

For the time Being: Heidegger's Final Words in *Vorläufiges I-IV*

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Abstract

This article discusses the final volume of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. It does so by contextualizing its main themes, that is, by relating it to other writings of Heidegger of roughly the same period. Three such themes can be discovered in Heidegger's "final" writing: a discussion of the nature of phenomenology, the abandonment of the ontological difference and the relation between the thought of being and the discipline of theology. The essay concludes with a comparison of Heidegger's thinking of *Ereignis* to how theology configured the relation between God and the human being, so arguing that Heidegger seemed more indebted to the tradition of theology that he at times could acknowledge.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger, phenomenology, ontological difference, theology, black notebooks

Preliminary Remarks

THE FINAL VOLUME OF THE Black Notebooks, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, obviously does not contain Heidegger's last words. We have plenty of texts that are of a later date. Yet the volume conveys a sense of closure: all of Heidegger has now been published and one can now spend a life-time reading Heidegger. Our method in this essay, discussing this last volume, will therefore consist in a sort of contextualization of this fragmentary, sketchy closure of the *Gesamtausgabe* in order to sense, so to say, what was on Heidegger's mind in these last years. Between 1963 and 1976, the year of his death, several of his works did appear. One might think, just prior to these notebooks, of *Time and Being* (1962), *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (1964) and the four seminars held in Le Thor and Zähringen between 1968 and 1970. Other texts, later ones even, will be helpful too to gain an understanding of these final notes of the thinker.

This last notebook rehearses quite some themes that prevail in these books authored by Heidegger. Yet our focus will lie on some of the threads that appear throughout this last notebook in order to so gain sight of Heidegger's thinking in the last phase of this life. We will gather three themes: his thought of the end of metaphysics and his attempt to press beyond the ontological difference, his return, so to say, to a version of phenomenology and his relation to theology, which, although less present in the volume, returns in Heidegger's preoccupations at the time through various instances, as for instance the publication of *Phenomenology and Theology* (1969 in French, 1970 in German)—first given as a lecture already in 1928 however—, the letter of 1964 to the conference at Drew University with some “pointers for a theological conversation” as well as his letters to Bultmann, dating all the way to 1975.

Heidegger's *Vorläufiges* are difficult to read. Their fragmentary nature can be very demanding. Quite some volumes in the *Gesamtausgabe* however display this fragmentary nature. It is difficult to see of what use these sentences sometimes were for Heidegger's writings. Were they scribbles he hoped to insert in a publication later, as one can in effect from time to time notice? Are they momentary insights he would rather keep out his published work? Were they meant as mere pointers, their fragmentary nature just enough for the thinker to be reminded how to spell them out in writing? It is hard to say.

It is not clear whether these final notebooks will bring anything groundbreaking to Heideggerian scholarship. Some, like Richard Capobianco, have already argued in this direction: “It would not be surprising that even in a few short years the *Black Notebooks* will be largely set aside in favor of returning to Heidegger's major writings and lecture courses. Even so [...] these notebooks [...] will be of some value in shedding more light on his central philosophical themes and on the development of his thinking”.¹

Capobianco's book, however, was published before this final volume saw the light of day and we have yet to see whether such an assessment is valid for the notebook in question. We want here, in this essay, apart from putting Heidegger's development in perspective to let these preliminaries, these provisional, provisory remarks, speak for themselves first of all and enter into conversation with them. With this, we already touch the first of themes we discuss below: Heidegger's renewed interest in phenomenology. It is an attempt, he even writes, to “save phenomenology”.² This return is obliquely present in his writings of the time and concerns, one might say, the movement of the phenomenological gaze or, as Heidegger says, “the

¹ Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger's Being. The Shimmering Unfolding* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2022), 35.

² Martin Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, GA 102 (Frankfurt a. Main: Klostermann, 2022), 351.

primordial sense of phenomenology”.³ This movement, this “path”, is in these publications however only addressed briefly: it “leads away to come before...and it lets that before which it is led show itself”.⁴ We propose to do the same with these notebooks—to read them as they are and let them show to where they lead us. In this way, their fragmentary nature might just as well serve the purpose to inspire their readers, to let the mind wander and walk away with the ideas that the notebook, here and there, might offer.

The *Black Notebooks* have received plenty of attention. One may doubt whether this was always due to philosophical reasons. Some interpreters might confront the *Vorläufiges I-IV* with a non-benevolent reading as well—after all, there is a mention of his Nazi period, and two references to fascism and antifascism. We will not discuss these passages here, for a perhaps provocative but nonetheless philosophical reason: the Heidegger of the thirties, with all the decisionism and the very naïve belief that one or the other political system might address the question of being and so relaunch Western civilization is probably the least interesting period of Heidegger’s work. It is where he intuited something like the *Kehre* but did not seem to have realized what exactly this *Kehre* was. This happened only later, and the notebook under discussion will make clear why. We will not mention these passages nor the lesser benevolent reading of the notebook that circulates on the Internet, for the simple reason that what is happening today to Heidegger in general but to his thinking in particular seems an immunization on all counts, whereas the only sensible conclusion, with regard to Heidegger’s path, seems to be that no one, not even the smartest, not even the wisest, is *immune* for fascism and its metaphysics, especially in a discipline that has had elitist tendencies from the very beginning, from Plato’s philosopher-king to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*.⁵

Heidegger’s *Vorläufiges*, their preliminary character, is a bit awkward considering it is the last tome of the collected writings. The diffidence speaking from this title—and for which the editors of the volume call attention since it markedly differs from the somewhat ironical and cynical tones of the earlier *Schware Hefte*—echoes *The End of Philosophy* where the decisionist stance of the earlier years had already changed into a preparatory thinking, which is now a preparation for God knows what. It anticipates an “other beginning” that by no means could be established by one or the other regime or thinker. “Thinking [...] remains unassuming, because its task is only of a preparatory, not a founding character. It is content with

³ Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. A. Mitchell and F. Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2012), 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ I did address this period, and these notebooks, in my essay on *Heidegger’s Black Notebooks. Beyond Antisemitism*, edited by P. Trawny, in *Phenomenological Reviews* 4 (2018). See: <https://reviews.ophen.org/2018/01/14/heideggers-black-notebooks-responses-anti-semitism/>.

awakening a readiness in man for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain".⁶

Heidegger obviously did not know this notebook would be the final volume, back in 1963. There are indications, however, that many of the entries date later than 1969. The mention of "Le Thor 1969"⁷ indicates at the least that some of the entries may have been written at the beginning of 1970. The editor of the Black Notebooks, Peter Trawny, reports this fact, and also conveyed that Heidegger did not write these different entries chronologically but came back to some of them, adding this deleting that, and so on.⁸ It was the philosopher's workshop so to speak. It is for this reason, too, that a contextualization of this notebook seems at issue.

The Return of Phenomenology?

Many commentators agree that Heidegger seems to have abandoned phenomenology altogether from the thirties onward.⁹ At least one will not find compelling descriptions of particular phenomena in the "later Heidegger", as he once did with boredom or anxiety. Now, late in life, Heidegger writes that he wants to save phenomenology. From what exactly? From its "transcendental" character. One of the last lines of the notebook reads: "the first compelling experience of thinking: to remark the relation between presencing and unconcealment [which] remains foreign to dialectics and sealed for phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology that is".¹⁰

Heidegger's early critique of transcendental thinking is well-known: Dasein was to be distinguished from the ego or the absolute consciousness of which, mostly Husserl's phenomenology, spoke. Dasein was to be inserted and immersed into the world in which it is involved in the things of the world. In a text from 1968, however, Heidegger still identified his question of being, or about the being of beings, as phenomenological.¹¹ His critique of transcendental thinking now however plays on an entirely different level. The thinker of the event of being now questions transcendentalism as a heir to metaphysical thinking. Its quest for "conditions of possibility" prolongs the latter's attempt at grounding and looking for an ultimate foundation. Transcendentalism repeats this attempt by looking for a priori structures, so laying out what is prior to what, like the metaphysical ground

⁶ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David F. Krell (London: Routledge, 2002), 436.

⁷ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges*, 267.

⁸ See the afterword, in *Ibid.*, 434.

⁹ For an original take, see Fredrik Westerlund, *Heidegger and the Problem of Phenomena* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹¹ See Heidegger, "Über das Zeitverständnis in der Phänomenologie und im Denken des Seinsfrage," in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2007), 147.

of being comes before, even caused, the chain of beings. Heidegger does not shy away from criticizing *Being and Time* in this regard. One of the remarkable features of Heidegger is indeed that he time and again returns to the thinking of this particular book. It is, however, quite rare that he openly criticizes this work which in *Vorläufiges* happens quite some times, along with critiques of his other works.

Vorläufiges repeatedly turns to the supposed transcendental nature of *Being and Time*. In a sense, in and through mapping the existentials of Dasein, it lays out the conditions for Dasein to be able to own up to its proper existence within being, that is, within the world against the “horizon” of its finitude. Heidegger, of course, would not be Heidegger if the critique is not in some way anticipated. At issue, then, in *Being and Time* already, is a “transformation” of transcendental thinking and its transcendental nature does not have to with Dasein so much as with being which, as the *transcendens schlethin*, remains as the condition par excellence through which there first are beings, ekstasis and so on.¹² It is, however, quite surprising to read — next to its attempted cleverness — the following: “It would be more appropriate to call the Heidegger from “*Sein und Zeit*”, insofar he still is suspended by metaphysics, attempts “*Ontology*”, and does not yet clearly see in what he moves, the later one,”¹³ that is to say: not the first, most *anfänglich* and important one.

If anything Heidegger, up to the seventies, was perhaps performing a phenomenology of poetry or phenomenological reading of poetry. A confrontation, however, with the discipline of phenomenology was absent. In the *Four Seminars*, then, there was the infamous mention of a “phenomenology of the unapparent”, along with some sort of “exercise” that accompanied this phenomenology, wresting the unapparent out of concealment into the open.¹⁴ It is this path that *Vorläufiges* lays bare. Heidegger here quite frequently returns to the nature of phenomenological questioning. He laments that what is lacking today is “phenomenological discipline” (which is something else than the discipline of phenomenology), one that is not biased by one or the other philosophical position and lets itself be determined by the claim of the *Sache*, the matter of thinking.¹⁵ For this, Heidegger turns, quite surprisingly, to Goethe’s notion of *reine Bemerken*, the pure remarking of what happens, the noticing of what might go unnoticed. Here too echoes can be found in the *Four Seminars*, where Heidegger quotes Goethe too: these *reine Bemerkungen* are rarer than one expects, Goethe says, all too often our sight is mixed indeed with opinions and interpretations.¹⁶ From this viewpoint, Heidegger will

¹² Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 141. For the “transformation”, see e.g. 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 80 and 89. The idea is mentioned in *Vorläufiges* a couple of times, see e.g. 350.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 89.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 97. The quote is present in *Vorläufiges* too, see 283.

launch a forceful critique of the discipline of hermeneutics, which always runs the risk of a totalitarianism of sorts stating that in the end interpretations are all there is.

This manner of noticing cannot be learned—it is more like a talent one has or one doesn't have. One does not learn phenomenology by “reading books”.¹⁷ Yet at the same time Heidegger complains that in our age of information “no one learns to read” anymore.¹⁸ In a similar manner, his critique of metaphysics' closure does not mean one no longer has to confront the metaphysical tradition. On the contrary, any thinking at the end of philosophy “finds itself moved to review the whole history of philosophy”.¹⁹ Reading, it seems, is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition to acquire phenomenological discipline and to learn phenomenological seeing.

Heidegger likens the practice of *Bemerken*, remarking, to *spüren*, a “sniffing around” as it were, to find a phenomenon.²⁰ One needs to have the taste for this discipline, or not—at best this phenomenology is an acquired taste. One might just as well stick to a phenomenon simple and plain and remain stuck in the “*Bestellbarkeit*” that spreads over the world through the *Gestell*, where all of us have become administrators that count everyone and everything.

What is needed, this late Heidegger says, is that phenomenology needs to be determined from out of *Ereignis*.²¹ It needs to heed the event of world and being. It remains for us to see just how such *Bestimmung* comes about. Elsewhere Heidegger adopts Goethe's *Urphänomen* when speaking of *Lichtung*, unconcealment (which, although part of it, is to be distinguished from *Ereignis*. Speaking of what appears in the *Lichtung*, one more lesson for phenomenology is to be learned. “Goethe notes: “Look for nothing behind phenomena: they themselves are what is to be learned”.²² It is as if Heidegger anticipated the bidding for the utter *epekeina tes ousias* that Levinas would launch and Marion today continues: “With regard to presencing, there is no *epekeina*”.²³

As much as we need to encounter the phenomenon without prior established conditions, we need to speak of it without interpreting it afterwards. We need to, as *Being and Time* indicated, receive the phenomenon as it shows itself from itself. There is neither something behind nor before its appearance—its presencing is all there is to it. Heidegger's critique of

¹⁷ Heidegger, “Über das Zeitsverständnis”, 149.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 354.

¹⁹ Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy”, 436.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 301.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

²² Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy,” 442.

²³ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 319. On this question, also Heidegger, *Vigiliae und Notturmo. Schwarze Hefte 1952/1953-1957*, GA 100 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2020), 74. For Marion, see *God Without Being. Hors-Texte* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), for Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2002).

Husserlian phenomenology is in this later era quite fierce: its quest for a “principle of all principles” is but one more attempt at a certifying foundation and its conditioned and constituted appearances but one more attempt to domesticate the beings and the things appearing.²⁴

A genuine phenomenology for Heidegger, one readied before the event of *Ereignis*, knows neither of conditions nor of borders: “*Phenomenological thinking* can never, not even to a certain measure, be learned. Because it desires that its relation to the matter and the determination of this matter as the matter of thinking [...] is constantly tried anew, that the thinker him- or herself incessantly renews his or her relation to the matter and is so tried by [this] relation to his or her thinking”.²⁵ All this concerns “the transformation of phenomenology into the *Inständigkeit des Ent-sagens*” — standing within (the event) and re-nouncing or unsay what is present and what can be spoken about.²⁶ With the latter, we have reached the vocabulary of the “later Heidegger”.

Heidegger quite early on connected “showing” — the phenomenon shows itself — to “speaking”: *Zeigen* is ultimately a *Sagen*. Apart from the similarity between the words, there is something to be said about this connection. I can of course notice this particular phenomenon over here (and solipsistically perform all kind of reductions on this phenomenon) but without communicating this phenomenon to others, this phenomenon never really “is” properly. It takes two for meaning and sense to arise — something that Levinas really took to heart. Once, however, a phenomenon “is” between us, it can be said in multiple ways, correct and incorrect ones. All these ways can and must be said and can be unsaid as well — one might be reminded of Levinas’ notion of *dédire*. Similarly, a phenomenon can appear in and through words alone. We should not underestimate Heidegger’s turn to poetry in this regard. The poet speaks and is so able to show us what we otherwise would not have seen. The connection between showing and saying is therefore double: what is seen, needs to be said; what is said can lead to a new way of seeing.

In *Vorläufiges* too Heidegger insists on this connection, which leads all the way up to the event of being and *Ereignis*. Here Heidegger appropriated the stages in the ways of truth that he announced since *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* in the thirties: truth has not always been truth but has a history — it is relatively late in history that truth comes to be determined as correspondence for instance. An older word for truth remains: *aletheia*, unconcealment. The word, and what it conveys, will be paradigmatic for the later Heidegger. Truth is accompanied now by a “*Hervorbringen*”, a

²⁴ See Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy,” 439-40. *Vorläufiges I-IV* contains quite some vicious remarks about Husserl, and his idea of the “*Lebenswelt*” especially, see e.g. 45 and 71 to mention a few.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

bringing forward, to the fore as it were. In a text from 1960, Heidegger explains it well: *Hervorbringen* concerns a bringing “from” (*her*) concealment “on/to” (*vor*) display in the open.²⁷ What was hidden, is in truth, put on display, brought onto a platform. This is paralleled in the first definition of phenomenology the notebook in question offers: “phenomenon—the self-showing of concealment as beckoning [*Winken*].”²⁸ The phenomenological gaze gazes into what conceals itself and is so able to wrest the phenomenon out of concealment into unconcealment.

It remains for us now to follow the different steps of this movement from concealment to unconcealment. It is through what is in the open, unconcealed, that we can speak of the showing and manifesting of presencing, the “*Zeige des Anwesens*”.²⁹ If in *Being and Time* already, one could surmise an overlap between the word and the world—beings are what is spoken of—then the later Heidegger sought to reveal how the naming of beings calls these beings into being.³⁰ This “call” and this “claim” is now an interplay between several actors, it is by no means a dialogue between Dasein and being. Rather, it concerns an encounter between things—Heidegger’s later word for “phenomenon,”—the contexts in which they arise, the speech of the human being needed for this thing to be brought to light and the “prior” bringing to light itself. Heidegger will admit, in *Vorläufiges* that for this encounter the names being and beings (nor their ontological difference) no longer suffice.

This naming is not an act of the subject. It is not we who do something with words. Rather, it is to “allow the name (the word) to be said, *sich den Namen [...] sagen lassen*”.³¹ Such an event of the word, then, belongs to all what is said through precisely *die Zeige*. We “owe” (*Sichverdanken*) the event of word to the showing of the being or the thing, which, in turn, needs the word to be called into being. “*Poiesis*,” is to be thought precisely as a “*Hervorbringen*”, so again a “bringing forward,” “in which the bringing concerns something handed to it [*Zugereichtes*], something already arrived”.³² Here Heidegger once more differentiates this thought from

²⁷ Heidegger, “Sprache und Heimat”, in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910-1976*, GA 13 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 1983), 171.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁰ Few studies have stressed this almost magical realist force of naming in Heidegger, yet it is a constant in his thinking from the thirties onward. See for instance, in 1939, Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache* (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 1999), 56, 72 and 117 and of course, in 1957-1958, in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1975), 193-4, the meditation on “nicht: Es gibt das Wort, sondern: Es, das Wort, gibt...”. Even in the *Schwarze Hefte*, this particular understanding of the word and the thing transpires, see Heidegger, *Anmerkungen VI-IX. Schwarze Hefte 1948/49-1951*, GA 98 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2018), 162, “every thing brings its own word with it”.

³¹ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 258, also for what follows.

³² *Ibid.*, 259.

the ego and the subject which know no dative, for nothing is ever handed to it, it always only concerns a *for-itself*, a for-me and “*Zu-sich*”.³³ The word (and the thing) step forward, they come toward us. One more feature of this *reine Bemerken* should not go unnoticed and will bring Heidegger a step further underway to *Ereignis*: “Presenting itself holds itself back, and lets what is present precedence and constant priority. In forgetting [of presenting, JS] there is no fault, it rather concerns an allowing [*Zulassen*]”, of presenting to let appear what is present.³⁴ Being admits that beings take center stage, and so winds up begin forgotten.

All of this might sound rather abstract. Let us give two examples, one rather lofty, one rather mundane. It is probably Jean-Yves Lacoste who has developed Heidegger’s account of language the most, by discussing the poet’s ability to make phenomena and things “overappear”, bringing an extra and an excess that the objectivity of the object cannot contain. Lacoste calls attention to Gerard M. Hopkins’ poem *Hurrahing in Haroest*. Hopkins writes that “these things, these things were here and but the beholder wanting [and], to speak the truth, it is the poet that they await.”³⁵ It is the poet who names things and, to turn to Heidegger, gathers them in a presence. Yet “what the poet says is unexpected”.³⁶ The poet so “speaks of the new, and if he (or she) manifests anew, he (or she) does so by taking leave of everyday experiences and everyday interrogations”.³⁷ It, in effect, makes little sense to say that the clouds are silk sacks, as Hopkins does, to the farmer who is watching the weather and hopes for rain. Yet the poet reminds us (and possibly the farmer) that “before him (or her) we had not really seen [and] that we suffered from a lack of seeing”.³⁸

The poet’s speech, for Lacoste, offers an “over-phenomenalization through language”³⁹: poetry accords an evidence to and for things that intuition alone cannot. In this regard, it grants a beyond of the phenomenon—it is closer to Heidegger’s *thing* than to Kant’s object. If the phenomenon is that which you and I can see, for instance, when seeing these clouds, then it falls to the poet to make us see something about these phenomena that we otherwise (and ordinarily) would not have seen—we would look up to the clouds and possibly mimic the scientist’s vocabulary. It is this that poetry does: it brings truth to speech. What is essential to the poem, however, is that its experience needs to be *communicated* to its readers. In this regard, there is no truth for one alone. The poet thus speaks from out of an

³³ *Ibid.*, 259.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

³⁵ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Thèses sur le vrai* (Paris: PUF, 2018), 117. For an analysis of this important work, see my “Jean-Yves Lacoste’s Thesis on Truth,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 53 (2020).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

“intersubjective accord”⁴⁰ and what he (or she) communicates is possible only first of all because it is so *that* there is communication and language prior to what is being said and, secondly, because there is a sense in which one can say that the question of being and the question of language allow for considerable overlap (which explains Heidegger’s later emphasis on “hearing”, say, the voice of being rather than on phenomenological “seeing” *per se*). The difference between Lacoste and Heidegger resides in that for Lacoste the *dichter* helps the *denker* in his or her thinking of truth, where Heidegger, more often than not, claims to understand the poets better than the poets understand themselves.⁴¹

In both thinkers, however, there seems to be an unquestioned priority of *Dichters* and *Denkers*. Their point can, however, be made in more mundane a manner. One might think of the phenomenon of a trend. #Metoo, for instance, does of course not mean that belittling women (or worse) did not exist before Alyssa Milano tweeted her story in 2017. Yet it is through this tweet that both the phenomenon—how it appears, through which medium—and the thing “in itself”—what it is—quickly gained some traction in contemporary culture. One might say: it is through the *naming* of the event in 2017 that we are able to point to similar extant situations happening before 2017, just as Heidegger argued, with Georg Trakl in mind, that no thing is if there is no word for the thing in question. It is also in this direction that one might be inclined to interpret Heidegger’s somewhat odd claim in *Being and Time*: “Before Newton’s laws were discovered, they were not ‘true’”.⁴²

Heidegger so thinks the event of a thing coming to language. It is such an event that will be more and more named as *Ereignis* and less and less with the terms being and beings. The event of a decent poem just as Alyssa Milano’s tweet, make for the fact that for the time being this word will resound in our culture (and so constitute a world of its own). We still need to understand that nothing conditions such an event. It pops up without a subject constituting it and the few conditions that have given rise to it, the poet taking up his pen, Milano picking up her phone, never contain the effects that such events brings along. There is more reality in the effect than in the cause—to counter a scholastic and Cartesian tradition.

It is true that such a concern for the event, how a being brings something to light, is a concern for Heidegger throughout his career. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the claims about the temple and the work of art make Heidegger say that the work of such unconcealment, of truth, “is the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again”.⁴³ Once the poem has spoken to us, everything is (supposed

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴¹ See, for instance, Heidegger, “Der Fehl heiliger Namen”, in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, 234.

⁴² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 269.

⁴³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, 187.

to be) entirely different than before. In any case, its event brings something new to light and it will do so in a manner that cannot be repeated or reproduced in any manner. The event does so, once and for all. In effect one will find the later Heidegger stress the *Jeweiligkeit* of these things coming to be more and more. Heidegger, one might say, wanted us to notice the coming and going of things (and then to learn us think about this coming and going).

There is one more peculiarity about this return of phenomenology we need to note. From *Being and Time* onward, Heidegger had a particular reluctance towards proofs—in *Being and Time*, for instance, he somewhat ridicules the modern attempts to prove the existence of the outside world. Similarly, he has always been critical about the *Gottesbeweise* that permeate the theological tradition. Heidegger always queried from whence these proofs get their force, their binding character. What is it in such a proof that makes for the fact that anything at all is considered proven. This, of course, is philosophy at its very best. “Is it accidental that the question about the Being of Nature aims at the ‘condition of its possibility’? On what is such inquiry based? [We] cannot leave aside the question: *why* are entities [...] understood in their Being, if they are disclosed in accordance with the conditions of their possibility? Kant’s [...] presupposition is something that cannot be left without demonstrating how it is justified”.⁴⁴

It is not enough to prove an argument, follow it to its conclusion and then form all kind of opinions based on this argument. Philosophy, for Heidegger demands more—and his critiques of the state of philosophy in *Vorläufiges* are (quite rightly) devastating.⁴⁵ It is hard to say what this more that is demanded precisely is. One can gather something from Heidegger’s mention of Tolstoy’s Iwan Illich, who protested the syllogism ‘All men are mortal—Socrates is mortal’ by claiming that it not did not pertain to him. It is also present in his later distinction between “what is correct” and “what is true”—something might be correct without being true.

In this later stage of his thinking something similar pops up in the difference between a “method” for thinking and a “way” or path for thinking, which he obviously prefers, and which he thinks possible for a “phenomenology proper”.⁴⁶ This distinction again rests on precisely the forceful character of what these methods actually are trying to prove. Here Heidegger turns to Husserl rather than to Kant. Yet the argument is directed, once more, to the presuppositions preestablished for (and *before*) thinking: “what the

⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 184. For Heidegger on these proofs, 249.

⁴⁵ See Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 170, 218, 304 where he for example argues that thinking is more than transcribing citations.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 144 and 148. For the distinction between “method” and “path”, see “Der Fehl heiliger Namen”, 233 and the parallel in Heidegger, *Gedachtes*, GA 81 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2007), 41.

matter of philosophy is presumed to be decided from the outset"⁴⁷: the "presence of what is present" is sufficiently, adequately proven if this presence accords with the conditions laid out by the subjectivity of the subject. Heidegger echoes *Being and Time*: "where does 'the principles of all principles' get its unshakable right? [T]he answer would be: from transcendental subjectivity, which is already presupposed as the matter of philosophy".⁴⁸ A phenomenon is a phenomenon if and only if its intuition agrees with the intention originating in the absolute ego. Yet from whence this force that made itself known and showed itself to thinkers? If thinking does not lead to a conclusion, as the premises of an argument do, from whence the need that compelled these thinkers? Heidegger here keeps looking for a *Verbindlichkeit* that is proper to being showing us beings: we "owe" our witnessing of beings to being granting these presences.

Now, what if, the "essence of truth" could be shown as other than this craving for correctness, for conditions, and interpretations? What if the multiple accounts of truth (correspondence, verification, certainty, and so on) could be shown to have a history? This, in effect, is what Heidegger later attempts. For something to be present in truth as corresponding to this state of affairs, or as verified by that state of affairs, or as ascertained in its appearance by the constitution and conditions of the subject, it is necessary that it first *come to presence*. It is brought forth (which is not solely our own making) and given over to *Dasein* which then preserves it as this or that being.⁴⁹ This *presencing* is a coming into the open, an unconcealment, which however is never exhausted—something is always withheld from view: the light casts a shadow, the open is not entirely visible and the unconcealed always retains an element that is concealed. With the latter, we have reached Heidegger's critique of the *Gestell* which knows not of anything inexhaustible. On the contrary, it lives off the total and utter transparency and manageability that now no longer pertains to nature alone but has reached the human being as well.⁵⁰

Yet we need to see how for Heidegger this event of presencing undoes all conditions that would be preestablished by a subject or interpretations that come after the fact of its presencing. Heidegger makes it clear that we are now outside of transcendental phenomenology: not only is the *Gegend*, the *Eignis* as he prefers to call it in this present notebook, "before any horizon", which is always thought only "from out of the human being"⁵¹, the very event of presencing which he had only noticed through the "step back", *Schritt zurück*, from metaphysics allows for no "transcendental-

⁴⁷ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy", 438.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 440.

⁴⁹ See for this, and to turn to the mentioned magical realist strand once more, Heidegger—in 1942-1943—*Parmenides*, GA 54 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 1992), 116.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 359.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

philosophical *Hinterfrage*”, a question about what lies behind the phenomenon as its condition. Of this event, it makes little sense to ask what makes what possible. It happens while it happens. Nothing is first or its ultimate cause—everything happens all at once and gathers itself around this thing presencing here: “there is neither a transcendental foundation in Dasein nor an “initiatory” role by being”.⁵²

The Sacrifice of the Ontological Difference?

Perhaps Heidegger never was more clear about the end of metaphysics than in *Vorläufiges*: “One still has not understood that the end of metaphysics remains metaphysical itself, and probably for a long and lasting epoch that, however, because of the self-distortion of the human being, can suddenly be broken off”.⁵³ Heidegger’s theatricality, however, is never far away—right after a quite sensible understanding of metaphysics, in line with the diffidence the editors underlined, there is again the Heidegger who hopes for a sudden breakthrough and, perhaps, another beginning amidst the devastation he sees happening now that even the human being is ordered and administered along the lines of the Gestell.

Yet these lines, as we will see, go somewhat against Heidegger’s position in this last notebook. More than once Heidegger adds that the thinking of *Eignis* is anything but hopeful—hope still waits for something and *counts* the days to this coming.⁵⁴ Another viewpoint on the problem of metaphysics here arises, obliquely as it were: after *Identity and Difference* Heidegger never said much about metaphysics as ontotheology. To be sure, metaphysics as the forgetting of being through its attention for beings got caught on the “wrong side” of the ontological difference. *Vorläufiges* will make clear, however, that at issue is a *Preisgabe*, a sacrifice or collapse perhaps, of the ontological difference.⁵⁵ The ontological difference taught Heidegger, after a long period of thinking, that the entire effort to see being from out of being itself is in vain. In and through the ontological difference one only

⁵² *Ibid.*, 352-3 for the two last quotes. For this, and what follows, see also *Was Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971), 74 where he argues that thinking does not go from the human being in the direction of being, or from being towards the human being but only ever starts from within the relations between them. It is this that is meant when Heidegger says that being *braucht*, needs, the human being to be brought to speech.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 179 and 216.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, e.g. 269 and 299. Credit must go to Andrew Mitchell who sensed what was going on quite early, see his *The Fourfold. Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2015), 316. The next to last volume, *Winke I und II. Schwarze Hefte 1957-1959*, GA 101 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 2020), 51 and 58 speaks of a similar *Preisgabe* but mostly that of “transcendence and difference” or of “being for *Es gibt*”. Heidegger must have sensed that the ontological difference was not the final word of his thinking, see *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 299 for another intimation of the coming collapse.

gets at the being of beings. This, perhaps, is the easiest way to explain this: although the being of beings puts us on the way of the question of being, on its path that is, away from beings, the fact that we think only the being of beings in fact returns us to beings—the ontological difference is never, so to say, crossed out but always already filled in: a being sooner or later will receive priority.

It is true that, later, Heidegger worried less about how a supreme being, or the being of this being, grounds and founds the entirety of being. Early on he made clear that this (theological) answer to the question of being did not suffice—Heidegger was not the man who sought answers—and fell neatly into the blueprint of ontotheology he devised later: the being of beings is grounded by the supreme being; yet the supreme being, in turn, is founded by the being of beings—a square circle if ever there was one! Nothing, therefore, in reality gets grounded and founded at all, even though such *Ergründen* and *Begründen* now dominate our entire “*Tun und Lassen*”.⁵⁶ Heidegger, after Nietzsche, wanted to show just this and, in a rare Nietzschean moment of the *Vorläufiges*, admonishes us to say “yes to the abyss”.⁵⁷ His aim was not to ridicule theology or abandon religious thought altogether, his aim was to show that there never has been any such ground and that this “metaphysical situation” now is what we have to deal with.

For a while the ontological difference was the way into the question of metaphysics and Heidegger thought to “step outside” the twofold nature of being and beings by “leaping” outside the metaphysical tradition by confronting it head-on as it were. Along with the decisionism of the thirties, there was an entire discourse that tried to show being “from out of being itself” —“*was im hinsehen auf des Sein aus ihm her es selbst zeigt*”.⁵⁸ This attempt is known as Heidegger’s *Kehre*. It is to this *Kehre* that Heidegger often turns in the notebook under discussion, along with a discussion of the ontological difference in which he now says to be “*verstrickt*” —entangled.⁵⁹ The way into metaphysics in the end offered no way out. The embroilment in the ontological difference ultimately leaves us entangled in metaphysics.⁶⁰ In a rare moment of self-criticism, Heidegger now admits that he “lingered too long on the scaffold of the ontological difference”⁶¹: the only “Being” we will get is only ever the being *of* beings and for a long while, he now admits, this particular being will be thought along metaphysical and ontotheological lines.

Yet the entanglement is no impasse for Heidegger: what is needed, rather, is indeed a “step back”, a *Schritt zurück*, to behold the presencing

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 26.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 105.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), 74.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 134.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 102, 131 and 136. See also *Winke I und II*, 136.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

of what is present. What is present, is always and already a being — though Heidegger thinks it better to drop the term being/beings altogether and allow what appears to be “things” gathering all kind of presences, such as heaven and earth, around its phenomenon. The relation between being and beings is ultimately *one*: it is from out of what is present that one senses the event of presencing just as it is from out of what appears that one notices that the appearing of appearing, itself, does not appear. The term being and beings do not suffice for this event. It is this *Verhältnis* of presencing and presence (being and beings if you still prefer) that now comes to the fore: over and against the twofold of the difference, the stress is now on the simple, *Einfaltige* of the entire event. Suddenly Heidegger writes: it is in and through this relation (*Verhältnis*) that we can experience the *Eignis* and “all talk in the manner of the “is” and of “being” turns out to be improper [*uneigentlich*]”.⁶² This event happens while it happens even if we only know about it through the particular beings that are happening. This is what the *Kehre*, years later, has learned Heidegger and through which lens he now turns to *Being and Time* too. Before we go there, we need to mention a surprising absence from the notebook: Heidegger carefully avoids any discussion of the “Es gibt”, turned famous after the publication, during the same period, of *Zeit und Sein*. This book is in effect mentioned only two or three times or so and almost always quite critical. One such criticism is that the lecture “risks but little in the open”.⁶³

One might say that *Vorläufiges* takes precisely this risk and it remains for us to show just how and, in a final section, to ponder upon the implications for theological thinking this dwelling in the open might have. Let us, for now, turn to Heidegger’s account of the *Kehre*, and its repercussions for reading *Sein und Zeit*.

It is true that the simplicity of the event of presencing, and the blind spot at heart of all appearing it entails, dawned upon Heidegger a bit earlier. Even the earlier attempt to gain sight of being directly quickly learned to distinguish between the being of beings and the truth of being. Metaphysics, he says, thinks being from within the being of beings without however thinking the truth of being.⁶⁴ What dawns upon Heidegger in and through his *Kehre* is that is not up to us to overcome, or even unwind, metaphysics: this is a matter of the *Seinsgeschick*, which will liberate us from metaphysics and its ontotheologies or not.⁶⁵ We would only be outside of metaphysics, Heidegger mentions, when returning to the

⁶² *Ibid.*, 313.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁴ See Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 1998), 47. Compare Schellings *Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 77.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 97.

postface of *What is Metaphysics?* in this last notebook, if the word “says being”, if “it shows the truth of being as presencing—as letting presence [Anwesen-Lassen]”.⁶⁶

The question of being, then, can no longer be confronted head-on, that is, by asking about “being itself”, nor can it be asked properly through the detour of beings. “If “being” is not something pertaining to beings and cannot be found from out of beings, where can we find it?”⁶⁷ The ontological difference for Heidegger now seems an obstacle, a *Wegsperre*, a blockage for the question of being. It blocks “the awakening to *Ereignis* out of the concealing semblance that is experienced in the *Gestell*”.⁶⁸ How, then, to say being? “By pointing to the presencing of what is present [*Anwesenlassen von Anwesendem*] with a word [*Sagen*] in which “being”, and so the ontological difference, vanish”.⁶⁹

One might say: the ontological difference steps into metaphysics by repeating it, laying it bare as it were. It thinks being from out of beings and is confronted with a question of ground which is now out of joint. This, in a sense, is the story told by *Der Satz vom Grund*: if we leap from the question of foundation “outside” metaphysics, we sense how the question of ground pertains to being and how the question of being, as foundation, is used to (and used to) ground beings. If “ground” there is, then it is always the foundation of beings. Yet the ground of the ground, so to say, the being of Being, is without ground: it presences.⁷⁰

Metaphysics will have its way with the *Grundhafte* pertaining to being. Quickly, Heidegger says, the foundation will be labelled as an *arche*—and a command and a beginning will enter the fabric of being as creation.⁷¹ No one is at fault for such a history of being, but this history makes for the fact that we, still, ask after the “from whence of presencing”.⁷² Heidegger now realizes that metaphysics and its ontotheology can hardly be avoided as long as we think from out of the ontological difference between being and beings. This, however, is now—contrary to appearances in *Identity and Difference*—not something we should deplore. The question of metaphysics, to begin with, was never the main goal of the question of being: it only ever wanted to show how metaphysics’ answers are insufficient to encounter the question of being.⁷³ Heidegger now even implies that there can be forgetting of being even when we no longer think metaphysically. What remains, for us thinkers, is to meet being where it meets us: in and through beings. Yet we need to think what is

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁰ See for this Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, 185.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁷² Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 276.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 130.

given to thought once we no longer have to, can, or even should, think metaphysically.

This is where Heidegger's *Kehre* comes in and everything turns: "[T]he *Kehre* is therefore no construction of the thinker, yet the *lightning strike* [*Blitzschlag*] in the relation of "being" to "Dasein".⁷⁴ In effect, "with [...] collapse [of the ontological difference] the distinction between ontic-ontological, between "being and beings" becomes invalid. But with the difference, identity also falls, that is, every attempt to think the difference in the manner of representation as an overarching connection of the difference" or between its terms.⁷⁵

In its place, comes a stepping back from what is present to presencing, from what is in the limelight to the lightning strike that enlightens it. This presencing is nothing pertaining to beings, yet it is nothing that "distinguishes or separates. It is rather a carrying away the one from the other [*Auseinandertragen*] out of the enlightening. This is neither a *synthesis* nor an identity distinguished from difference. Enlightenment: [the coming to light] of the inseparability as presencing—that is: the presencing of what is present".⁷⁶ Heidegger here tries to name what he answered when asking what *Ereignis* is: "the sending of Being [that] lies in the extending [*Reichen*], opening and concealing of manifold presence into the open realm of time-space".⁷⁷ It is in these sendings, if you like, that being "takes on body", opening space and making room for beings to relate to one another—as if it is necessary nonetheless that the true embody itself.

If metaphysics "questions what is present only with regard to its presence"⁷⁸, of which it then can represent its beingness or its essence, the *Kehre* aims, through the presencing of what is present, for this sheer happening of presencing. It sees both, one might say, what is present in the light and the light that enlightens what is so present. "Presencing names, strictly speaking, the relation of keeping away [*Auseinanderhalten*] presencing and what presences from one another; and so neither being nor solely the whole of beings".⁷⁹ This brings an utter temporality to thought: for what so presences, only ever presences here, now, for the while that it presences. Even the various epochs and sending of beings are not a "necessary process".⁸⁰ Yet what so presences is not per se a being—if with a being one means something identifiable through one or the other essence or *res extensa* or even something up for use as *Being and Time* has it—what presences is rather a thing in which all kinds of actors gather for the time being. This

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁷⁷ Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1969), 20/"Zeit und Sein", in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 25.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy", 446.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges*, 319.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

“insight” lasts, if it lasts, probably no longer than the lightning strike itself. Usually indeed, there are beings and only rarely we notice that there is being.

If the *Gestell* shows us “how the world now works” (and perhaps should not work by keeping us precisely from experiencing presencing), the event of presencing shows us “how the world worlds”. For this event, it is obvious that the definition of world offered up by *Being and Time* as a *Bewandtnis* of useful beings, does not suffice. “The world is an insufficient name for the *Geviert*”,⁸¹ in which presencing gathers presences like the mortals and the divinities around its event. Similarly, *Dasein* is folded into the event as the one to whom the event is given and who is called upon to witness presencing precisely. To be sure, presencing needs the human being to present its presence, but its “thrownness” is now of the one to whom—in the dative case—the *Entwurf*, the pro-ject of coming to terms with presencing belongs.⁸²

What, then, is to be done at the end of metaphysics, knowing well it still is “ending” and this particular sending of being will last its time? It is to recognize both the unavoidability of metaphysics and attempting to look beyond the onto(theo)logical difference between being and beings. For Heidegger, this means first of all the consideration of the thinking of Ereignis: “Was das Ereignis gibt, *hat* Es selber nicht; es ist kein Anwesendes, “ist” schlechthin nicht”.⁸³ The event of presencing gives what itself does not have. It gives leeway to beings and things without belonging to the order of being itself. Presencing, to turn to the language of phenomenology again, is what lets appear without appearing itself.

We need to dwell on this giving of presencing what it does not have. This means that it hides and conceals itself in order to make room for other, particular presences. “Ereignis dispossesses itself in the *Geviert*”.⁸⁴ It neither claims beings nor possesses them. It is this movement that is met by the phenomenological gaze’s *Hervorbringen*—it brings to the fore what *already* has been brought before the gaze. Unconcealment of beings is always and already something that was allowed by presencing. Presencing allows what is present to be in the limelight. There is an ontological clinamen here: it is as if “being” turns away, and refrains from all appearance, in order for beings to be able to appear.

There is a risk, however: it might always be the case that some of these beings take precedence over being itself. Heidegger will now admit this risk to a certain extent is indeed unavoidable. “Presencing as such cannot be represented. When represented, it will be necessarily be done as something

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 44. Compare 73, “Was sagt dies, wenn die Anwesenheit selber nichts Anwesendes “sein” kann?”.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

that is present, *Anwesendes*”,⁸⁵ as for instance when one would query *who* is *causing*—from whence—the event of presencing. What is present, will be talked about and discussed—it will be made to signify and have meaning—as this rather than that and so “the “is”-saying of the logos will more and more come to the fore” and take over presencing as such.⁸⁶ The truth will, then, reside more and more in the judgement (s as s is p) rather than in the event of presencing. This event, so to say, will become present-at-hand and it will be claimed, too, by the *Machenschaft* that is part of the Gestell.

What does this mean for the question of ontotheology (and a fortiori that of theology)? Heidegger writes that metaphysics will only be overcome “when “transcendence” (the passing over beings to being) and rescendance (the backfall of what is most beingful into being), and difference between being and beings have unwound and so any beginning of an onto-theo-logic has vanished”.⁸⁷ The passing beyond being and beings is necessary if we are to avoid ontotheology. However, since Heidegger himself has shown that not all judgement is to be excluded from the event of presencing, it is quite likely that, here or there, ontotheological turns will indeed be taken and that the collapse of the ontological difference will not always succeed.

Theology in the Last Notebook?

It is obvious from the four or so last notebooks that the question of theology and of Christian faith somewhat vanished from Heidegger’s radar, especially when considering the vehement anti-Christian tone of the *Schwarze Hefte* of the thirties.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Heidegger’s relation to theology has always been somewhat a flirtatious one. In a letter to Rudolf Bultmann from 1967, Heidegger for instance states that he still follows the positions and trends in contemporary theology, although, he says, mainly because of the theological interests of his brother.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 55. Compare p. 282 where Heidegger says that words are *just* words when they *bedeuten* or *bezeichnen*, they then no longer preserve the word for being.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. These movements (from beings to transcendent Being, and, reversely, to interpret what is most in being, or most beingful, *as* being per se) need to be abandoned when the difference collapses. Inkings of this collapse must have led Heidegger to mention more clearly what is “wrong” with metaphysics and what distinguishes the thought after the collapse of the distinction between being and beings from metaphysics. See for the “erring” of metaphysics, especially Heidegger, *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 149.

⁸⁸ On these notebooks of the thirties, see Judith Wolfe, “Religion in the Black Notebooks,” in *Heidegger’s Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*, ed. Marten Björk and Jayne Svenungson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 23-48.

⁸⁹ Martin Heidegger-Rudolf Bultmann, *Briefwechsel 1925-1975* (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2009), 227.

Needless to say, perhaps, but Heidegger wasn't particularly impressed by the state of theology. Even in the notebooks leading up to this final one, his stance toward faith and theology remains ambivalent to say the least. If the *Anmerkungen I-V* from 1942 to 1948 for the most part rehearse the rift between philosophy and theology that we know from *Phänomenologie und Theologie*—"thinking is for believing but a dryness, and faith for a thinking is what is impossible"⁹⁰—and if he up to the seventies remains critical (and cynical) about theology's leaning toward and lending from ("Anleihen"⁹¹) philosophy, he simultaneously will write "that the human being can become a believer only if he or she first is a thinker".⁹² Apart from this keenness to separate the question of the (Christian) God from the thinking of being, this notebook repeats what we know from the *Letter on Humanism* on how the (last) God might spiral through, along with the divinities, within the sacred built for it on earth.⁹³ *Anmerkungen VI-IX* continues Heidegger's harangue on, broadly, Latinized *Christentum* that forgot all about *das Christliche*—it contains even some rather naïve thoughts on Jesus separated from Christ—and in this regard seems to underscore once more the demythologization of Christianity proposed by his old friend Bultmann.⁹⁴ The *Vier Hefte* from 1947-1950 prolongs the separation of theology from philosophy: "As soon as we bring God in view of Being [...] no longer a path to the God of Christian faith, which teaches God in Christ, can be experienced".⁹⁵ It is only in *Vigiliae und Notturmo* 1952-1957 that things seems to turn, as if Heidegger realized that he targeted theology in too broad a manner. More than once he condemns the godlessness of rational metaphysics that identifies God as the *cause* of all beings.⁹⁶ Heidegger, throughout, took to Protestantism—*sola fide; sola gratia*—more than to Catholicism's insistence on a dialogue between thinking and believing. All-in all Heidegger felt little for a "natural reason" seeking understanding with or without the help of revelation. But Heidegger, it seems, never denied that if God is and would appear, God is and appears as the "sender of salvation".⁹⁷

To this urge to separate theology from the thinking of theology, where those who are saved obviously do not need to think and those who think

⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I-V*, GA 97 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2015), 206.

⁹¹ See Heidegger, "Phänomenologie und Theologie", in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2004), 69. The quote is from the letter to the conference in 1964.

⁹² Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I-V*, 193.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁹⁴ The distinction is already in play in *Anmerkungen I-V*, see 204-205. For *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, see 102-3. In *Vorläufiges* Heidegger still wonders about "demythologization", a "task for theology worthy of question" and asks what Plato and Aristotle would have been without Parmenides' poem, see 62-3.

⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Vier Hefte I und II. Schwarze Hefte 1947-1950*, GA 99 (Frankfurt a. M: Klostermann, 2019), 139.

⁹⁶ Heidegger, *Vigiliae und Notturmo*, 37 and 130.

⁹⁷ Heidegger, Martin. *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 98.

are obviously not saved, Heidegger's last years in effect bring some notable exceptions. Not only is there the avowal in 1970 that the discipline of theology admits of its own *Fragwürdigkeit*⁹⁸—Heidegger, recall, was not one to block questioning—*Vorläufiges* in a rare occurrence abandons the mutual exclusion of believing and thinking. “Whether or not [the thinking of being] can be performed from out of faith, or rather from out of unfaith, whether this either-or perhaps can also be a both-and, or even something else, it is the task of theology to decide”.⁹⁹

It is Heidegger himself who with regard to the relation of his later thought and theology countered Lacoste's (perhaps ironical) suggestion “that theology has nothing to learn here”¹⁰⁰ and decided ultimately in favor of a “both-and” rather than an “either-or”. For Heidegger's flirt with theology persists to very late in his career. Very much in an Eckhartian vein, many of these suggestions imply that the death of God by no means entail the end of the “living God”.¹⁰¹ In the *Four Seminars* similar instances can be found: here Heidegger concludes a session, which seems to have left his audience in amazement, as follows, referring once more to Eckhart: what if “being ‘*istet*’ God, that is, Being lets God be God”?¹⁰²

It is on this point, namely on just how God is held by, and bound to, being that the later notebooks shed some light. For it might not be the case, as many, such as Marion and Levinas, have thought that God's belonging to being would give, without further ado, way to idolatry. In one of the stranger passages on the connection between being and God, where he already must have sensed that it will be hard to distinguish between metaphysics as ontotheology and the thinking of being after the collapse of the ontological difference, Heidegger writes: even when God is thought as the highest being, and independent of any other being, then God is “still in the highest measure obedient to being. That God can allow this, this is God's divinity”.¹⁰³ But this need and this obedience, for Heidegger, traverses being and need not mean that God is servant to being or Ereignis—as in effect the theologians fear. Even within the event of being, of *Ereignis*, God remains at a distance. It is this that the late Heidegger wanted us to understand: “only when we are near [*in einer Nähe*] can the God, who is, first be far from us”.¹⁰⁴

We need to think both of this movement of drawing near and of belonging and “complying” to being if we want to understand the relation between

⁹⁸ Heidegger, “Phänomenologie und Theologie”, 45.

⁹⁹ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Lacoste, “Heidegger”, in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* vol. 2 (3. Vols.), ed. J-Y Lacoste (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 679.

¹⁰¹ See Heidegger, “Aufzeichnungen aus der Werkstatt”, in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, 154. The text dates from 1959. A parallel can be found in *Winke I und II*, 160.

¹⁰² Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 34.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, *Vier Hefte I und II*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I-V*, 266.

God and *Ereignis*. Heidegger made it clear that God, too, would need to comply to being (if God is). God is bound to being, just as much as any other being is folded into the event of being: “God too belongs to being and presences from out of the fourfold”.¹⁰⁵ We need to understand that this movement of “drawing near” and of “belonging” has a special status in Heidegger’s later philosophy and that these movements have to do with the reach and the range of *Ereignis*.

Heidegger, in his turn to a peculiar brand of phenomenology stressing the *Hervorbringen* of a phenomenon (thing rather) will in effect stress that this *bringing* to the fore is indeed in consequence of *Ereignis* which concerns a “*reichen*”, that is, a reaching, a reaching out, which the human being will measure. The phenomenon is *zugereicht* and will be met half-way, if the human being listens, remarks, and senses its presencing. The phenomenological movement we traced above, the *Hervorbringen* amounting in a *poiesis* (for the thing brings a word with its own appearance) will have a theological component which is not very far from the theological tradition Heidegger used to criticize.

Let us begin with a question that Heidegger posed to theology, itself tirelessly proving the existence of this God, once: when will they finally ask if this “God [...] ‘is’ [*sei*] and whether God presences [*anwese*] and how”?¹⁰⁶ These are questions, we would say, that Heidegger in fact did take up and that we now need to unpack. This movement of *Näherung* of being (in *Ereignis*), or rather of beings (in being), is to be remarked upon.¹⁰⁷ In the *Letter on Humanism* for instance, Heidegger thinks of this movement of nearing, of this coming forward of the phenomenon out of the happening of *Ereignis*, as a “concern for man”, *eine Bemühung um den Menschen*.¹⁰⁸ Yet what draws near in this way, is always and already a being. The movement of drawing near, and its concern, itself holds back or is held back. The *Enteignis* of *Ereignis* is such that it, in a sense, moves away from beings only to let beings themselves come into the open. Heidegger often turns to metaphors that must sound familiar for theology, for this “reserve” is a *Bergen* as much as a *Verbergen*: a concealing that is a sheltering and a preserving. We have mentioned that there is a risk here, and this risk pertains to God just as well. Heidegger writes: “in this retreat” reigns the possibility that these beings are “released [*entlassen*] in such a way that “they seem left on their own. This is why the gods and the God appear as the for-itself

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, *Vier Hefte I und II*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 230.

¹⁰⁷ When asking what sums up his thinking, Heidegger writes, “Die Summe meines Denken [besteht] in den einfachen Schritt aus dem vorstellenden zum be-wegenden Denken”, *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 57. It is this thinking in motion that transpires in these notebooks—twisting, turning and changing—and perhaps still is to be preferred over the “opiniated” philosophies one today sees everywhere.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, 223; *Über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 2000), 11.

[*an sich*], present from out of itself [*von sich her Anwesende*]”.¹⁰⁹ Left to themselves, these beings and these God will sooner or later appear as *causa sui*, unrelated to anything that this God supposedly has created or—more modern—as the self-made man that doesn’t owe anything to anyone.

Heidegger is far from idolatrous here. That the God—if God is—is related to the human being, *involved* in these relations between heaven and earth, the gods and the mortals is rather a way to preserve, for Heidegger at least, the divine. For this drawing near does not result in an appropriation of the human being of what draws near. On the contrary, this nearness can never be adequately grasped and it remains for Heidegger one of the mysteries of being, a matter of *Geheimnis*, why this event would need (*brauchen*) to call upon the human being. This response of the human being, our *Entsprechen*, remains risky, tentative and *spürend*: the human being “at first fails to the nearest and attaches himself to the next nearest. He even thinks that this is the nearest. But nearer than the nearest [is] nearness itself”.¹¹⁰ What is near will be mistaken for nearness itself, just as “what is present” will take precedence over presencing itself.

This movement of co-responding—what Heidegger first called *Entsprechen*—to Ereignis has nothing unchristian about it: never will anyone succeed, if he or she is so inclined, to comprehend the God. Not only does it remain mysterious why the event calls upon us mortals, and from whence “this priority for the least”¹¹¹ of the fourfold, the event itself cannot be touched, incorporated or appropriated. This movement of drawing near, this “nighness” which we know only through its “movement of paving the way for the face-to-face of the regions of the world’s fourfold”, that is to say, through its embodiment and materialization in and through beings, this movement, itself, “remains unapproachable [*Ünnahbare*]”.¹¹² What was perceived as an idolatrous intake of God in being, is actually a way to preserve the mysteriousness of beings and of God all the way up and all the way down. In this way, Heidegger’s strict separation between philosophy and theology might even be interpreted as a way of being respectful for what would be the *Sache* of theology.

Yet one needs to understand how the unfolding of this event echoes the Christian tradition precisely. If being indeed approaches beings, and if God is to gesture towards beings, then such a God will ‘take the hint’ as it were and accommodate to the conditions of the receiver, knowing well that the receiver will possibly distort this very approach. If God then chooses to appear (and this freedom, contrary to what theologians as Jean-Luc Marion think, is not contradicted here) then God will appear in being and as a

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Anmerkungen VI-IX*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, 235.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 156 “Vorrang des Geringen”.

¹¹² Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 211. See Heidegger, *On The Way to Language* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1982), 104.

being. The *Offenbarung* will therefore accommodate to the *Offenbarkeit* and unconcealment of beings. It is in this way that Heidegger remained faithful to Aquinas' dictum that God's revelation to humankind always and already occurs according to the mode of the receiver (e.g. *Summa Theologica* 1a. q.75 a.5).¹¹³

Yet we need to probe further and think about the reach and the range, the *Reichen*, of *Ereignis*, for it is here that we will learn about such freedom. It is too soon to speak of this "reaching out" as a desire on the part of *Ereignis*—Heidegger will never do so, all accounts of the *Brauch* considered, but theology might consider its possibility—although one consider it a "greeting", a thought more appropriate, it seems, for this "pleasing nearness" than Heidegger's notion of the *Wink*.¹¹⁴

The connection Heidegger makes between the *Gegend* and *entgegenen*—meeting someone or encountering something—at least seems to indicate this.¹¹⁵ Yet what one needs to tread carefully here, for, if anything, *Ereignis* is neutral. Let us listen to Heidegger on the happening of *Ereignis*:

How are we to determine this giving [*Reichen*] of presencing[?]. Does this giving lie in this, that it reaches us, or does it reach us because it is in itself a reaching? The latter. Approaching, being not yet present, at the same time gives and brings [*reicht*] about what is no longer present, the past, and conversely, what has been offers future to itself. The reciprocal relation of both at the same times gives and brings about the present.¹¹⁶

The phenomenon arrives—from *Ankommen*—because it reaches for us. This arrival makes for the fact that something now appears and that, thus, something else has faded away, is no longer. Yet this past is prolonged, and taken up, by the fact that because of this appearance there is a future. This movement of coming and going, however, is only perceived in the present, say, by a mortal witnessing the coming and going of these presences.

This is why Heidegger proceeds by saying that temporality here does not suffice. Time is not to be seen as a being (showing up in being, in the present, from out of its *Ankommen*). Rather, it gives time. In the language

¹¹³ I have elaborated on this in my "The Later Heidegger and Theology," in *Theological Fringes of Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph Rivera and Joseph O'Leary (London: Routledge: 2023).

¹¹⁴ Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' und 'Der Rhein'*, GA 39 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1999), 32. Throughout, this later Heidegger strikes a more positive tone than the earlier one, see e.g. the thoughts on the "Seligkeit" of thinking, in *Vorläufiges*, 216. Only once, it seems, Heidegger was prepared to see in the greeting a fundamental gesture and word, see *Anmerkungen I-V*, 3. For an ontology of the greeting along Heideggerian lines, one might still consult Schrijvers, *Between Faith and Belief. Toward A Contemporary Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016).

¹¹⁵ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 316 and esp. 320.

¹¹⁶ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 13; "Zeit und Sein", 18.

of metaphysics, we would have said that this event hovers above and beyond time and being. The simplicity Heidegger has in mind, however, obliges us to say that there is no *epekeina* here, lest we fall back in the speech about beings (who already arrived). If we want to speak about this “reaching”, this “reaching out” by sending being and beings, no specific language is at our disposal. The event, again, is neuter and its phenomenological description forces us to say only that it describes the happening of the happening of world.

But the most important lies elsewhere. For in this fleeting—ghostly, Derrida would say—passing, from past to future from out the present—something reaches out and hits us. There is encounter. For the time being, rather (be)fore time being, *everything is possible*. There is no way of knowing what will and can appear. Beings have not yet materialized and the spirit of being hovers above the ways of the world.

About this happening not much more can be said. It is clear that for Heidegger it represented an utter temporality: it happens while it happens and as long as it happens. Yet, a few things have been added by Heidegger about the characteristics of this reach, of this coming forward of being *before* (by lack of a better word) it settles for being and time. It is to be noted, first, that Heidegger becomes ever more careful here: the *Entsprechen* now becomes an *Entsagen* for the simple reason that the former still connotes the possibility of a corresponding to the event. For Heidegger, now, late in life, it has become clear that there is no word that “says being” once and for all: there is no right word, not one word. Everything must be unsaid. “Das Denken wird je und je ent-sagender – vorläufiger”.¹¹⁷ Literally, anything can happen. Presencing can “hide” in the *Gestell* forever or we might see the *Gestell* for what it is: a particular brand of presencing that can always be overturned. Long gone, though, the Heidegger that thought that thinkers or regimes could on their very own overturn the *Gestell*.

Heidegger is clear that our language is a speaking about the “Bereich” of the reach to one another. The *Sage* does not so much concern our speech, rather the *Sage* “is determined from out of the reach to determine the reach” through speech precisely. *Ent-sagen*, then, has a positive and a negative component—as in Levinas where all “said” [*dit*] needs to be unsaid and so turned, positively, to the other’s *Dire*: it is both the refusal of judgement, propositions or proofs *and* a coming forward itself, through a speaking with, of that which reaches us in order to be spoken about.¹¹⁸ This is why, in the end, “phenomenology is transformed in *das sich Zuwinkenlassen des ins Nennbare zu rufende Kennen*”¹¹⁹—an extending of the greeting, if you will, to connect to what longs to be named and so calls to be made known. The *Kehre* now is complete: “*Geworfenes Verstehen wird: Ent-sagen im Brauch*”

¹¹⁷ Heidegger, *Winke I und II*, 19.

¹¹⁸ Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 357.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

and the concomitant *Geworfene Ent-wurf* “dem Wurf als Ereignis im Ereignis ent-sprechen”.¹²⁰

Long gone, now, the *Unzuhaue* of which *Being and Time* spoke, this back and forth of the word instead makes for, can make for, a familiarity with this reaching out which brings about a sense of belonging—hence Heidegger’s positive tone in these later years: “Reichen [is] a Gehören lassen”¹²¹ which is, if not a belonging, than at least an allowing of the mortals to be part of the happening of world.

For Heidegger, again, not much can be said of the event. It is obvious for him that the accompanying *ent-sagen* is an utterly *finite thinking*. Finitude, thought from out *Ereignis*, is infinite¹²²: there is not much more to being, in this regard, for Heidegger than the endless coming and going of beings. Yet the flirt remains: occasionally one sees Heidegger turn to prayer to elaborate on the meeting of what reaches for us and what we reach for in our speech. A fascinating example of this can be found in the *Winke* from late in the fifties, where Heidegger thinks prayer as a desire “to be guarded in and through grace”, and “the intimate calling for grace, the listening to [the] call” which, perhaps, is an “infinite *Zuspruches*”.¹²³

Heidegger’s flirt is legitimate, since in effect no final word can be spoken about this event of world and being. It is clear, however, that, by now, being-in-the-world for Heidegger has become a being-in-the-word. The proximity between Heidegger and the Hebraic and Christian tradition here should not be underestimated, and it is a pity for the future of philosophy and theology that Heidegger did not have the courage to comment upon these remnants of the Hebraic and Christian tradition in his thought.

Heidegger read, perhaps, too much Aristotle to leave any space in his thinking for the idea of creation. It is a pity, too, that Heidegger could not conceive of creation otherwise than as a predecessor of the current *Gestell* as a making and fabricating of world.¹²⁴ Yet the accounts of the Two Testaments insist on creation through the word rather than through producing: God is no handy-man! If the Gospel of John, somewhat succinctly, insists that the word is with God, one can similarly not forget that creation, in *Genesis*, occurs precisely in the magical realist way that Heidegger promotes since at least the fifties: “there is light” if and when God says “let there be light”, the thing appears when the word is spoken. The same verses delegate the power of naming beings to the human being precisely and this is what makes the human being stand out and gives it power over beings. In this regard, it is more than noteworthy that at his most theological, namely in his books on Schelling where it is impossible to distinguish

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹²¹ Heidegger, *Winke I und II*, 144.

¹²² Heidegger, *Vorläufiges I-IV*, 142.

¹²³ Heidegger, *Winke I und II*, 166-7 and 170 respectively.

¹²⁴ See, for example, *Ibid.*, 149.

between Heidegger's thinking of being and the former's philosophical theology, Heidegger in a similar vein explains the *Vorrang* of the human being. The human being, he says, is the caretaker of the light because, first, it is in the light, and secondly, because this being alone is able to "speak about the light, *spricht dieses Licht aus*".¹²⁵

One might be inclined to conclude that the later Heidegger learned more from theology than theology can learn from the later Heidegger. This is, at least, what Derrida aimed for in his imagined dialogue between "the theologians" and Heidegger: was this not, the theologians say, what they have been saying all along?¹²⁶ Something comes to meet us half-way. Is this in effect not what theology has been saying all along, and which came to be known, first, as revelation through the Word (Judaism) and then as incarnation in and through a being (Christianity)?

Coda

Was Capobianco right about this particular notebook? To a certain extent. Yet at least this notebook sparks thought—both about what Heidegger meant and, I hope, about that what he was thinking about. And even if it is not the first thing one should read of Heidegger, it likewise won't be the last.

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¹²⁵ Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung*, 170.

¹²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and The Question* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 90.

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