatically denies that the notion of god should be understood metaphysically or equated with the nonmetaphysical event of beyng: 'The god is neither a "being" [*seiend*] nor a "nonbeing" [*unseiend*] and is also not to be identified with beyng. Instead, *beyng* essentially occurs in the manner of time-space as that "between" which can never be grounded in the god and also not in the human being (as some

objectively present, living thing) but only in *Da-sein*'.<sup>162</sup> The between into which the thinking of beyng leaps is the clearing wherein humans and gods abide in the distance of their intimacy.<sup>163</sup> The juxtaposition of this mutuality in the space of difference is what makes possible the atheological exceeding of the theological:

Deliverance [*Erlösung*] from the 'gods' [Göttern] means: from the idols [*Götzen*] to whom belong all 'purposes' and 'causations' and 'causes,' all forms and 'goals' of machination: 'the' science, 'the' technology, 'the' common usefulness, 'the' people – 'the' culture. Why this deliverance, and whence the demand for it? From the truth of beyng – so that every being might again find its way back into its simple ground and manifest in all this the abysses of beyng, which alone suffice as sites of the decision on whether beyng merely bestows beingness to beings or surmounts itself toward the trembling of that which is most uncertain: the advent or flight of the last god.<sup>164</sup>

In contrast to the divinization of theopoiesis, which is a circling around god (*ein Kreisen um 'Gott'*) that arises from a technological utility,<sup>165</sup> the decision of de-divinization is the final iconoclastic gesture, the destruction of all the forms of objectification presupposed by the doctrines of causality, teleology, utilitarianism, pragmatism, machination, technology, science, peoplehood, and culture.

Here it is pertinent to recall Heidegger's explication in 'The Age of the World Picture', a lecture delivered on June 9, 1938, of the loss of gods (*Entgötterung*) as the fifth phenomenon of modernity. This expression is not to be understood as the 'mere elimination of the gods, crude atheism'. The loss of the gods is a twofold process intimately related to Christianity: 'On the one hand, the world picture Christianizes itself [*sich verchristlicht*] inasmuch as the ground of the world is posited as infinite and unconditioned, as the absolute. On the other hand, Christendom reinterprets its Christianity as a world view (the Christian world view) and thus makes itself modern and up to date'. Contrary to what one might assume, the loss of the gods does not imply an atheistic abolition of the gods. In a far more complicated and sophisticated way, the loss of the gods is related to the Christianization of the world picture (*Weltbild*), which posits the ground of the world (*Weltgrund*) as the infinite and unconditioned absolute. The shift in orientation results in Christianity becoming a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that reflects the

‘condition of indecision about God and the gods’. Heidegger is quick to point out, however, that the loss of the gods does not exclude religiosity. Rather, the relation to the gods, which ensues from the loss of the gods, ‘is transformed into a religious experience [*Erleben*]. When this happens, the gods have fled. The resulting void is filled by the historical and psychological investigation of myth’.<sup>166</sup>

Heidegger offers a shrewd analysis of the modern predicament and the role played by Christianity in fostering the religious experience that is centred on the flight of the gods that results from a worldview that posits God as the absolute that supplants the theistic image. As he enunciated in the notebooks, the release from idolatry, which is demanded by the truth of being and the need for every being to be restored to the ground that manifests the abysses of being, culminates in the removal of the final idol, the idol of the god personified as the deity that must be worshipped without being idolized. For Heidegger, moreover, the monotheistic iconoclasm is transposed philosophically into the assumption that being itself will no longer be apprehended ontologically as that which bestows beingness on beings, but will transcend itself toward the trembling, the decision that comports the indecision of whether the last god is arriving or departing. In this matter, there is no intention or will; it is simply the consequence of the *es gibt*, the giving that gives with no will to give and no desire to be given, an idea that is far removed from the postmodern theological efforts to salvage the nature of being as a miraculous gift.<sup>167</sup> As Heidegger put it in another passage from the notebooks, ‘To be in the proximity of the gods – even if this proximity is the remotest remoteness of the undecidability regarding their flight or advent – that cannot be charged to “good fortune” or to “misfortune”. The constancy of being bears its own measure in itself, provided it at all requires a measure’.<sup>168</sup> The measure, as we have seen, is immeasurable, which is not to say a being of immeasurable proportions, but rather the immeasurability of being that is commensurate to the between, the interlude wherein god is present as the excess (*Übermaß*) of the surpassing of all beings that is yet to come and therefore must always be not present.<sup>169</sup> As the presence of nonpresence, the last god is the signpost of the khoric abyss of the ‘concealment of that self-concealment which radiates as being’, the space of ‘great solitude’, wherein one can heed the ‘uncanny silence which indeed still devours the thunder of the passing by of the god’.<sup>170</sup>

## NOTES

1. For an extensive analysis of this motif, especially as it relates to Heidegger's notion of timespace, see Paola-Ludovica Coriando, *Der letzte Gott als Anfang: Zur ab-gründigen Zeit-Räumlichkeit des Übergangs in Heideggers's "Beitrügen zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)"* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1998). See also the analysis of the 'last god's beginning' in Frank Schallow, *Heidegger and the Quest for the Sacred: From Thought to the Sanctuary of Faith* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 131–162, and compare Ben Vedder, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion: From God to the Gods* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 157–187; Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 166–171.
2. Schallow, *Heidegger*, 106–109.
3. John D. Caputo, 'People of God, People of Being: The Theological Presuppositions of Heidegger's Path of Thought', in James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (eds), *Appropriating Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 87. For a list of relevant sources that discuss Heidegger's thought, religious phenomenology, and theology, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift: Apophasis and Overcoming Theomania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 352–353 n. 391, 364 n. 89.
4. Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, GA 65 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989), 371; Eng. trans.: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), § 238, 293. References to the German original of Heidegger's works will be given as GA (*Gesamtausgabe*) followed by the volume number.
5. Heidegger, GA 65, 244; Eng. trans., § 127, 192.
6. *Ibid.*, 406; Eng. trans., § 254 (emphasis in original), 321.
7. *Ibid.*, 240; Eng. trans., § 123, 189.
8. Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*, GA 94 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2014), 410–411; Eng. trans.: *Ponderings II–VI: Black Notebooks 1931–1938*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 299.
9. Heidegger, GA 94, 429; Eng. trans., 311.
10. See John D. Caputo, 'Toward a Postmodern Theology of the Cross', in Merold Westphal (ed.), *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 203–204; *idem*, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 57.



11. Heidegger, GA 65, 406; Eng. trans., § 254, 322.
12. Heidegger, GA 94, 7; Eng. trans., 7.
13. Heidegger, GA 94, 185; Eng. trans., 35. I have modified the translation of *Geistlosigkeit* as ‘Godlessness’ to ‘spiritlessness’. In the previous paragraph of this aphorism, Heidegger does use the term *Gottlosigkeit*.
14. Gregory Tropea, *Religion, Ideology, and Heidegger’s Concept of Falling* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 126–127.
15. Heidegger, GA 65, 263; Eng. trans., § 143, 207.
16. Martin Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, GA 69 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1998), 73; Eng. trans.: *The History of Being*, trans. William McNeill and Jeffrey Powell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 114.
17. Heidegger, GA 65, 406; Eng. trans., § 33, 58. See the analysis in Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift*, 243–244; and, in more detail, idem, ‘Retroactive Not Yet: Linear Circularity and Kabbalistic Temporality’, in Brian Ogren (ed.), *Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism: That Which is Before and That Which is After* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 33–37.
18. Heidegger, GA 65, 405; Eng. trans., § 353, 321.
19. Heidegger, GA 94, 314; Eng. trans., 228 (emphasis in original). The passage is repeated almost verbatim in GA 65, 411; Eng. trans., § 256, 326.
20. Heidegger, GA 65, 416; Eng. trans., § 256, 329.
21. *Ibid.*, 411; Eng. trans., § 256, 326 (emphasis in original).
22. *Ibid.*, 412; Eng. trans., § 256, 327.
23. *Ibid.*, 412; Eng. trans., § 256, 326.
24. The passage occurs as the epigraph to the seventh section of the *Beiträge* on *Der Letzte Gott*. See *ibid.*, 403; Eng. trans., 319.
25. *Ibid.*, 406; Eng. trans., § 254, 323. Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu render *Gottwesen* as ‘Godhead’, but in order to avoid the peril of lapsing into an ontotheology, I have followed the more literal translation as ‘divine being’ in Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), § 254, 286. This is the only section in the *Beiträge* where the expression appears.
26. Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 170–171.
27. Heidegger, GA 69, 211; Eng. trans., 178–179.
28. I have explored this in more detail in the chapter ‘Jewish Time and the Historiographical Eclipse of Historical Destiny’ in Elliot R. Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Many Jewish thinkers have affirmed some form of this paradox of the messianic future as that which comes by not coming, but the two that bear the most affinity to Heidegger are Levinas and Derrida. See Elliot R. Wolfson,

- ‘Not Yet Now: Speaking of the End and the End of Speaking’, in Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes (eds), *Elliot R. Wolfson: Poetic Thinking* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 127–193, esp. 142–156.
29. Heidegger, GA 69, 211; Eng. trans., 179.
  30. Heidegger, GA 65, 406–407; Eng. trans., § 254, 22.
  31. Paul Murphy Higgins, ‘Speaking and Thinking about God in Rosenzweig and Heidegger’, Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 2013, 93. But see 95, 104. Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 91, also assumes that the meaning of ‘godhead’ in Heidegger is identical to the use of the term in Eckhart ‘to designate the transpersonal ultimacy of the divine’. The two passages to which she refers in support of her contention are from Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translation and introduction by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 150, 178; *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA 7 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2000), 151, 180. In both contexts, Heidegger is explaining the nature of divinity, which together with sky, earth, and mortals, constitutes his notion of the fourfold. Mention here should be made of the innovative analysis of Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, ed. and introduction by Andrew Louth, trans., Haralambos Ventis (London: T & T Clark International, 2005). The author accepts Heidegger’s criticism of Western metaphysics, but turns to apophatic theology, especially culled from the works attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, to adduce an alternative explanation such that nothingness is not construed, in the wake of Nietzsche, as the absence of God conceived ontotheologically as the supreme being—a position that ends in nihilism—but as the unknowable God to whom neither being nor nonbeing can be applied, and not merely, as Derrida famously argued, as the hyperessential being that is the being beyond being.
  32. Higgins, ‘Speaking and Thinking about God’, 112.
  33. Schallow, *Heidegger*, 131 (emphasis in original).
  34. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Zweiter Band*, GA 6.2 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997), 349; Eng. trans.: *Nietzsche, Volume IV: Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 211.
  35. Heidegger, GA 94, 541; Eng. trans., 248.
  36. Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege*, GA 5 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2003), 347; Eng. trans.: *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 261.
  37. Heidegger, GA 94, 442; Eng. trans., 321.
  38. *Ibid.*
  39. *Ibid.*, 448; Eng. trans., 325.

40. Ibid., 448; Eng. trans., 325 (emphasis in original).
41. Ibid., 449; Eng. trans., 325–326 (emphasis in original).
42. Ibid., 404; Eng. trans., 294–295 (emphasis in original).
43. Ibid., 341; Eng. trans., 248 (emphasis in original).
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 318; Eng. trans., 231.
46. Ibid., 352; Eng. trans., 257.
47. Ibid., 316; Eng. trans., 230.
48. Ibid., 386; Eng. trans., 281.
49. Heidegger, GA 65, 400; Eng. trans., § 252, 317 (emphasis in original).
50. Heidegger, GA 94, 335; Eng. trans., 244.
51. Ibid., 344; Eng. trans., 250.
52. Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elizabeth King (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 31. See also István M. Fehér, ‘Heidegger’s Understanding of the Atheism of Philosophy: Philosophy, Theology, and Religion in His Early Lecture Courses up to Being and Time’, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995): 189–228.
53. Hans Jonas, ‘Heidegger and Theology’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 18 (1964): 211–214; idem, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, with a foreword by Lawrence Vogel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 241–243.
54. Jonas, ‘Heidegger and Theology’, 219; idem, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 248.
55. Jonas, ‘Heidegger and Theology’, 219–220 (emphasis added); idem, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 248.
56. George Connell, ‘Against Idolatry: Heidegger and Natural Theology’, in *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, 144–168. Consider the revealing remark of Heidegger, GA 94, 320 (Eng. trans., 232): ‘Mother – my untainted memory of this pious woman – without bitterness, and in a surmising prescience, she countenanced the itinerary of a son who had *apparently* turned away from God’ (emphasis in original).
57. George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation: Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 68. See ibid., 19 n. 1: ‘Heidegger’s ontology is grounded in a constant “keep-ing at bay” of the theological’.
58. Heidegger, GA 94, 44; Eng. trans., 33–34. On the Heideggerian distinction between overcoming (*Überwindung*) and surpassing (*Verwindung*), see discussion and sources cited in Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift*, 100, 361–362 nn. 77–78.
59. Susan A. Taubes, ‘The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger’s Nihilism’, *The Journal of Religion* 34 (1954), 157.
60. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil: Die mythologische Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 90–91, 107–108;

- idem, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Zweiter Teil: Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 7, 359–379; idem, ‘Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism’, *Social Research* 19 (1952): 430–452, esp. 441–442, 445, 449–450; idem, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 62–65, 320–340; and see analysis of David J. Levy, *Hans Jonas: The Integrity of Thinking* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 25–30; Wolfgang Baum, *Gnostische Elemente im Denken Martin Heideggers? Eine Studie auf der Grundlage der Religionsphilosophie von Hans Jonas* (Neuried: Ars Una, 1997).
61. Jonas, ‘Heidegger and Theology’, 221; idem, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 250.
  62. Heidegger, GA 65, 416; Eng. trans., § 256, 330.
  63. Heidegger, GA 94, 29; Eng. trans., 22.
  64. Ibid., 209; Eng. trans., 153.
  65. Ibid., 218; Eng. trans., 159 (emphasis in original).
  66. Ibid., 209; Eng. trans., 153.
  67. Ibid., 76; Eng. trans., 58.
  68. Ibid., 30; Eng. trans., 24.
  69. Ibid., 213; Eng. trans., 156 (emphasis in original).
  70. Ibid., 410; Eng. trans., 299.
  71. Compare *ibid.*, 301; Eng. trans., 220.
  72. Ibid., 341; Eng. trans., 249 (emphasis in original). Compare *ibid.*, 338–339; Eng. trans., 246.
  73. Ibid., 341–342; Eng. trans., 248–249. Compare Heidegger, GA 65, 397; Eng. trans., § 250, 314.
  74. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil*, 106–109, mentioned Heidegger in his discussion of the motif of thrownness (*Geworfensein*) in gnostic sources.
  75. Heidegger, GA 94, 213; Eng. trans., 156 (emphasis in original).
  76. Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Idea and Significance*, trans. John E. Steely (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 354; Walter Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 82–134; Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 121–122, 131–132.
  77. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 volumes, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1:166–167, 175–177.
  78. Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil*, 96–98; idem, *The Gnostic Religion*, 49–51, 75–80.
  79. Heidegger, GA 94, 71; Eng. trans., 54 (emphasis in original).

80. See above, n. 74.
81. Heidegger, GA 94, 210; Eng. trans., 154 (emphasis in original).
82. *Ibid.*, 167; Eng. trans., 122.
83. *Ibid.*, 170; Eng. trans., 124 (emphasis in original).
84. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 72; German text: 140–141.
85. Yannaras, *On the Absence*, 51.
86. Martin Heidegger, *Besinnung*, GA 66 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1997), 255–256; Eng. trans.: *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum, 2006), 225.
87. Heidegger, GA 94, 334; Eng. trans., 243.
88. *Ibid.*, 382; Eng. trans., 278 (emphasis in original).
89. *Ibid.*, 49; Eng. trans., 37.
90. *Ibid.*, 87; Eng. trans., 66.
91. *Ibid.*, 53; Eng. trans., 40.
92. *Ibid.*, 252; Eng. trans., 169 (emphasis in original).
93. See citation and analysis in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 14–16, 409–10 nn. 123–124.
94. Heidegger, GA 5, 364; Eng. trans., 274.
95. Heidegger, GA 66, 256; Eng. trans., 225. I have slightly modified the translation.
96. *Ibid.*, 256; Eng. trans., 225.
97. Heidegger, GA 65, 410–411; Eng. trans., § 256, 325–326.
98. *Ibid.*, 410; Eng. trans., § 256, 325 (emphasis in original).
99. Heidegger, GA 94, 398; Eng. trans., 290 (emphasis in original).
100. *Ibid.*, 172; Eng. trans., 126. Compare *ibid.*, 183; Eng. trans., 134.
101. *Ibid.*, 214; Eng. trans., 156–157 (emphasis in original).
102. *Ibid.*, 215; Eng. trans., 157.
103. *Ibid.*, 214; Eng. trans., 157.
104. *Ibid.*
105. *Ibid.*, 318; Eng. trans., 231.
106. *Ibid.*, 242; Eng. trans., 177.
107. Heidegger, GA 65, 398; Eng. trans., § 251, 316 (emphasis in original).
108. *Ibid.*, 398–399; Eng. trans., § 251, 316 (emphasis in original).
109. *Ibid.*, 399–400; Eng. trans., § 252, 317 (emphasis in original).
110. *Ibid.*, 400; Eng. trans., § 252, 317.
111. Heidegger, GA 94, 167; Eng. trans., 122.
112. *Ibid.*, 223; Eng. trans., 163.
113. *Ibid.*, 215; Eng. trans., 157 (emphasis in original).
114. *Ibid.*, 172; Eng. trans., 125.
115. *Ibid.*, 172; Eng. trans., 125–126.

116. I have modified the translation of *Ungrund* by Rojcewicz (see following note) as ‘deformed ground’.
117. Heidegger, GA 94, 217; Eng. trans., 159 (emphasis in original).
118. Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 3. See also Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 224–237; Robert S. Gall, *Beyond Theism and Atheism: Heidegger’s Significance for Religious Thinking* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 74–95.
119. Heidegger, GA 94, 231; Eng. trans., 169 (emphasis in original).
120. *Ibid.*, 457; Eng. trans., 331.
121. *Ibid.*, 351; Eng. trans., 255–256.
122. *Ibid.*, 522; Eng. trans., 380.
123. *Ibid.*, 76; Eng. trans., 58. Compare the aphorism ‘*On clandestine ways to God who is “dead”*’, in *ibid.*, 73; Eng. trans., 55–56. See also *ibid.*, 329; Eng. trans., 239, where Heidegger criticizes the effort of those overflowing with ‘Christian humility’, who explain Nietzsche’s madness as an ‘instance of the Christian God punishing and striking down the arrogant’. See the discussion of Nietzsche’s aphorism and Heidegger’s destruction of ontotheology in Gall, *Beyond Theism and Atheism*, 14–38.
124. Martin Heidegger, *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, GA 42 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988), 87–88; Eng. trans.: *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 50–51 (emphasis in original); I have taken the liberty to amend Stambaugh’s translation based on the original German text. For discussion of Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics as ontotheology, see Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7–43.
125. Heidegger, GA 94, 303; Eng. trans., 222.
126. Compare *ibid.*, 297; Eng. trans., 218.
127. *Ibid.*, 250; Eng. trans., 183.
128. *Ibid.*, 333; Eng. trans., 242.
129. Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)*, GA 95 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2014), 75–76. Eng. trans.: *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 57–58.
130. Heidegger, GA 94, 304; Eng. trans., 222.
131. *Ibid.*, 90; Eng. trans., 68.
132. In the interview with Gershom Scholem, ‘Zionism – Dialectic of Continuity and Rebellion’, in Ehud Ben Ezer (ed.), *Unease in Zion* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), 292. Scholem’s statement is noted

- and briefly analyzed by Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 79. See also Ronny Miron, *The Angel of Jewish History: The Image of the Jewish Past in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Academic Studies Press 2014), 160. In n. 38 ad locum, Miron asserts that the concept of nothing implicit in Scholem's comment 'is similar to that of Heidegger'.
133. Heidegger, GA 69, 132; Eng. trans., 114 (emphasis in original).
  134. Heidegger, GA 65, 239–240; Eng. trans., § 123, 189.
  135. *Ibid.*, 240; Eng. trans., § 123, 189.
  136. For a different interpretation that extracts from Heidegger's comments an idea of the holy as neither a being nor being, see Peter S. Dillard, *Non-Metaphysical Theology After Heidegger* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23–26.
  137. Heidegger, GA 65, 407–408; Eng. trans., § 255, 323.
  138. *Ibid.*, 415; Eng. trans., § 256, 328 (emphasis in original).
  139. *Ibid.*, 408; Eng. trans., § 255, 323.
  140. *Ibid.*
  141. Heidegger, GA 94, 239–240; Eng. trans., 175.
  142. *Ibid.*, 457; Eng. trans., 331.
  143. Compare *ibid.*, 263; Eng. trans., 193.
  144. *Ibid.*, 356; Eng. trans., 259.
  145. *Ibid.*, 262; Eng. trans., 192.
  146. *Ibid.*, 274; Eng. trans., 201.
  147. *Ibid.*, 429; Eng. trans., 311 (emphasis in original).
  148. Heidegger, GA 5, 364; Eng. trans., 274–275 (emphasis in original).
  149. *Ibid.*, 364–365; Eng. trans., 275 (translation slightly modified).
  150. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans., with additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 23–24 (emphasis in original). See my previous analysis of Derrida's commentary on this Heideggerian passage in Wolfson *Giving beyond the gift*, 195–196, 425–426, n. 271. Compare the discussion of the Derridean trace against the background of Heidegger's thinking in Paola Marrati, *Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 87–176.
  151. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans., with an introduction, by David B. Allison, preface by Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 156; *idem*, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, corrected edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 61; *idem*, *Margins of Philosophy*, 65–67. See also Jacques Derrida, *Spurs/Nietzsche's*

- Styles*, introduction by Stefano Agosti, trans. Barbara Harlow, drawings by François Loubrieu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 20–23. Regarding the philosopher’s constriction to following the trace of truth, see *ibid.*, 86–87. On the Derridean trace and arche-writing, see Tom Conley, ‘A Trace of Style’, in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 74–92; Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 157, 186–194, 277–278, 289–293; *idem*, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 25, 40–42, 44–49, 158, 160–170; John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 57–61, 319–320; Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 50–52, 74, 134–135; Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 12, 15, 28, 35, 169–171, 178, 196; Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Différance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 153–181; David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 165–204. On the possible kabbalistic nuance of the Derridean arche-trace and the gesture of writing, see the views of Habermas, Bloom, and Handelman discussed in Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift*, 155–156, 177–178, 180, 182, 184–186. See *ibid.*, 161, where I note the thematic link between time as the originary iterability, the non-identical identity of the Jew, and the trace as the repetition of the same that is always different.
152. On this account, there is affinity between Heidegger’s *Spur* and Levinas’s notion of the other as the *trace of illeity*. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 106–107; *idem*, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 12, 94; and see the analysis in Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 158–164, 224; Wolfson, *Giving beyond the Gift*, 98–99, 142, 144–148.
153. Heidegger, GA 5, 336–337; Eng. trans., 253–254 (emphasis in original).
154. Heidegger, GA 94, 241; Eng. trans., 176. See the analysis in Vycinas, *Earth and Gods*, 174–223.
155. *Ibid.*, 245; Eng. trans., 179.
156. Heidegger, GA 5, 272; Eng. trans., 202.
157. *Ibid.*, 272; Eng. trans., 203.
158. *Ibid.*, 295; Eng. trans., 221. See Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 197–201, esp. 199–200.



159. Heidegger, GA 95, 25; Eng. trans., 20.  
 160. Ibid., 25; Eng. trans., 20.  
 161. Heidegger, GA 65, 428; Eng. trans., § 259, 338.  
 162. Ibid., 263; Eng. trans., § 143, 207.  
 163. Heidegger, GA 95, 252; Eng. trans., 195.  
 164. Heidegger, GA 94, 426; Eng. trans., 305. Compare Heidegger, GA 94, 456; Eng. trans., 331: ‘The *twilight of the idols* is drawing near. ... It is not yet the evening twilight; coming first is the morning one. The assembling of the idols is the sign of a long and conclusive flight of the gods’ (emphasis in original).  
 165. Heidegger, GA 94, 426; Eng. trans., 309.  
 166. Heidegger, GA 5, 76; Eng. trans., 58. On the atheological and non-metaphysical import of Heidegger’s embrace of atheism, compare the passage in Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)* GA 96 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2014), 23–24; *Ponderings XII–XV: Black Notebooks 1939–1941*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 19.  
 167. Wolfson *Giving beyond the Gift*, 227–260, esp. 236–246.  
 168. Heidegger, GA 94, 294; Eng. trans., 215 (emphasis in original).  
 169. Ibid., 347; Eng. trans., 253.  
 170. Ibid., 412; Eng. trans., 300.

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