Interpreting the Sacred: 
Investigations of Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion

by

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ABSTRACT

INTERPRETING THE SACRED:
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OF RELIGION

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This thesis is an investigation of Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of religion. The author argues that Heidegger’s thought opens the way for descriptive conceptual analysis of religious experience and its object without undue theoretical distortion or reduction. Heidegger dismantles uncritical distortions of religious life under “scientific” rationality and objectivity. While the self-understanding implicit in religious practice is certainly transformed through Heidegger’s own philosophical analysis, philosophy undergoes its own transformation through thinking encounter with religious life. Philosophy cannot produce an objectively neutral, universal analysis of religion, but must in its own way participate in the object of religious life. The wonder and awe at the manifestation of being which gives rise to philosophical questioning finds orientation in poetic and revelatory sources of inspiration whose content exceeds conceptual grasp. Philosophical questioning brings thought to the paradoxes at the limits of our understanding of language and human experience. Philosophy cannot conceive of the origin systematically. But religious attunement to the origin, aided by the prophetic utterances of the poet, then enables philosophical speculation as to the highest form of human flourishing. The author concludes by calling into question interpretations of Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion in the work of Jean-Luc Marion and John D. Caputo. These remains bound up in part with the philosophical project for transcendental analysis of universal religion. Drawing on the hermeneutic phenomenology of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the philosophical theology of John Milbank and William Desmond, the author sketches an alternative reading of Heidegger’s critique of the Western metaphysical
tradition and philosophical retrieval of religion in light of the notion of incarnation, arguing that this alternative offers a better phenomenological account of religion as such.
To my wife
Acknowledgments

This work developed as the unfolding of a gift. If the work was inspired in the pages of great thinkers and writers, it was brought to fruition through my many conversations with mentors and friends. I wish to extend my gratitude to John Russon for helping see this project through. John’s passion for wisdom spills out into his compassion as a teacher. Many thanks also to Jay Lampert for his helpful guidance and mentoring, and to John Hacker-Wright and Dominic Marner. I am grateful to Andrew J. Mitchell for his offering extensive feedback on an earlier draft of this dissertation. I thank Reiner Schaefer for our many hours of musing together. I am grateful to have a philosopher of language patiently endure my waxing eloquent about poetry and the gods. This project bears many traces of our invaluable exchanges. I thank David Fennema for his stimulating conversations about myth, religion, Tao, Buddhism and Christianity during lunch breaks on the chicken farm. His life and thought emerges from a deep and profound gratitude of existence. I thank Professor James K. A. Smith for ushering me into the world of Reformed thought and for opening up the wonders of St. Augustine to me.

There are, of course, many people whose love and support gave me the means to carry out this project. I can name only a few here. I thank Rev. John Vanderstoep and the community at Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Cambridge, Ontario for welcoming our family with open arms and for providing a nourishing place to set down our roots. I extend gratitude to all my friends at Friday night small group, to Craig and Kathy Vanderzwaag, Rev. Dr. David Courey, Kasie and Tristan Brake, and Rick Price. I thank my parents, Brad and Deb Rogers, for their encouragement and not a little financial support from time to time. And of course, I thank my family. Caleb and Nathaniel patiently endured as this project far too often stole away their father’s time and attention. Yet, I cannot imagine myself having written it without them, and now, without baby Aaron. Sarah my wife tirelessly gave her encouragement and support over these eight years of graduate school. She has given so much; this project would not have been possible without her. I owe an eternal debt of love.
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List of Abbreviations

References are given to original language texts and to published English translations. Because most of my citations of Heidegger’s work are from published English translations, I give the abbreviation of the translated work first, followed by a backslash and the abbreviation of the original German text. Where I have modified a translation I indicate this in parentheses. Except *Sein und Zeit*, which is abbreviated with “SZ”, works from Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976ff.) are abbreviated with a “GA” followed by the volume number of the text.

German Texts

GA 3  *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991)

GA 4  *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981)

GA 5  *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981)

GA 6.2  *Nietzsche* (Zweiter Band) (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997)

GA 7  *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977)

GA 8  *Was Heisst Denken?* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002)

GA 9  *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976)

GA 11  *Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006)

GA 12  *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985)

GA 15  *Seminare (Heraklit/Vier Seminare/Zürcher Seminare)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1986)

GA 20  *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979)

GA 24  *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975)

GA 26  *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978)
GA 29/30  *Die Grundbegriff der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983)

GA 40  *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983)

GA 41  *Die Frage Nach Dem Ding* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984)

GA 42  *Schelling: Vom Wesen Der Menschlichen Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988)

GA 48  *Nietzsche: Der Europäische Nihilismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983)

GA 50  *Nietzsches Metaphysik. 2.Einleitung in die Philosophie: Denken und Dichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1990)

GA 51  *Grundbegriffe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981)

GA 53  *Hölderlins Hymne »Der Ister«* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984)

GA 58  *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993)

GA 59  *Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks. Theorie der philosophischen Begriffsbildung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993)

GA 60  *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995)

GA 61  *Phänomenologie Interpretationene zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985)

GA 63  *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988)

GA 65  *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989)

GA 66  *Besinnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997)

GA 67  *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999)

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<td>GH</td>
<td><em>Gelassenheit</em> (Pfullingen: Günter Neske, 1959)</td>
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<td>SG</td>
<td><em>Der Satz vom Grund</em> (Pfullingen: Günter Neske, 1957)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SZ</td>
<td><em>Gesamtausgabe</em>, vol. 2: <em>Sein und Zeit</em> (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TK</td>
<td><em>Die Technik und die Kehre</em> (Pfullingen: Günter Neske, 1962)</td>
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**English Translations**

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Introduction: From Philosophy of Religion to Religious Philosophizing

General Introduction

Can philosophy speak (of) its other? Can the concepts and categories of thought point to that which remains un-thought? In the language of traditional philosophy, can thought bespeak the essence of being, the essence of “what is” and “how it is”? Does thought belong to being, and if so, in what manner or mode of existing? How can we existing beings speak of that to which we belong most profoundly? Is not such discourse traditionally the role played by religious affirmation of the absolute, of the completely other of which human beings must nevertheless “speak”? How does philosophy bring this speaking and its object to the familiarity and universality of concepts without reducing them in their singularity to something tame and domestic, something utterly reasonable and orderly? Moreover, does philosophy hear in the call of religious voices only the “truths” it can verify analytically and objectively? Or, as Hegel contends, do philosophy and religion speak of the same, of the absolute object?1 If so, does not philosophy also have to become a discourse of the absolute in its own right?

This line of questioning is not to imply that religion is inherently unreasonable or disorderly. On the contrary. But can philosophy take upon itself the task of conveying that which is utterly singular? The question is at least as old as Plato. But our late modern age we tend to hear an impressive distinction between philosophy, on the one hand, and religion, on the other. Religion, it might be said, has to do with things believed by faith, while philosophy has to do with rational inquiry. If religion is the utterly singularity of an intuitive immediacy, philosophy is the universality of rationally mediated knowing. But can religion reflect on its object without losing its essentially religious orientation? And does philosophy depend for its own essence on that which cannot be rationally mediated?

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That which is questioned about here forms the heart of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy. Through his task to repeat anew the ancient thought of the West, to re-open the tradition of Western thought to the awe and wonder of its great beginning, Heidegger must hold open the question of philosophy’s other. Even we de-mystified, disenchanted late moderns can still gaze upon the sky in the lazy afternoon and marvel at its deep blue, which opens a place for the sun to shine its revealing light on things, while concealing an inscrutable depth.\(^2\) As with all transitions from the apparent sign to the unapparent whole it signifies, we are always led to retrieve something through an appropriation of that which is given to us. We ourselves are the “site” for an appropriation of the gift of this whole in its singularity. We human beings are the very occasion for religion and philosophy. Both religion and philosophy constitute the singular occasion for the “repetition” (Wiederholung) of something essentially given. Thus, human being as such is the “language” of this giving (Es gibt) of being. This is an absolute language, without external relation of dependence.

But what, then, is this human being as such? The question concerns what it means to be and to be human. This question reverberates just as much in religious ritual as it does throughout the pages of philosophy, and it is the motivating question of Heidegger’s entire corpus. We wonder at the gift of an unfolding existence by ourselves existing in/as response to it. Religion and philosophy both enact the search for a genuine or authentic mode of response to the existence we ourselves are. These entail therefore the search for a genuine response to that “other” which mediates the gift of existence to us. Heidegger’s thought enacts this search in the “sites” of transition – from religion to philosophy and back again to religion, in continued enactment of the existential task of voicing the absolute.

The main contention of this project is that Heidegger’s thought is at its core a philosophy of religion and a religious philosophy. In his later thinking Heidegger drops both of these labels – philosophy and religion – which for him designate inauthentic modes of existence in the modern world. However, my task in this work is to show that Heidegger’s thought is in fact profoundly interested in the enactment and retrieval of something like the genuine mode of being human that these terms designate. Heidegger’s thinking is a philosophy of religion in that it looks toward the phenomenon of religious life to articulate its central structures. It is also religious philosophizing in that, primed by a certain way of responding to the world – first in

\(^2\) Of course, Kant was famously led to marvel at the starry host above and the moral law within.
religious writings and then in Hölderlin’s mythic poetry – Heidegger’s thinking anticipates possibilities for what could be, for the shape of human being-in-the-world, including the possibility of a relation to the divine.

First, I contend that Heidegger’s thinking is the robust embodiment of a philosophy of religion. This means that Heidegger attempts to enact a genuine philosophical relation to the wisdom implicit in the religious vision of the West without distorting the object of this vision. It is an attempt to give phenomenological articulation to the understanding of “what is” implicit in the practices and rituals of religious traditions. Through his confrontation with great religious thinkers, mystics, and reformers of the West, Heidegger thus calls for the transformation of the fore-conceptions and aims of a philosophy dominated by the attitude of disinterested scientific gazing. In order to do justice to religious life and its object, philosophical enquiry must at some level anticipate the continued enactment of the truth unfolded in it. Philosophy cannot specify in advance the terms of the investigation, nor can it foreknow the outcome or effect of this investigation. It must resign itself to receive these from the singular object of its enquiry. However, philosophical thinking can be no merely passive description of the object; as the indication of structures and patterns of being, philosophy actively contributes to the shape of the very object it helps unfold. It does so through its anticipation of the manner in which the absolute will break into existence.

Hence, in the second case, I argue that in his own way Heidegger at least opens the way for the notion of an inherently religious philosophizing. Quite importantly, Heidegger’s philosophy of religion articulates an alternative to positivistic notions of religion as the object of a scientific rationality, on the one hand, and transcendental reduction of the truth of religion under given categories of subjectivity. In the last analysis, I think that Heidegger’s philosophizing also sets him apart from the avatars of supposedly post-metaphysical philosophies of radical difference who fail to move beyond the shortcomings of these former approaches. Heidegger develops the alternative of a thinking dialogue with poetry which bears witness to the divine – the “law” of existence offered from the gods – transcendentally unfolding within human expression. On Heidegger’s reading, only the poetic can articulate the “site” of this hyperbolic unfolding of the simultaneously human and divine, and thus it is ontologically closest to concrete human existence. Philosophy pursues the insights of the poetic as possibilities for human being; but in so doing it already inhabits the imaginative space opened up by the religious
work or the poem. As such it co-articulates and co-expresses the decision – a decision about the absolutely other, the holy, and its sending of the gods – already being disclosed in the work.

In addition to reading religious thinkers and mystics, Heidegger also contends with major players in the history of Western philosophy to unfold his critique of the metaphysical tradition and his vision for a renewed form of thinking. In Heidegger’s estimate, metaphysics as onto-theology is at bottom philosophy’s historically enacted attempt to escape the free decision, the condition of our having to speak as if from the gods, out of the inscrutable depths of language. Language is the “sending” of being, of the “happening” or coming to be of what is, over which human beings have no ultimate control. Language is thus the originary opening of the “mythic” space and time of human response to the unfolding giving of being. For this reason, on Heidegger’s account, philosophy cannot excise myth from its discourse, cannot close the gap to mythic utterance of the divine in our “rational” responses to the unconditional.

To what extent, then, does Heidegger’s vision correlate to the dominant religious traditions of the West? While I agree with commentators that Heidegger’s vision for a post-Enlightenment thinking relation to religion is not committed to any one particular tradition of Western religion, I think this is only because his work is still more deeply motivated by its own particular understanding of the divine. Heidegger himself often claims that he thinks something older, more originary than the Western religions, and as Charles Taylor observes, he remains suspicious as to whether “the Christian God can ever escape the dead end of onto-theology.” Such would also stand for the God(s) of Judaism and of Islam. Yet, these commentators are right to insist that Heidegger does open the way for continued philosophical reflection on the “absolute” named by the theological traditions of the West. Yet, part of my task in this project is to show the extent and ways which, in my estimate, Heidegger’s own thinking remains religious. I thus move beyond commentary in certain respects and foray into my own attempts to come to terms with the matter for thinking to which Heidegger points us. While one may indeed be concerned that at times I am doing a certain sort of violence to the text, I would repeatedly

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3 See Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 41, 136-42, and Mark A. Wrathall, “Between the earth and the sky,” 85. To his credit, Crowe does acknowledge that it is a serious question as to what “God” might end up meaning under Heidegger’s understanding of being as the holy (138). It is Jean-Luc Marion who broaches this question most rigorously. However, as I argue in Chapter 5, the framework of his own philosophizing is far less radical than that of Heidegger’s.

emphasize with John Sallis that the interpretive task requires one to listen and to hear what the text can say, even after and in spite of Heidegger: “[I]n turning to Heidegger’s text itself, one must be attentive to the phantoms that haunt it and that reproduce within it precisely what the text would submit to Destruktion or commit to overturning. These spirits need to be exposed, not in order to reenclose Heidegger’s text in itself, but rather to let it say what it can, to let it echo language itself, to let its echoes resound, now, after Heidegger.”

One might indeed ask why religion should figure at all in a reading of Heidegger’s philosophy, and why, if the latter does account for religion, there should be a measure of sympathetic reception of it. Would not a robust reading of Heidegger lend itself to the radical destruction of the central claims of traditional religion in the West which point toward an eternal and transcendent origin?

Indeed, there has in recent decades been a plethora of scholarship dedicated to salvaging a notion of religious experience which escapes Heidegger’s critical onslaught against metaphysics in the worst sense of the term as the modern enterprise of “onto-theo-logy,” the subjection of the entire truth of being under the contemplative grasp of purely self-regarding and self-positing subjectivity. This hidden root of onto-theo-logy naturally projects itself in the abstract formulation of immediate self-reflexivity, achievable only by an eternal and transcendent being. Much work has been done to show that Heidegger intended to liberate religious meaning as a possibility of human experience from the clutches of totalizing thinking. This would amount to liberation of the genuine sense that binding meanings and structures of intelligibility are disclosed in experience as something, neither created nor constitutively discovered, but ultimately given. One may then argue that Heidegger’s thinking paves the way phenomenologically for philosophical affirmation of the form of experience wherein meaning breaks forth without human origination. This form of experience would be religious to the extent to which it is given to the linguistic and ritual community to unfold this meaning in affirmation of some hidden source of intelligibility that demands response. Phenomenology can then point us

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6 I give my thanks to Jay Lampert for pushing me to articulate a response to these important questions.
7 To my mind, the most powerful argument for this possibility opened up by Heidegger’s thought is found in Benjamin D. Crowe, Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion (2008). But we can find versions of this claim in the work of Mark A. Wrathall, Ben Vedder, Hubert Dreyfus, and Laurence Paul Hemming.
toward and even help draw us into this kind of experience without entering the territory of dubious metaphysical explanation of its ultimate origin or source of possibility.

I do not wish to counter this research or to deny its conclusions. Such recent work on Heidegger’s philosophy of religion has indeed provided much of the impetus and framework of my own research. Yet, I think that this body of scholarship answers the above questions only in part and quasi-satisfactorily. One might indeed argue that Heidegger’s philosophy discloses the role of the unconditional givenness of meanings and the expressive role of human beings in their receptive unfolding. One might applaud Heidegger’s attempt to retrieve this irreducible phenomenal form from “religious” thinkers and writers while arguing that Heidegger’s thought also divests itself of religion in any ordinary sense, i.e. as the response of all that is limited and finite to that which is beyond finite limitation, as the temporal reception of that which is other to time itself, the eternal. If Heidegger remains somewhat sympathetic to religion, and there is textual evidence at least that he does not outright reject it as a genuine possibility of human experience, yet it remains open to question whether the very terms of Heidegger’s philosophy undermine religion in the sense delimited, and whether in fact this is a welcome development in the history of philosophy. Religious traditions in their most robust forms do engage in speculative reflection and development of their implicit claims with respect to topics such as being, transcendence, eternity, and human experience. And indeed, Heidegger himself recognizes that the shape of traditions shifts and changes with the manner of their response to the metaphysical question of “being,” or of why and how what is is. But does Heidegger’s work give us any philosophical reason to re-open the question of the role in the formation of meaning played by the transcendent object of religion?

I argue that phenomenology of religion cannot avoid confronting this question of the metaphysical role of religion. It is not just the question of signalling the possibility or even the necessity to human life of something like religious experience, but of revisiting inquiry into the relation of thought to the beyond of thought, the very opening and emergence of existence as such which we are compelled to think.

By “thought” I have in mind Heidegger’s sense of thinking (Denken) as, beyond mere abstract and theoretical modes of reflection, full-bodied response to the ultimate reality that calls forth the expression of our essential nature. This emergence happens only as the ecstatic stretching of time, the gathering of our nature out of possibilities that, though rooted in our
having been, can only arrive to us in the anticipated moment. Being is thought to the extent to which it is precisely the opening of time itself, the temporal emergence of all of our modes of relation in and to the world. Our thoughtful response to being is just the “releasement” (Gelassenheit) of our essential belonging to this opening emergence of all that is without reactive and retroactive attempts to fix this a priori event in a necessary logical sequence or formal framework. Yet Heidegger rightly insists that the phenomenon of disclosure itself cannot be fully disclosed, cannot be brought completely into the light of thinking. There remains an essentially hidden or unthought dimension of being. It is of the very nature of disclosure to hide itself in the thing disclosed. We witness only the rose in its coming into bloom; the rose itself is the very phenomenon of its own blooming. And yet, the given rose cannot at any time coincide with the full range of its possibilities for being disclosed. It is not just that it remains absurdly possible, in Kafka-like fashion, for the rose bud to bloom into a vacuum cleaner. More importantly, it is that the full meaning of the rose’s disclosure as a rose cannot be exhaustively surveyed. Said disclosure remains always open and incomplete until (paradoxically) the descent of the rose into oblivion. Hence, though being hides itself in the disclosure of things in relational contexts of meaning which bear out a temporal structure, phenomenological thinking traces in this disclosure the profoundity of non-manifestness and withdrawal that shapes meaning.

But is this unthought of being just nothing? It is not “nothing” in the sense of mere negation, as in not-p. The disclosure of a thing is a positive phenomenon. But neither is it precisely something. How can the inquiry into nothing make sense at all? I argue that Heidegger’s thinking of “nothing,” the unthought dimension of being or disclosure between simple presence and simple negation, demands reflection on an origin beyond thought. Despite recent consensus, I shall argue that Heidegger shows himself to be somewhat of a metaphysician of the origin (though he would cringe at this way of putting it). In order to insist as he does on the fundamental givenness of structures of meaning and intelligibility Heidegger must clear and renew the path to reflection on the originating source of disclosure, the stillness at the centre of the whole and thus beyond it, on that which the tradition called transcendence.

I thus argue that we should not exaggerate the implications of Heidegger’s critical rejection of onto-theo-logy, or the encompassing of all being into the for-itself of subjectivity, as William Desmond puts it. As Desmond argues, if there is to be the possibility for thinking at all outside of or beyond the strictures of the sheerly instrumental appropriation of all being to
subjective will (the technological paradigm Heidegger clearly anticipated) then the speculative path to reflection on the origin of disclosure must be re-opened.\(^8\) Desmond takes Heidegger to task for his supposed ambivalence and inconsistency on this score. But Heidegger’s thought is not devoid of this sort of reflection, as is evinced especially in his later retrieval of Hölderlin’s notion of the holy. The phenomenon of disclosure that remains nothing to theoretical thought shows up in the attunement of the “poetic” as plenitudinous origin. If Heidegger at times overstates his critique of the metaphysical claims of religion, I argue that his thinking belongs to the deeper current of the speculative development of these claims in modern thought, though with its own unique vision for the shape of this development in the West. This is the reason why I also claim in the final chapter that Heidegger’s thinking can be allowed to rejuvenate philosophical reflection on the theological notions such as the incarnation, just as philosophy’s return to speculative thought concerning the infinite may in fact prove indispensable for an overcoming the nihilist rendering of language and being in modernity.

Yet the question remains as to Heidegger’s precise treatment of the notion of the other of thought or of the origin, and of the relation of this notion to the traditional concept of transcendence. Two of Heidegger’s foremost interlocutors in the philosophy of religion, Jean-Luc Marion and John D. Caputo, rightly question whether Heidegger’s holy is finally just the eternal circle of an impersonal One. Has Heidegger’s thought escaped the lure of this holy as fated return to the eternal past of the Greeks? Here Kierkegaard and Augustine are helpful interlocutors. I enquire as to whether Heidegger’s notion of the open site that makes possible human doing and making – the site of logos – cannot itself also be thought as the opening of a “place” and a “time” for divine self-giving. Can we here bring Heidegger’s thinking into dialogue with philosophical reflection on the infinite? Does this notion survive Heidegger’s relentless critique of the philosophical tradition? I argue that in fact it seems to fulfill the best intentions of Heidegger’s thought. Despite Heidegger’s arguably misleading objections to the notion of divine creation, this incarnational logic develops a pathway in his own thinking.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) Here I acknowledge a profound debt to James K. A. Smith’s work on the “logic of incarnation,” and to John Milbank’s “Radically Orthodox” reading of philosophical reason in the aftermath of the “meta-critical” philosophies of Hamann, Herder, Jacobi, and Kierkegaard. See Smith, *Speech
In this project I proceed with an analysis of Heidegger’s earliest through his latest philosophical encounters with religion. Drawing from these analyses, I argue that philosophy occupies the space, not of disinterested theoretical reflection, but of a kind of reflective re-mediation of religious practices. Thinking takes its orientation from ontologically more primary modes of religious expression, yet still gives partial expression to that which continually sparks religious wonder. The most genuine thinking, I conclude, flourishes in communities that collectively embody love for divine wisdom, in the charitable practices of hospitality, breaking bread, even prayer. Heidegger himself famously anticipated a god-less thinking (without the abstract god of philosophy) that remains in proximity to and perhaps holds open the possibility for dancing, kneeling, and singing before the divine God (ID, 72/141). If philosophy helps religion to be self-critical in the reception of its object, to hold religion open to the wonder of being, religion gives philosophy its impulse and its aim. Could it be that further retrieval of Heidegger in the “open” between philosophy and religion must confront and contend with the theological thought of incarnate logos? Many of Heidegger’s interlocutors – from Augustine to Schelling and Hegel to Kierkegaard – refer to the paradox of being which, in our attempt to bring it into language, it simultaneously speaks us, opening the eschatological horizon of continued anticipation of the arrival of being, of the possibility for mutual flourishing in the midst of the plenitudinous goodness of being. Perhaps in his own way Heidegger too repeats this thought of an original good and plenitude.

But if Heidegger’s work sheds philosophical light on the phenomenon of religion, why must this activity take the form of participation in the object of religion? Why assume that the object of religion is not an illusion, that our wonder at the utter contingency of being is properly understood in the mode of response to a prior gift? At stake is not whether there is an ultimate reason for anything at all: For as I argue, Heidegger shows that genuine religion does not look for an explanation to ground our understanding of reality. At stake, rather, is the mode or manner in which we receive the emergence of all that is and so also of our very selves. Is religion a fantasy, the pipedream of an eternal origin that allows human beings to escape the harsh reality of change and flux? Heidegger certainly will have no truck with visions of other-worldly essences and static forms. But there remains in his thought the sense that human beings

*and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation; and Milbank, Theology and Social Theory.*
essentially unfold in/as response to a gift. If metaphysical recourse to timeless essence is really
the bogus attempt to secure the contingent arising of being in some given form, are we then to
conclude that this contingency cannot be the expression of an originative and creative power? Is
this not also to assume access to an “objective” perspective on the relation of reason to the
universal, as John Milbank contends?\textsuperscript{10} Against this still uncritical privileging of the mood of
objectivity, Heidegger remains more radically with the paradox and ambiguity of our
situatedness in language – as the beings who must take hold of and meaningfully unfold the very
existence that we are. The disclosive moods we find in various manners of religious
comportment to the world – from Augustine’s caritas to Schleiermacher’s dependence to
Luther’s faith – cannot without violence be brought under the tutelage of an independent
reason.\textsuperscript{11} The alternative is to unfold the disclosive power of these moods from within,
developing their philosophical potential as a construal of the universal.

Still, there is no ultimate justification as to why phenomenology must itself turn to
religious moods. For if philosophy itself depends upon some ontologically disclosive mood,
some mode of expression of that which is ultimate, a particular desire for the universal, then
justification for the turn arises only within the turn itself. One might accept this argument and
yet be unconvinced that religion has given philosophy any such grounds for authentic relation to
the emergence of being. Is it not better to relinquish notions of an origin in order simply to
embrace the utter contingency of “what is” most fundamentally?

I think that Heidegger anticipates two responses to this question; although, in order to
articulate them I have to move beyond Heidegger’s work in certain ways. The first is that
philosophy has indeed subjected much of religion in the West to sustained critique but that much
of this critique has itself emerged out of the thoughtful development of these traditions in their
rejection of the onto-theo-logical notion of a prior, substantive ground of philosophical thought.
Heidegger himself, I argue, marks just this sort of speculative development (as I argue in Chapter
5). Thus, I argue that religion is and has in fact been implicit in the philosophical critique of

Theology (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 147.

\textsuperscript{11} Milbank, “On Theological Transgression,” 149. Milbank argues that Heidegger fails to grasp
this point. However, against Milbank I argue in this study that Heidegger turns to extra-
philosophical, even religious sources of inspiration precisely because he acknowledges the non-
independence of philosophical reason.
onto-theo-logical reason. Secondly, from a phenomenological standpoint, I think that Heidegger’s notion of a plenitudinous origin which bears much resemblance to the theological infinite, in fact offers a better, that is to say less dogmatically constraining, account of language than the versions of “objective” and “critical” philosophy examined in this study. For as I hope to show in this study, thought of the incarnation of an origin accounts for the paradoxes of language and human creativity in/as response to the unfolding of being (and all that is not human) in a way that both objective and purely critical attempts to grasp our relation to the universal have failed to achieve.

The Shape of the Project

The first two chapters explore the question of a philosophical approach to religion. They explore Heidegger’s philosophical retrieval of religious meaning and its object-referent from the basis of a phenomenological investigation of the modes of intentionality constitutive of religious life. Heidegger rejects what I am calling “positivistic” and “transcendentalist” approaches which would mediate religious life by way of an objective or abstracting rationality. These avenues close off the dimension of an interpretive affirmation of a sense of norms that shape an understanding of the world for the community of practice which according to the self-understanding of the community are received as unconditional gift.12 Heidegger retrieves phenomenologically from religious thinkers and writers the notion of a transformative event through which arise the initial “gift” of emerging possibilities, including the possibility of interpretive response. Indeed Heidegger comes to see that the transcendental notion of the event is never available to a disinterested rational gazing (Chapter 1) or even to “objective” attempts to root it in a self-positing critical rationality (Chapter 2), but can be grasped only insofar as it is always partially enacted as part of the expression and unfolding of a concrete understanding of the gift. Thus, if philosophy is in part transformative of religious life through its reception of it, the philosophical reception is mediated by the same “religious” sense that meaning is irreducibly donated to it, and so philosophy always in part constitutes a kind of active reception of that toward which it points.

12 Benjamin D. Crowe’s study is an important antecedent to my own interpretation of Heidegger on this score. See Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion (2008).
The final three chapters thus investigate the correlative question of the nature of a religious philosophizing, or a philosophizing that is primed to respond to the world from out of the aim more fundamentally embodied in the poetic imagination of religion. I think that this notion is implicit in Heidegger’s work, even though Heidegger himself tends to distance his thought from the category of the “religious.” Heidegger is nonetheless profoundly concerned with the loss in modern technological life of a collective sense that things and persons refer to a depth of meaning which bespeaks something that is more than merely human. Western philosophy has followed the trajectory of separation of itself from this mythic notion, opting to mediate its reception of the world by way of a naked reason which (on Heidegger’s reading) has disclosed itself historically as the operation of a disguised will to power. The only way beyond the disingenuous response to its own finitude engendered in this self-overcoming will is to re-affirm the centrality of the poetic imagination to philosophy: Only here can be affirmed that persons and things are inherently expressive of more than themselves, that they disclose the holy, and thus can truly be affirmed as irreducible to sheer will or instrumental value. But to philosophize this way is already to affirm the holy along with the poet. Hölderlin represents for Heidegger the only productive way beyond the loss of the human and thingly nature of things to the technological paradigm that has finally come to full fruition in late modernity.

Heidegger thus confronts the loss of the human in the “subjectivism” of modern philosophy, and looks to Hölderlin’s poetry as the proper place to orient us to our dwelling as human beings in proximity to this divine power (Chapter 3). He also affirms Nietzsche’s reception of the Western metaphysical tradition – culminating in “modernism” – as bare will to power, but like Kierkegaard seeks to transform metaphysics in light of the idea of the paradox (Chapter 4). (I thus take a somewhat unorthodox interpretive line on Heidegger’s relation to metaphysics.) Heidegger rightly sees that ontologies are performed before they are thought or conceptualized. The overcoming of technological nihilism thus requires the performance of an alternative ontology, rooted in a competing myth of a sort of humanity whose expressions are the site or locus of divine power. Chapter 5 is an investigation of revisions of Heidegger’s philosophy in the direction of (I argue) a still-Enlightenment concept of the relation of reason and religion. I defend Heidegger against criticisms put forth by Jean-Luc Marion and John D. Caputo and offer a counter-proposal as to why I think Heidegger’s is in the position better to resonate with the ancient notion of the incarnation. I argue that this concept helps flesh out the
idea of the relation of reason and religion in a way that captures some of the most radical intuitions of Heidegger’s thinking.

My own interpretation of Heidegger is thus a kind of reception of that toward which the great thinker points, one which learns from him – to be sure – but which finds pathways that he did not follow. I thus attempt to enact Heidegger’s thinking along the path of my own decision regarding the holy and the divine. But this is just what is wholly appropriate to the matter to which the thinker points, which in some respect always remains other to philosophy.
1.1 Introduction: Early Sketches of a Phenomenological Method

Does the possibility exist for a philosophy of religion? Can philosophy, which traffics in the generality of concepts, bring those concepts to bear on religious life in a way that respects the matter for thinking? How can philosophy describe religious life as it is lived without the violence of reductive theoretical analysis (e.g. as opposed to framing it as essentially “ethics” or “myth”, etc.)? Is “religion” or even “religious phenomena” philosophically determinable? And if so, then how are these determined philosophically in a manner that respects them in their integrity precisely as other than philosophy, even pre-philosophical in their origin? What would the manner of approach of such a philosophy look like?

Though the young Heidegger did not pose these questions in just this manner, the object of this chapter is to show that he indeed begins to answer them directly or indirectly through his earliest sketches of the programme for a “hermeneutics of facticity.” Heidegger’s earliest writings on religious life appear in the form of lecture courses he delivered or planned to deliver at Freiburg in the years (1919-1923) prior to the publication of Being and Time. As I attempt to show in this chapter, the writings of this period were crucial in the development of a philosophical approach to bringing conceptual analysis to bear on human experience – or what Heidegger calls the “concretely” lived or “factual” situation – in a non-reductive manner, i.e. one which takes up experience precisely as the very situation from out of which and in light of which one conducts one’s analysis. If the factual situation is the phenomenon, and if as phenomenon it is the very enabling condition of philosophical analysis, then the task of philosophy is to grasp the condition of its possibility. Any genuine grasp of this condition must
consequently learn to approach it a way appropriate to it. The phenomenon at the heart of this analysis cannot be given or given genuinely, for example, simply as an object of use or an abstract theoretical construct. Thus, the aim of the young Heidegger is to find the right mode of access to this phenomenon such that it can be philosophically explicated in accordance with the way in which it is given to analysis. Such an analysis of concrete life would be a hermeneutic in the sense that it is a way of grasping the situation from out of itself and of interpretively explicating or unfolding it precisely as it is given.

Needless to say, these writings are important for my own attempt to answer the questions posed above and to address the problem of what it might mean to allow religious life to articulate itself philosophically in a way that respects its basic categories and experiences. The young Heidegger did in fact sketch out an early programme for a phenomenology of religious life (Phänomenologie des religiosen Lebens) in the form of a hermeneutics of facticity. My goal for this chapter is thus to set these analyses of religious life in the wider context of Heidegger’s earliest work in developing his hermeneutical approach to phenomenology – to the philosophy that treats the given according to the manner or mode in which it gives itself – in order to flesh out the beginnings of something like Heidegger’s philosophy of religion. The task is not merely an exegetical one, however, in that I aim to address the question of whether Heidegger’s thinking provides adequate resources for the satisfactory development of a non-reductive account of religion. While this question guides my project in its entirety, in this chapter I argue that Heidegger’s earliest analyses of factual life represent something of a breakthrough in philosophy of religion which allowed the young Heidegger to retrieve religious life on a philosophical footing that had broken away from the then-dominant paradigms of neo-Kantianism and historicism. At bottom Heidegger resists the tendency that characterizes these general ways of thinking to reduce the phenomenon of concrete life to an objective field or region to be grasped in theoretical consciousness. Accordingly, Heidegger’s phenomenological approach to religion enables us to revise and even to upset potential tendencies in philosophy to treat the phenomenon of religious life as though it were an object “lying there,” as it were, for the objective theoretical gaze, in order to bring our philosophizing into a more appropriate manner of receiving this phenomenon and of allowing it to “show itself” conceptually according to its own way of being.
But how does one allow religious life to show itself without objectifying it? In contrast to what I will call the positivism of conceptual theoretical approaches whose aim is to grasp the phenomenon in question in such a way that one can then make universally valid claims about it with reference to some particular region of “evidence” or empirically binding support, Heidegger aims in his early writings to develop a non-objectifying mode of description whose goal is not positive (i.e. scientific) knowledge of the object but genuine philosophical engagement with it. Of course one might question this distinction. But if the matter for philosophical engagement is the very concrete life from which philosophy emerges as a possibility, then said engagement cannot completely disengage itself from its object. If this is the case and if philosophy aims for genuine engagement, then the ideal of disengagement from the object for the sake of pure positive grasping would be inappropriate both to it and to philosophy. Such is the task for Heidegger’s early phenomenology of religion: to find a non-objectifying way of speaking philosophically of religious life. Genuine engagement with the object calls for a way of appropriating it as our own and of interpreting it from the standpoint of our own concrete situation, even if genuinely philosophical engagement would require doing so in a way which touches on something essential in that situation. No less is the case with the matter of religion: Genuine philosophical engagement would have to interpret the phenomenon of religion from the standpoint of one’s concrete situation, appropriating it as an essential possibility from out of that very situation itself.

Accordingly, this task calls for the right manner of approach and concept formation. Heidegger makes it clear from his earliest writings that the task of philosophy according to him is to approach the factual situation in the “how” or modality of its being. The situation is historical in the sense that it opens itself up to what is essential in the mode of being actualized as this very essence in temporal movement. Approaching this situation in the modality of its being thus requires the sort of concept formation whose function is to direct the thinker is his thinking toward it. The goal of this conceptuality would be to bring us as close to concrete life in its manner or mode of being as possible, so as to take up or appropriate what “speaks” to us in it in a genuine way. Indeed, Heidegger develops just such an approach to the concrete situation by virtue of his notion of the “formal indication” (die formale Anzeige). The formal indication was Heidegger’s way of entering into a genuine interpretation of the factual situation in the mode of its unfolding as life, i.e. as the temporally concrete way of our being or existing. The genuine
object of this research cannot be grasped positively in self-evident intuition or theoretical observation for reasons noted, but must be taken up in its very potentiality for self-interpretation. Heidegger’s formal indication would thus be the actualization of philosophical self-interpretation in factical life. The formal indication is Heidegger’s method of conceptually pointing toward the ontological modes in which the factical situation unfolds as historical existence in such a way that the philosopher remains existentially engaged in this situation itself. The concept thus forms part of the greater movement of the existential actualization (Vollzug) of the object itself. It is in fact in his lecture course on the phenomenology of religion (winter semester 1920/1) where Heidegger most clearly articulates three senses or modes of being of the factical situation and argues that the task of a formal indication would point to each of these modes in order to bring thinking to bear on it in such a way that it is understood in a new light out of the other modes. Heidegger refers to the content-sense (Gehaltssinn) or what the phenomenon is, the relational-sense (Bezugssinn) or basic manner in which the phenomenon unfolds as what it is, and the enactment- or actualization-sense (Vollzugssinn) or the manner in which the phenomenon comes to be what and how it is. He continues to reflect on these three modalities of being in various and different ways across the span of his career and they will prove quite central to my own attempts to unpack Heidegger’s philosophy of religion. The task of his earliest explication of the factical situation is to retrieve the phenomenon in each of its modes of being in such a way that the other modes are also elucidated. Traditional and modern philosophy alike, argues Heidegger, has remained fixed on the first two modes of being, interpreting the phenomenon primarily as a content available to theoretical or epistemological grasping. Philosophy has fallen into the tendency in the factical situation to hide its genuine mode of being from itself under the guise of apparently self-evident concepts and worldviews handed down by a tradition that is no longer genuinely taken up and reflected on. For example, epistemological presuppositions in philosophy keep thinking bound to uncritical dualities of knowing subject and known object or mind-in-here and world-out-there. These preconceptions affect how the factical situation is ultimately regarded in its content and manner of being. But they tend to cover over and obscure the actual situation as it is lived. My way of characterizing Heidegger’s project is that it calls for the dismantling of theoretical concepts in order, from the “ground up,” to bring philosophical interpretation into an engagement with the concrete situation itself. The correlative movement is what I call a “circling back” that transforms our basic understanding and way of grasping each of the modalities of
being in a further retrieval. The process of philosophical interpretation is thus endless as it continually brings thinking to bear on what is essential in the situation at hand.

The implications of this method for a philosophy of religion are profound. As mentioned, Heidegger indeed begins to carry out a hermeneutic phenomenology of religion in these years. Between 1918-1921 Heidegger interpreted numerous thinkers whom we would consider “religious” in one way or another, from Sts. Paul and Augustine, to Luther, Eckhart, Kierkegaard, and Schleiermacher, to name a few. As the work of scholars has also shown, the impetus for all of Heidegger’s early lecture courses on facticity was developed in conversation with several of the thinkers noted above. We shall see that on the basis of these lectures that according to Heidegger, in order to retrieve religion philosophically one must direct one’s analysis from the ground up to the predominant mode of life’s being actualized in the concrete situation of the believer (for example, to the forward-looking sense of the eschatological horizon in the letters of Paul, i.e. entering life as if it were the crucial moment of decision) in order to allow the particular content and relational senses of religious life to elucidate themselves. One can elucidate religious life as a phenomenon successfully only to the extent to which one has entered into the interpretive situation and taken it up in a circling back that re-interprets and re-articulates it in a productive repetition (Wiederholung). The important and true implication is that religious life has an ontological sense, but one that can be “known” only through its being existentially carried forward in further interpretive unfolding. For the early Heidegger, philosophical questioning alone is the most genuine form of self-interpretation because it lives in such a manner that it continually holds open the possibility for new forms of repetition, new ways of retrieving the tradition and its possibilities handed down to it (see PIA, 114/GA 61, 153-54). Philosophy continues to point us to the temporality of concrete life as the future-oriented actualization of the possibilities for being handed down to it.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: First I will lay out the topic and method of Heidegger’s early hermeneutics of facticity as an alternative to the positivism of the neo-Kantians and historicists in more detail, though in brief. I will then unpack Heidegger’s ground-up and circling-back retrieval of religious life, arguing that this approach marks a breakthrough in the philosophy of religion, one that allows the phenomenon in question to show itself in accordance with its manner of being. I will attempt to articulate this manner in terms of the
threefold modality structure of factual life. In these early lectures Heidegger interprets religious life in its most basic sense fundamentally as the decisive moment wherein the possibility for being a self is actualized. Heidegger thereby challenges and dismantles positivist accounts of religion that treat the latter as an isolable and objectively describable phenomenon of society or culture.\textsuperscript{13} He retrieves the content of religion as the entire nexus of largely pre-reflective significances and involvements that characterize the overlapping senses of the life-world of the believer and believing community. Heidegger understands this content in light of the relational structure of religious life as care (\textit{Sorge}) for one’s identity as a whole in the face of the inscrutability of the ultimate source of one’s own possibilities for being. The task for a phenomenology of religion is to grasp these structures in a way that brings them to light in one’s own situation in further actualization: In Heidegger’s own context this meant dismantling philosophical orthodoxies that failed on their own terms to grasp the deep structure of care emerging from a profound sense of ultimate \textit{dependence} at the heart of religious life.

\textbf{1.1.1 Shape of a Method: The Formal Indication as Phenomenological Retrieval of Life}

The term \textit{life} is notoriously vague. It denotes something like the animatedness of our being; but it is neither an object of use nor a determinable structure of subjective consciousness. And yet as David Farrell Krell notes, “Such animation or, better, animatedness (the passive form of \textit{Bewegtheit}), ‘movedness,’ is not to be overlooked) is Heidegger’s principal preoccupation both before and after \textit{Being and Time}, from the period of his hermeneutics of facticity (roughly 1919-1923) to that of his theoretical biology (1929-1930) and well beyond.”\textsuperscript{14} Heidegger launched his programme for phenomenological research in the Freiburg years with the call to

\textsuperscript{13} See also Benjamin D. Crowe’s important study, \textit{Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion: Realism and Cultural Criticism}, 42-9. Crowe also notes how Heidegger challenged both the idealism of the neo-Kantian philosophers, for whom religion amounts to something like the ideal projection of the rational subject, and the life philosophy deriving from the thought of Nietzsche, under which religion is merely constructed by humans to fulfill strictly human interests. Crowe argues that Heidegger was concerned to retrieve the religious understanding that human beings can be normatively bound over to something that they did not anticipate or construct but which confronts them in a meaningful way.

return to life in its very concreteness. Life as it is concretely lived is according to Heidegger “that which is condensed and originates out of compression (Verdichtung), compaction (Zusammenwachsen)” (PIA, 22/GA 61, 28). The concrete eludes our best efforts to grasp it. We might think by analogy of the infinitesimal character of the point of space or the “now” of a moment of time. It is not that these are so abstract as to be meaningless; on the contrary, if we are to say that they have a mode of being at all, this mode cannot without paradox be brought to the level of abstract representation. Yet in order to speak of the radically concrete it must somehow be given according to its own mode of being. Heidegger thus contends that phenomenology treats of factical life, i.e. the concreteness of life being “there” (da) for us in its various expressions (OHF, 5/GA 63, 7). Factual life is the manner in which the compressed (Verdichtung) concrete rises into expressiveness (Ausdrücklichkeit) according to its own mode of being. We ourselves belong to this upsurge of concrete life as expression, Heidegger argues, in the very openness or movedness of our being “there” (Dasein) temporally for a while (5/7). The term life is vague because life itself is characterized by haziness (Diesigkeit) (PIA, 81/GA 61, 109). Yet precisely in its facticity life is expression directed toward itself through its modes of being.

The task of phenomenological research according to the young Heidegger is one of elucidating factical life in the very character of its movedness as expression. But it must also bring the concrete to its expression in a manner befitting it. Another way in which Heidegger describes the self-expression of concrete life is in the term interpretation, literally a “laying out” of the matter (auslegung). Factual life is the interpretive laying out of life in its concrete expressions or expressions as concrete. Not only does factical life stand in need of interpretation, but it “is” in the manner of “having-been-interpreted,” and it is precisely for this reason that it also remains open to being interpreted (OHF, 11/GA 63, 15; PIA, 13/GA 61, 16-17). Thus, according to Heidegger, phenomenological research is a sort of interpretation or hermeneutics in which the self-interpretation (Selbstauslegung) of factical life is brought to the level of self-understanding (Selbstverständigung) (PIA, 14/GA 61, 18). The latter designation is nothing essentially different from the former but is rather an interpretive movement wherein “factual Dasein is ruthlessly dragged back to itself and relentlessly thrown back upon itself” (14/18). Phenomenological research must interpret in such a way that the essential character of the factical situation itself is brought to conceptual clarity. And this of course means that the
situation must be known in accordance with its own expression as an articulation (auslegung) of life. The nature of this philosophical elucidation is thus a kind of “existential knowing” or a way of being that “speaks from out of interpretation and for the sake of it” (OHF, 14/GA 63, 18; author’s emphases). As Krell notes, “hermeneutics is factical life caught in the act, vigilantly caught in the act of interpreting itself.” The task of hermeneutics is to enter in to the very expression of life in its facticity in wakefulness (Wachsein) to itself as historical possibility “which is in each case definite and for a while at the particular time” (OHF, 15/GA 63, 19). It is to exist in such a way that this possibility which characterizes the upsurge of life into its concrete expression is continually held in play in the factical situation (12/16). It is to interpret in such a way that one’s own existence becomes a pressing issue for it, something that must be decided upon.

The question we are facing is how Heidegger could claim to bring such concrete expression into philosophical articulation. Do not concepts designate universals, and if so, how could philosophy (i.e. conceptual analysis) bring concrete life in the irreducible singularity of its expression into elucidation? Are our attempts at doing philosophy doomed to failure the moment we speak of anything in general? How could an interpretation of factical life be anything other than the violent grasping thereof, the attempt to snatch it out of its very concrete movedness and to place it under a static schema? On the contrary, these early courses saw the development of Heidegger’s strategy for defining the object of philosophy in a manner appropriate to it (PIA 14-15/GA 61, 16-18). “What is important at first [i.e. in the matter of defining the object] is only this: the idea of determination, the logic of the grasp of the object, and the conceptuality of the object in the respective definitory determination must be drawn out of the mode in which the object is originally accessible” (PIA, 17/GA 61, 19-20; author’s emphases). Factical life is not definable according to a particular object-region, in the way a rose is, for example. In biology the rose is defined as a “plant” and subsequently as an “organism”. These terms are meaningful in the particular context in which the rose is grasped as a biological object. The definition of the rose springs from a particular way of being in relation to roses which belongs to a mode or manner of relating to things in general from out of regional contexts (i.e. the life-world of the biological sciences, of the university, etc.). Concepts such as biological and organic life, which

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serve to delimit a particular domain of objects, are inappropriate to other domains. When I give a rose to my wife, we both view it as a token or symbol that embodies the mutual expression of our love for each other. To view it in strictly biological terms in that context would be as unsuitable as a biologist writing love notes to her partner in a journal of botany! In each case, the definition would be forced and imposed, given the basic context in which the object presents itself. The point is that the inappropriateness of the concepts stems not from their nature as concepts but from the basic attitude and approach guiding their use. Heidegger countenances the possibility in his earliest works of a mode of conceptuality that would enable us philosophically to elucidate the factical situation, the “whole active and passive pose of the human being toward the world” (PRL, 8/GA 60, 11).

The question that arises is what kind of conceptuality or what manner of conceiving would be appropriate to factical life. Heidegger gives his most robust and clearly developed answer to this question in his winter semester 1920/21 course Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion. Here Heidegger brings to light his own view of the modes of being of factical life and the manner of approach that would be appropriate to grasping these modes in their structural coherence. Heidegger names the three basic modes or senses of the being or intentionality of life the content-sense (Gehaltssinn), relational-sense (Bezugssinn), and actualization-sense (Vollzugssinn) (PRL, 46/GA 60, 62-3). The first sense concerns the meaning of the “what” of experience, i.e. life in its manner of being a “this.” The second addresses life in its manner or in the “how” of its being directed or oriented as the actualization of its possibilities. The third sense concerns the fundamental manner in which the directedness of life is fulfilled or in which life is pulled in its particular direction.16 Heidegger proposes a new mode of conceptuality in the figure of the “formal indication” (die formale Anzeige), which in his view is best able to elucidate factical life in the mutual coherence of these different senses, since it evades the tendency in our theorizing “one-sidedly” to objectify life by focusing exclusively on it as a particular content or factual “what,” obscuring life in its original concreteness (43/63).

Contends Heidegger, the formal indication is a use of concepts in a manner different from that of generalization. It is not the bringing of particular cases under classificatory schemas for

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the sake of grasping their universal qualities (PRL, 39-40/GA 60, 57-9). This way of conceiving has its uses – for example in discerning the biological qualities of the rose – but it looks at the object in the direction of its content-sense as an original “what” experienced in the objectifying attitude. In this attitude of looking at or “taking cognizance of” the object (10/14) a particular material region is formed or sketched out in which the relations among possible objects are characterized and defined. This particular rose is then grasped in its “objective” character as bearing these qualities (e.g. being composed of cells; drawing energy from sunlight through photosynthesis, etc.) which define its “being” as a biological object. The problem with generalization (e.g. scientific generalization) arises when it is fallaciously thought to characterize the essence of the thing: “One can ask whether the determination ‘sensuous quality’ determines ‘color’ in the same sense as the formal determination ‘thing’ [Gegenstand] does any thing you like” (PRL, 40/GA 60, 58). Hence, the problem arises when I think that the rose I give my wife is reducible in its nature as a thing to a biological organism. This is to move beyond simple generalization into the mode of formalization, i.e. formalizing the “essence” of the thing from out of a view to the ways in which one can relate to it. It is a mistake to believe that because the rose “shows up” in a certain way in one material domain (e.g. as cellular organism) that this “what-content” is essential to the meaning of the rose in every context (40/58-9). There are certain ways of relating to the rose (e.g. as a token or symbol of love) that render such content irrelevant or meaningless. At stake here is the right sort of approach for defining the object that will look away from – i.e. remain formally neutral to – its “what-content” in the direction of the relational mode of being appropriate to it.

The formal indication is thus a mode of formalization in the sense that it looks in the direction not of types but of the manner in which something is related to as a thing. However, as Theodore Kisiel notes, we must “be careful to distinguish between traditional logical formality, whose Gegenstand is always an Objekt, and phenomenological formality, whose Gegen-stand is first a relation, the intentional relation which defines and articulates life as such, gets at life in and for itself.”\(^{17}\) The indicatory nature of Heidegger’s formalization functions as a sort of indexical\(^{18}\) that directs us toward the concreteness of life in the “how” in which it is experienced


(PRL, 43/GA 60, 62-3). Concepts are used here as indicators that sketch out a formal picture of the movement of life in its modes of being in order to direct us toward it in its very concreteness. According to Heidegger, a concept “is not a schema but rather a possibility of being, of how matters look in the moment [das Augenblicks], i.e., is constitutive of the moment—a meaning drawn out of something—points to a forehaving, i.e. transports us into a fundamental experience—points to a foreconception, i.e., calls for a how of addressing and interrogating—i.e., transports us into the being-there of our Dasein in accord with its tendency to interpretation [Auslegungstendenz] and its worry [Bekümmerung]” (OHF, 12/GA 63, 16). The formally indicative approach acts as an explication (Explikation) of the factical situation which directs us to the pre-theoretical way in which life is already “there” for us in its indeterminate actuality-possibility (forehaving) and allows descriptive content to unfold from this dynamic relationality (foreconception). The unfolding interpretive sketch of relational possibilities not only springs from the self-interpretation of life but also guides it back to the moment (Augenblick) of origination of this interpreting impulse inherent to the movedness and orientation of life, the actualization sense. As Kisiel contends, it is the task of phenomenology “in its explications” to repeat the actualization of life “by an empathetic going-along-with, a devoted yielding to it to let it be, a Hingeben and not a Hinsehen.” 19 The character of the evidence (Evidenzcharakter) found in the elucidatory sketches of factical life is thus “labile” (12/16). We might say that the structures (“existentials”) traced out of an interpretation of life are firmly enough rooted in life to direct our understanding but are not so firm as to constitute immoveable designations.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, it might be helpful to use the metaphor of a dual movement of retrieval of concrete life “from the ground up” and the repetition of this dynamic movedness in a “circling-back” that repeats it forward. In the remainder of this section I will attempt to clarify the sense in which the ground-up movement of the formally indicatory sketch of the concrete senses of being belongs to the task of a hermeneutics of facticity. In the next section I will attempt to elucidate how the ground-up retrieval is completed or fulfilled in a circling-back movement on the matter being interpreted that brings it to temporal fulfillment (Zeitigung) through existential engagement. The defining problem of philosophy for the young Heidegger was: if life is the topic of phenomenological research, then how can it be brought to

the level of conceptual analysis without distortion or violent reduction? We have seen that according to Heidegger phenomenological research is hermeneutical in the sense of its arising as a “fundamental experience” (Grundерfahrung) of self-unfolding, self-referential character of life (OHF, 14/GA 63, 18). Hermeneutics is guided by an initial conceptual grasp of this experience and is sketched out in the formal indication (14/18). Heidegger contends that hermeneutics designates the “as what” of factical life, i.e. it begins to point out the relational dynamic of our being Dasein, there for a while, in order to find a way to engage it or bring it into play as one might direct our attention to the high stakes of a card game (14/18). Hermeneutics wakes us up to the factical situation at hand. Most importantly it rouses philosophy from the slumber of objectifying thinking by which it distances itself from the urgency of life. Thus Heidegger goes as far as to say, “I think that hermeneutics is not philosophy at all, but in fact something preliminary which runs in advance of it and has its own reason for being: what is at issue in it, what it all comes to, is not to become finished with as quickly as possible, but rather to hold out in it as long as possible” (15-16/19-20). Hermeneutics points us back to our original and originally contingent situation; it holds our philosophical hand to the fire of the pre-philosophical situation to continually allow our conceptuality to spring from it. Or, to employ a different metaphor, hermeneutics proceeds from the ground up to stir factical life to bring itself into relief, to articulate its own facticity for itself for the sake of clarifying itself as possibility for being.

The ground up retrieval of factical life accordingly produces formally indicatory sketches of the basic senses of direction or involvement that characterize the situation. The process entails the continual dismantling of ossified conceptual structures that hinder access to the situation. As early as 1919 Heidegger speaks of this destructive movement of thought (Zerstörung) (see PM, 22/GA 9, 25). It is the precursor to the Destruktion or de-structuring of the history of ontology Heidegger calls for in Being and Time (see BT, ¶6. 41-9/SZ, 19-27). Destruktion guides the interpretation of the factical situation back to the originary sense of being of its actualization in order to seize upon it as a “latent possibility” of meaning for one’s own situation in a further repetition (BT, 42/SZ, 20-1). Such a seizing upon of latent possibilities requires formal explication of the situation or the sketching out the temporal and historical senses of its modes of being as pulled along into its possibilities from out of what is has been (41-2/19-21). As Heidegger formulates it in the mature work of Being and Time, Destruktion means appropriating what has been transmitted to our own historical situation in tradition. Such appropriating means
also *rescuing* something originary from structures that no longer elucidate but have long since allowed it to sink into oblivion: “Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks out access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand” (43/21). Consequently, argues Heidegger, “this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved,” in order that we might “arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since” (44/22). Hermeneutic sketching is the ground-up retrieval of the temporal character of our “being” which arises always from such dismantling.

The process of dismantling is thus careful and methodical. *Dekstruktion*, as John D. Captuo notes, is not destruction, where the goal is simply to destroy a structure, but *deconstruction*, where the aim is to retrieve it more genuinely by way of the careful stripping away of concepts to expose underlying structures by way of more appropriate conceptuality.\(^{20}\) As Caputo goes on to argue,

> In *Being and Time* the work of destruction or deconstruction is deployed on two levels. In the first place, it must break through the accumulated, metaphysical commonplaces which envelop Dasein, whose Being is always interpreted in terms of the present, in order to exhibit the deeper Being of Dasein as a being of temporality. Dasein tends constantly to interpret itself in terms of the present and to turn away from its more radical being-toward-the-future. Hence the first work of deconstruction it to disrupt the predominance of Dasein’s self-interpretation as a being of the present (*Gegenwart*). And this leads to its second work: to disrupt the concomitant interpretation of Being itself in terms of presence (*Vorhandedsein, Anwesenheit, Praesenz*) [...] The desconstruction of the prevailing tradition will open the doors to a radical recovery of Being itself in terms of time.\(^{21}\)

I have been arguing that the procedure of Heidegger’s earliest sketches for a Hermeneutics of factical life gives rise to the precursor of the more formulaic process we find in *Being and Time*. The point in these lectures, I have suggested, is to find the right manner of approach that will enable us to bring the actualization sense (*Vollzugssinn*) of factical life into maturation.


\(^{21}\) Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 64-5.
(Zeitigung) or full expression as the self-interpretation it is. Heidegger characterizes the process as that of becoming wakeful to the situation as one’s own possibility for being. Accordingly, “The more we succeed in bringing facticity hermeneutically into our grasp and into concepts, the more transparent this possibility becomes.” On the other hand, “[a]s Dasein’s historical possibility which it in each case definite and for a while at the particular time, existence has as such already been ruined when one works with the idea that it can be made present in advance for philosophical curiosity to get a picture of it” (OHF, 15/GA 63, 18-20). Heidegger does not mention Destruktion in the course cited from the summer semester of 1923, but he argues there that the initially given directions of interpretation in both historical and philosophical “consciousness” (Bewußtsein) must themselves be investigated to free up the possibilities for being that they simultaneously indicate and hide (28/35-6).

Heidegger makes more explicit reference to Destruktion as it stands in conjunction with the task of formal indication in his 1919 review of Karl Jaspers’s Psychology of Worldviews. Here Heidegger stresses that the point of his critical review is to examine the pre- or fore-conception guiding Jaspers’ interpretation of life as something objectively given to theoretical consciousness in the mode of psychical being or the “uniform and unbroken whole [...] which transcends all oppositions, encompasses all life, and is free of all fragmentation and destruction” (PM, 15-17, 20/GA 9, 17-20). The aim of said review would be to determine whether the guiding preconception of Jaspers’ research is appropriate to the matter intended by the interpretation (i.e. life) (PM, 17/GA 9, 19-20). Heidegger’s is thus a functional analysis of the way in which the preconception grasps or intends its object.

There are two principal movements to this analysis. The phenomenologist first considers the formulation of the object of research in the preconception and the particular mode of experience from which this formulation arises. That is, he looks at the function that the preconception plays in grasping the object of research and to the origin of this very object itself in order to determine whether the philosophical explication guided by the preconception is appropriate to the object intended (PM, 24/GA 9, 28). The task is to determine whether the relational sense or “how” (manner) in which the object is initially given is properly correlated to

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the relational sense of the explication (21/24). The analysis examines the way in which the self-
interpretation of the factual situation has been formed out in “prestruction” (Prastruktion) – in
the development of a horizon or context of expectations for further actualization – according to
the guiding preconception (19/22). It asks whether this forming out opens us up to grasping the
object in its most radical possibility or whether it limits it in some manner (19-20/22-3). This is
the moment of De-struktion, where the structures of interpretation in the preconception are traced
back to the initial moment that gave rise to the interpretation. If the first movement points back
to the initial interpretive situation (“existence”), the second points forward, sketching out a
formal indication or further prestruction of this situation (21, 25/24-5, 29). These are not
temporally sequenced moments; rather, they happen in tandem as the process of “circling round”
the phenomenon of existence forms itself out in factual self-interpretation (24/29-9). Such
circling round is not yet what I am calling the circling back repetition of the actualization-sense,
but is the preliminary sketching out of the relational- and content-senses of the phenomenon
through the back and forth movement of de-structuring and pre-structuring (see Figure 1).

Heidegger describes the preconception guiding Jaspers’ research with respect to the mode
of access to its object, to the basic attitude in which the object is approached, and to the origin
of the conception itself (PM, 24/GA 9, 28-9). These correlate to the different senses of the mode of
being of factual life. In the first case, argues Heidegger, Jaspers adopts the then-common
subject-object conceptual schema to determine the content of life as something objectively
given as psychic being (15-16/18). Heidegger refers the schema and its concepts back to the
theoretical understanding of life from which they arose. He contends, in the second case, that Jaspers’
thought remains bound up in “fundamental aesthetic experience” or the attitude of disinterested
looking or “observation” that characterizes theoretical consciousness (19-20/22-3). Finally, in the
third case, Heidegger notes that Jaspers’ preconception is guided by the uncritical adoption of
philosophy’s tendency to abstract from the lived situation in formalizations that sanitize the

23 During his course on phenomenology at Marburg in the summer semester of 1927, Heidegger
further develops the phenomenological meaning of this process in suggesting that its moments
belong to the reduction. The reduction, argues Heidegger, has both a constructive and a
destructive moment. Inasmuch as it aims to return to the sources of experience, it can do so only
projectively in an interpretive sketching out of the factual situation. See Die Grundproblem der
Phänomenologie, GA 24 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975), 28-30; The Basic Problems
of Phenomenology, Revised Edition, edited and translated by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington /
messiness and particularity of life and that neutralize the anxiety of genuine struggle in the face of the indeterminate (22-3/26). My intention is not to evaluate the fairness or accuracy of Heidegger’s critical reading of Jaspers but to bring to light Heidegger’s own formally indicative Destruktion of philosophy. The question guiding his research is whether the preconception of Jaspers work is appropriate to its object.

Heidegger answers this question in the negative. At each stage of his analysis of Jaspers’ basic approach Heidegger dismantles the preconception by referring it to another formally indicated sense of factual life. With respect to Jaspers’ objectification of the content-sense of life (and his denigration of concepts as reifying instruments), Heidegger argues that it provides no access to life’s pre-theoretical directedness, its relational-being (PM, 16-17/GA 9, 18-19). Moreover, Jaspers’ relational mode of access – aesthetic gazing or observation – covers over the historical-contextual situation of an original understanding of life. Yet Heidegger argues that Jaspers’ does manage to sketch out the actualization-sense of factual life in his reference to limit-situations that bring us to concern ourselves with something essential. However, Jaspers uncritically adopts the Kantian aporias and a formalized version of Kierkegaard’s Absolute “which has been ‘cleansed’ of its specifically Lutheran religious sense and its particular theological meaning in this regard” as their theoretical expression (21-3/21-7). Accordingly, argues Heidegger, he covers over anxious concern for existence, which is the genuine temporal sense of the limit-situation, even while Jaspers’ own work contains a clue as to this character in its reference to the “transitoriness” of finite life (22/25). The formally indicated temporal sense of life then serves to break down the entire machinery of Jaspers’ formalizing approach in order to bring interpretation closer to the same object of his research.

Heidegger thus goes on to form out his own preliminary sketch, another pre-struction, of the senses of factual life, one which leaves behind the objectifying attitude that characterizes Jaspers’ work. Having dismantled Jaspers’ conceptuality down to the actualization-sense of the limit-situation, Heidegger begins to sketch out this sense in a retrieval of its existential character as lived situation, the situation of “I am” (PM, 25/GA 9, 29). The basic experience in which “I have myself in a particular “how” or manner of existing must be drawn out from the situation itself in its manifold ambiguity (PM, 25-6/GA 9, 29-30). Thus, hermeneutics must find a way to enter into the situation in an interpretation that formally indicates the way in which it is
originarily given. “When the sense of existence is investigated in terms of its origin and our genuine basic experience of it, we see that it is precisely that sense of being that cannot be obtained from the ‘is’ we use to explicate and objectify our experience in one way or another when we acquire knowledge about it” (PM, 26 /GA 9, 30; author’s emphases). Heidegger retrieves the actualization sense of the self as anxious concern for its own existence. This mode or manner of having-oneself is not originally oriented to the objectifying, theoretical attitude (28/32-3). Rather, its basic relational sense or manner of expression is that of conscience—wakeful awareness of the factual situation (28/32-3). Accordingly, the “how” of experiencing as conscience forms itself out in its orientation as self in its relational contexts. The self “has” itself through the contexts of its immediate world (Selbstwelt), the social or public world (Mitwelt), and the surrounding world of significances in which things show up (Umwelt) (GA 61, 94-6). These overlapping horizons of significance constitute the content-sense of the factual situation. From the “ground” of the concrete limit-situation of anxious concern for the self Heidegger sketches out the other basic senses of factual expression in terms of the latter’s temporal way of being. The hermeneutic retrieval emerges out of the lived situation itself as the formal indication of its own factual concern for itself.

We thus begin to see in a preliminary fashion the manner in which the formal indication differs from mere formalization in that it resists the objectifying attitude of the latter. As George Kovacs notes, “The phenomenological method, according to the appropriation of Husserl by the early Heidegger, is not a dialectical, theoretical construct; it consists in making oneself free from the theoretical attitude (from the primacy of the theoretical) and in orienting oneself towards and by (a liberation for) the primordial (pre-theoretical) intention of (the disposition to reach) true life and of living experience (participation, immersion in phenomenological living).” In other words, philosophical comportment, phenomenologically deployed, is a “primordial habit” (Urhabitus) of being. In his winter semester 1920/21 course Heidegger contends that the hermeneutic interpretation forms out factual life by an in-forming (Ein-bildung) and a re-forming (Umbildung) that clarifies the factual situation for itself as the temporality of concern for life (PIA, 99-100/GA 61, 134-35). As Heidegger states, “[t]he interpretation is fully

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25 Kovacs, “Philosophy as Primordial Science,” 130.
appropriated and actualized only when we understand, by tracing back over the course of its own progression, that it itself interpretively in-forms what was ‘left behind’ and incorporates this into the highest-attained level of the interpretation” (99-101/134-35). The formal indication finds its completion, not in the static object of theoretical consciousness, but in the incalculable moment of clarity of itself to itself as what is at stake, what is at issue in its concern (102-4/136-40). Life announces itself in the mode of this concern. Hermeneutics brings the announcement of life – what is left behind in the theoretical attitude – into sharper relief, brings it to maturation in a properly philosophical interpretation that struggles against the tendency of factical life to fall into a dissipated, distracted mode of existence wherein it hides its own historical and temporal character from itself in its “ruinance” (104, 113/140, 153).

As philosophy the formal indication develops the “self-givenness” of factical life in the attitude of a persistent questioning that “consists in living in the answer itself in a searching way, such that the answering maintains a constant relation to the questioning, i.e., such that the latter remains alive, or in other words, such that the basic experiences retain a factically historiological vitality in factical life and in its ontological sense” (PIA, 113-14/GA 61, 152-53). Life is eminently questionable to the factical situation as what is at stake for it as its most pressing possibility. Philosophical interpretation holds open this questionability of the situation to itself in regards to its own possibilities by bringing it, again and again, to the point of a “repetition” (Wiederholung) of the situation in a further actualization of its basic directedness toward the world of its concern (113/152-53). It is thus to the fulfillment of the formal indication in the full actualization of the existential situation that I now turn.

1.1.2 From Grasping to Being Grasped: Method as Existential Transformation

The task before us is to investigate Heidegger’s interpretation of facticial religiosity. Before moving on to this, I will briefly explain the moment of completion or maturation in the formal indication. As I argued in the previous section, the young Heidegger aimed to retrieve the factical situation according to its distinct senses of being – content, relational, and actualization senses – by way of an interpretation that grasps the situation from the ground up. Instead of objectifying the relational contexts of life in theoretical consciousness, the hermeneutics of
facticity sketches out the temporal modality of each of the senses, beginning from the way or manner in which life is actualized in its being-directed toward itself. This actualization comprises the historical situation of oriented to life out of a context of worldly relations for a particular while. I noted that the task of philosophy is to bring the self-interpretation of historical facticity to the level of questioning through pre-struction (forming out its possibilities) and de-struction (bringing interpretation to bear back on the situation itself). The formal indication carries out both of these preliminary tasks by formally sketching out the senses of the factual situation in their interrelatedness in the manner of a non-objectifying pointing. As an indication of the lived situation, Heidegger's method finds its fulfillment in our grasping of it in the right manner, i.e. in the “how” of its being.

The question that remains – which guides the study thus far – is just what the right manner of grasping the lived situation philosophically might be. How does the formal indication solve the problem of bringing the concrete to expression in the language of concepts? How can philosophical conceptuality, regardless of whether it springs out of the factual situation, avoid the violence of reduction? How does one “repeat” the self-retrieving character of life, inquires Kisiel, “without reflective distortion and intrusion?”

In the context of a philosophy of religion the question is of the utmost importance, given one’s concern therein to bring religious experience to speak philosophically and without distortion.

In the typecast of loose notes appended to the published version of the winter semester 1921/22 course, Heidegger makes the interesting claim – one which he would repeat in varying ways well into the 1930s – that the philosophical comportment is not religious and yet, on the other hand, to hold religious life open to philosophical questioning enables one to be “genuinely religious”: “i.e., to take up one’s worldly, historiological-historical task in philosophy, in action and in concrete word of action, thought not in religious ideology and fantasy” (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197-98). The questionability of life to itself is, Heidegger contends, not religious, even though “it might lead to a situation of religious decision” (148/197). Heidegger is of course aware of the fact that the actualization of philosophical questioning takes place in a context and from out of an historical situation. The formal indication of the situation therefore has meaning only in the

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context of that situation from whence it arose (see PRL, 44/GA 60, 63-4; PIA 50/GA 61, 66-7). But in each case it can bring the questionability of the situation to itself into sharper relief, to bring it to the place of decision. The philosophical interpretation is non-distortive – in Heidegger’s account – because it leads the factual situation to what is decisive for it in its own time. This may in fact mean that religious life is lifted out of its own “ideological” distortion and disclosed to itself in the “how” of its being. This is not to grasp religious life, in the mode of positivism, as the “rational” kernel stripped of its mythological accretions; rather it is to open the factual situation to whatever speaks to us out of the tradition by way of a *Destruktion* of that tradition back to its initial sources and the elevation (*Abhebung*) of these sources in their further concrete expression (PRL, 36/GA 60, 53-4).

I call this process of “elevation” to which Heidegger refers in the winter semester course of 1920/21 (“maturation” in the winter semester of the following year) the “circling back” moment of interpretation which brings the modes of being sketched out in the factual situation into their temporal actualization. As Jean Grondin contends, the formal indication needs to be filled “with concrete content according to our different situations.” As we saw in the previous section, the concept does not contain the object but only refers to it, opening factual self-interpretation out onto its own possibilities, awakening it to them and guiding further self-interpretation. The formal indication “introduces us to a situation of decision, but its concrete realization must remain open since it has to be performed (*vollgezogen*) but each specific Dasein in its own unique way.” The self-interpretation of hermeneutics, then, inevitably holds a moment of realization where the possibilities sketched out for our own particular situation are concretely actualized in a genuinely self-interpretive way. The circling back is the moment of

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27 Heidegger argues that the university, while not the necessary condition for doing philosophy, is an appropriate place for the enactment of the philosophical comportment because it (ideally) provides a place for philosophizing to take place without prior agendas and forced programs of research. It is questionable as to whether Heidegger maintained this rather sanguine view of the cultural power of the university throughout his career. The crucial point to take away from this, however, is that for Heidegger, philosophizing is always enacted *somewhere*, in the context of historical institutions with their own particular traditions and inherited ways of doing things.


repetition of factual self-interpretation wherein that which is bequeathed to factual life through its historical belonging to tradition is seized upon as one’s own possibility.

Hence, what must be noted here is that the goal of the hermeneutics of facticity is to bring the situation in its “character of being” as possibility for self-interpretation to a higher level of clarity for the sake of further appropriation (OHF, 11/GA 63, 15). Hermeneutics must do this because factual life is “alienated” from itself in its ordinary way of being (11/15). Though it is characterized by its care for itself, through its worldly goals and projects, factual life is continually falling away from itself into “ruinance” (Ruinanz) (PIA, 99/GA 61, 131). Ruinance is the particular direction of caring in which factual life tends away from itself into “collapse” (Sturz) (99/131). Factical life becomes absorbed into the seductive cares of everyday life (76/101-2). It thereby disperses its care and sequesters its experience of itself into its many projects, aims, and concerns that occupy it in the multifaceted contexts of its world (78-9/103-5). Factical life is inclined toward the easy or the light (das Leichte) way, where it avoids the difficult task of repetition in a primordial decision (81/109). The circling back interpretation is carried out once the ruinant features of the factual situation have been sketched out and grasped in terms of the more fundamental or genuine possibility for self-interpretation that they indicate. It is a transformative moment in which one begins to appropriate one’s own situation with heightened self-awareness as to the possibility for being a self at stake in it. Correlatively, the formally indicatory process of sketching out the senses of being is itself repeated, as the original ground up interpretation is submitted to further sharpening in light of situation’s turn away from its ruinance. Refined concepts continue to offer themselves up for phenomenological elucidation of the situation (78/104-5). There is thus a continual back and forth movement between the ground up retrieval, sketching out the possibilities of the factual situation, and the actualization of these possibilities which circles back on the original interpretive sketches, bringing a more mature perspective to bear on them.

It is thus evident that, in his attempts to sketch out a method for describing the primal levels of our pre-theoretical, pre-cognitive experience of the world in philosophical terms, Heidegger also sought to effect a radical transformation of the tradition. Philosophy would have to be re-appropriated as a way of bringing thought to bear on precisely those topics that are neglected or subsumed by a tradition dominated since Plato by the metaphysical interpretation of
the being of phenomena as essential form (eidos) and the corresponding epistemological attitude characterized by the reduction of all form to graspable object for thought. The problem with metaphysics, for Heidegger, is that it makes things too easy, in that it pre-conceives the matter for thinking as itself entirely open to cognition, if not to finite then at least to infinite cognition. In doing this it passes over precisely those phenomena of primal experience that are not subject to cognitive conceptual grasping. Philosophy must be brought out of its ruinance if it is to be awakened to the factical situation that speaks to it in the tradition, including religious traditions.30

The formal indication in its ground up and circling back hermeneutic retrieval is Heidegger’s tool for fine tuning the aim and attitude of philosophy, bringing it out of its fixation on static objects of theoretical consciousness and directing it back into the dynamic directedness of factical life. Only thus, as we will see, can the “positivism” of reductive theorizing be avoided and can something like religious life be brought to speak in philosophy. Not only did Heidegger find a way to resist the reductive theorizing implicit in both the neo-Kantian value philosophy and the historicism that were popular in the day (all the while appropriating their most important insights), but as I shall argue, he also discovered in religious life senses of experience that would prove decisive for his own interpretation of the factical situation. Primarily in primordial Christian religiosity Heidegger uncovered and awakened philosophical resources that would help him launch his own critical confrontation with modernity. It is to Heidegger’s earliest sketches of a phenomenology of religion – in the mode of a hermeneutics of facticity – that I turn in the second half this chapter.

30 However, as Theodore Kisiel has convincingly shown, Heidegger’s early method, spanning the decade of the 1920s, undergoes a series of subtle shifts away from the notion that philosophy would describe the being-there of human beings on the basis of the temporal horizon, taken to be primordial, toward the less metaphysically charged stance that it would merely attempt to be the temporal occasion for a “leap” into one’s own historical situation. Heidegger’s philosophy thus becomes suspicious and critical of its earlier transcendental aims. I will take up this topic in more detail in Chapter 2 of the present work. Cf. Theodore Kisiel, “The Demise of Being and Time: 1927-1930.”
1.2 Retrieval of Primordial Religious Life

Heidegger’s investigations of what he terms *primordial Christian religiosity* (urchristliche Religiosität) in his 1920/21 lectures on Sts. Paul and Augustine, and *religious consciousness* (des religiösen Bewußtseins) in his 1918/19 sketches for a lecture course on the foundations of medieval mysticism, basically carry out the same formal process I sketched out in the first half of this chapter. In fact, as scholars such as John van Buren and Theodore Kisiel have shown in recent decades, much of Heidegger’s formulation of the project of a hermeneutics of facticity emerged from his earliest engagements with religious sources. My intention here is not to repeat the work that has already been done but to inquire as to what Heidegger contributes to the question of the possibility of a philosophy of religion. His earliest work begins from an investigation of specifically Christian religiosity, and while it is important to note the distinction between this and religion in general, it follows from Heidegger’s own methodological positioning that the *form* of religiosity remains in certain ways inextricably rooted in the particular *content* of religious life. Thus, while the aim of a phenomenology of religion is to explicate the contours of religious life in general as much as possible, said explication remains on the insurmountable bedrock of a tradition. We might say that participation in the tradition to some extent is the necessary condition of phenomenological disclosure of the form it institutes. One might of course ask whether such an approach affords sufficient degree of critical leverage to the philosopher to weigh out the normative framework and implicit claims of a particular religious tradition. I think that it does and that in fact Heidegger engages in just such a critical endeavor – a point to which I will return in this chapter.

I will thus investigate these early sources with an eye to their degree of success as philosophical retrievals of religious life which draw their impetus and conceptuality from the factical situation itself. I argue here that in these early lectures Heidegger manages to open philosophical interpretation to layers of meaning in factical religiosity that could not be accessed under the reigning life- and value-philosophy paradigms of his day. Moreover, Heidegger himself aims to unlock the hidden potential in important sources of “Christian religiosity” and

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32 I extend my gratitude to Jay Lampert for his critical comments on this score.
“religious consciousness” in order to allow these sources to speak to and possible transform our own historical situation. There is a ground up and circling back movement of retrieval in Heidegger’s early analyses of factical life that aims to allow religion to speak into our own situation.

I follow Benjamin D. Crowe’s important study on Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion in my argument that Heidegger looks to primordial sources of religiosity, not merely to rescue their lived historical meaning from reductive, objectifying analyses (though this is indeed an important thrust of his project), but also in order to subject to critique the tin ear for religious meaning – for anything that commands human beings and binds them over in dependence to something radically “other” – bequeathed to us by modernity.33 Crowe argues that Heidegger discloses religious meaning as radically given rather than created.34 According to Crowe, Heidegger’s explicatory method brings our interpretation to bear on the basic self-understanding in religious experience – at least in the particular religious situations Heidegger brings to light – that human beings are radically dependent on a mysterious source which surges up into expression through them and gives them over to the possibility of response. “Anti-realist” paradigms inherited from Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and the Neo-Kantians bar access to an appropriation of this understanding for modern times.35 “Heidegger’s aim in depicting the fundamental contours of religious life is to open it up as a live possibility for actual men and women in the modern world.”36 The hermeneutics of religious life is marked by a deep concern for culture, to open us up to sources of meaning that have been covered over in the crisis of meaningfulness that confronts our situation in (now) late modernity.37 Heidegger’s analyses of religious life are also fruitful sources meant to “stimulate internal dynamism within religion itself,” to awaken it as the force of change to our own situation.38

Yet beyond Crowe’s analysis of Heidegger’s ground up retrieval of religion, I contend that Heidegger also circles back to repeat what he believes to be the most basic senses of being

34 Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 141.
35 Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 139.
38 Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 139.
of religious life in the manner of *philosophical* self-interpretation. Heidegger was not simply a “provocateur,” challenging modern thinkers to remain true to the original sources of religion; rather, he also attempted to bring these original sources in a transformed way into philosophical comportment in and for itself.\(^{39}\) I suggest at the close of this chapter that these two aims in fact remain in tension throughout Heidegger’s early analyses of religious life, bringing these analyses into its own interpretive crisis or moment of decision. Such would set the stage for Heidegger’s more formalizing analyses of “existence” during the Marburg years (1924-29).

I thus turn to Heidegger’s ground up retrieval of religious life – his *Destruktion* of the dominant thought paradigms of his day and his subsequent analysis of primordial sources of religiosity in their basic ontological senses (content, relation, and actualization).

### 1.2.1 Destruktion of Neo-Kantianism and Historicism

In the winter semester of 1920/21 Heidegger tasked himself with the project of a hermeneutic retrieval of factical religiosity. The problem guiding this research is the same as that guiding all of Heidegger’s earliest investigations of factical life: The core phenomenon to be treated philosophically is *historical* – i.e. “becoming, emergence, proceeding in time” – the movedness of life itself (PRL, 22/GA 60, 32). Heidegger inquires as to whether and in what respect the historical is to be made a problem for philosophy. On the one hand, it is unclear whether (traditional) philosophy, “which seeks the eternally valid”, must remain anything but indifferent to the flux of historical change and movement (22/32). On the other hand, as we saw in previous sections, the historical itself confronts philosophy with the problem of the appropriateness of its own (philosophy’s) conceptuality. For philosophy grows out of the historical and points back into it. The *object* of philosophy is historical, even if philosophy seeks in this historical object something that withstands historical transformation (23/32). The problem of a philosophy of religion thus also concerns the way in which the historical phenomenon of lived religiosity will be brought into philosophy, whether philosophy will remain indifferent to its sense as *lived* experience in favour of the eternally valid and how philosophy will bring this object into concepts in an interpretation.

\(^{39}\) Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 41.
Given what we have seen, it will not come as a surprise that Heidegger subjects philosophical analyses of religion that aim for eternal validity and neutrally objective description to phenomenological destruction in order to clear the way for the retrieval of factual religiosity in its character as historical. Heidegger directs his preliminary destructive analysis against the regnant philosophical paradigms of his day in order to expose the ways in which philosophical treatments of religion had fallen into the tendency theoretically to objectify the factual situation and thus to reduce it in its complex polysemy to a graspable content (PRL 24/GA 60, 35). The polysemous complexity of the individual situation, we will recall, is for Heidegger bound up in the “how” or manner of its existence – in its relational sense – and in the way in which this multiform sense is concretely actualized. In his early courses Heidegger argues that the theoretical attitude bars access to the proper object (Objekt) of philosophy because it preconceives it primarily in terms of its nature as content (Inhalt) or thing (Gegenstand) (PRL, 25/GA 60, 35). The theoretical attitude is primarily a sort of positivism in the sense that it searches for rigidly graspable or unchanging aspects within the dynamic of experience in light of the preconception that only these are positively meaningful to philosophy because of their eternal validity or transcendental significance for life as a whole (see PIE, 115/GA 56, 149).

The regnant paradigms for the philosophy of religion in Heidegger’s day belonged to the thought of his neo-Kantian contemporaries, i.e. Rickert, Natorp, Windelband, Cohen, Troeltsch, and to the “historicist” and “life” philosophies of Dilthey, Bergson, Simmel, and Spengler. Heidegger consistently argues that the reigning philosophies of his day were in various ways guided by the preconception of the task of philosophy as that of liberation from the “disturbance” (Beunruhigung) of history (PRL, 27/GA 60, 39). According to this preconception, philosophy must secure stable meaning against the flow of historical change. It must seek to find ways of bringing the historical consciousness of human beings out of the shifting sands of contingency onto the firm ground of eternal verities. It must mediate the “stuff” of immediate reality, forming it into the object of a representation (PRL, 28/GA 60, 40-1). On this constellation of views, history is at best the material complex from which emerges, is constituted, the form of an absolute norm or value (neo-Kantian). Or else history itself is an objective absolute whose meaningfulness emerges from the flux of occurrences (historicism). In either case the attitudinal stance toward history is a theoretically objectifying one which above all looks toward history after the manner of its content or sense of “whatness”. These paradigms
ignore the relational senses of factual life in their particular actualization as concretely lived history – they tend to embody the struggle against the radically temporal character of the concrete situation characteristic of factical ruinance (PRL, 26-7/GA 60,38-40). The struggle against the concrete character of factical life is taken up in the theoretical stance which seeks to insulate itself from the uncontrollable and changing nature of the historical.

As we have seen, Heidegger’s method of Destruktion is aimed at stirring up factical self-interpretation, at re-awakening the primal source and impetus of our philosophizing so as to bring it into repeated self-expression as lived temporality. Destruktion is the careful dismantling of philosophical concepts that hinder philosophy’s task of pointing us back to the primal sources for the sake of the renewal of life (see PIE, 59/GA 56,75). Heidegger thus isolates the preconception guiding philosophical analyses and holds it to the basic criterion of such renewal or actualization (Vollzug) of life. In another course taught in 1920, entitled Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression, Heidegger summarizes that the criterion of primordial philosophy is a matter of the basic direction and tendency of the questioning: It must point in the direction of the actualization of life in its particular “how” or way of being and it must as an interpretation tend toward the repetition of this existence through co-constituting it, i.e. bring it to its mature self-expression, though not in any objectifying sense (PIE, 59/GA 56, 75). The task is to show where philosophical analyses have gone wrong, where they have slipped up and allowed an objectifying attitude towards factical life to creep in. The result is to release the genuine philosophical impulse motivating the theory – to understand life in and out of itself – from the inappropriate attitude and conceptuality guiding it.

According to Heidegger, the crucial difference between neo-Kantian and historicist philosophies of his day lay in the respective aims and conceptualities guiding their approaches to history and not in their basic attitude, which remained in both cases an objectifying one from the theoretical standpoint. Heidegger’s Destruktion thus exposes the way in which the aims and conceptualities of these philosophies remain bound up in a problematic attitude or approach toward the matter.

The neo-Kantian philosophers, argues Heidegger, remain within the basically “Platonic” aim of understanding historical reality “by reference to the realm of ideas, in whatever way one may grasp them” (PRL, 27/GA 60, 39). The “Platonic way” interprets the being of history in
terms of supra-temporal norms and principles. Heidegger argues that this tendency originally was enacted in the attitudinal struggle against scepticism and relativism. In order to secure truth amid the temporal flux of appearances, theory must land itself upon that which does not change. It must secure the logical sub-structure or super-structure of appearances. Theory itself thereby aspires to the position of knowledge (epistēmē) in grasping toward the absolute, unchanging principle of all that changes. However, understood in this way, theory is for Heidegger one possible manifestation of the attempt to “assert oneself against history” (PRL, 27/GA 60, 39).

The objectifying attitude obscures the relational- and content-senses of factual life by attempting to grasp them purely logically in the form of a-historical principles. The Neo-Kantian philosophy of Herman Cohen, Wilhelm Windelband, and Heinrich Rickert merely give this Platonism a “transcendental” spin, argues Heidegger. He argues that these thinkers interpret the mediation between the historical and the ideal in terms of the “having to do with consciousness” (bewußtseinsmäßig gewendet) (PRL, 33/GA 60, 49). The fundamental attitude toward the historical remains in these thinkers an objectifying one. The historical is rendered meaningful in terms of the norms of pure logic belonging to the immanence of subjectivity. Truth as meaning is completely interiorized in the subject, but it is not thereby the witness to any radical transformation. It consists in a-historical norms that secure the objectivity of conscious experience of the world (PRL, 33/GA 60, 49).

In the area of philosophy of religion Neo-Kantian philosophy translates into the grasping of the so-called religious a priori, the supposedly “general essential structure” underlying or constituting religious consciousness, as Ben Vedder notes.40 Religion is here treated as the historical instantiation “of an extra-temporal lawfulness” (PRL, 52/GA 60, 76). The historical self-understanding of the believer is translated into theoretical knowledge which follows the rules of a formalized logic of experience guided by norms and values (PRL, 27/GA 60, 38-40). Religious life itself is ultimately referred to these norms and values as its ideal form (27/38-40). Even where philosophy allows for an experience of the sublime beyond knowable forms of experience – as in Rudolf Otto’s phenomenology of the holy – interpretation of this experience takes place against the background of the supposedly a priori laws of culture (PRL, 252/GA 60, 333-34). Throughout, philosophical attempts to secure the relation of the historical to the supra-

historical on the basis of a priori norms of value and rationality, and the attempt to secure the relation of these norms to the further “irrational” moment of overpowering, are plagued by the age-old problem of the relation between the two worlds of the eternally unchanging and the temporally contingent sphere of becoming (PRL, 27, 252/GA 60, 39, 333-34). Heidegger is not concerned with solving the “analytic” puzzle as much as he is with seeing in this philosophical disconnect a clue to our deeper factual tendency to avoid the confrontation with life in its radically historical character. Conversely, the a priori interpretation of religiosity is at odds with the factual self-interpretation that expresses itself in the comportment of the religious believer. Not only does objectifying philosophy turn itself away from the “how” of historical life toward its content, but even the content (Inhalt) is secured in an inauthentic way. It must be twisted free of inappropriate conceptual schematics and brought into its genuine meaning as religious.

Apart from the Neo-Kantians, the historicist or “life” philosophies of Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and Oswald Spengler do not aim to grasp the a-temporal form of historical and cultural development. In a reversal of the “Platonic” emphasis, these philosophical positions (indebted as they are to Nietzsche) variously interpret the dynamic flow of history as the absolute basis of all particular instantiations of meaning. Their basic aim and conceptualities are thus different from those of the Neo-Kantians (PRL, 28-9/GA 60, 40-3). However, Heidegger argues that these philosophies remain within the same basic attitude or philosophical orientation of an objectifying relation to history. In contrast to the “ontological” founding of history in the “meta-real lawfulness” of norms characterizing Neo-Kantian philosophy, the historicist philosophers remain solely within an ‘epistemological’ preconception (PRL, 25/GA 60, 40-1). Simmel asks, for instance, how historical meaning arises from the immediately given and in what form (25/40-1). Similarly, Spengler searches for the origin or emergence of the temporal present within the “objective process of historical happening” without appealing to an ontological ground or basis beyond this flow (29-30/41-3). Thus, in both of these philosophies, “[h]istory is not contrasted to an extra-temporal reality; rather, the security of the present against history is reached in that the present itself is seen as historical” (30/43). Nevertheless, the historical itself is approached from out of an objectifying attitude that Heidegger traces back to Dilthey’s philosophy.

Of these thinkers, it was Dilthey who initially divided reality up into the categories of the “natural-scientific” and the “historical” in his attempt to distance the model for the historical
human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) from that used in the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) (PRL, 28/GA 60, 40-1). But Dilthey’s motive was to raise the historical to the level of scientific comprehension. Subsequent thinkers following on Dilthey’s footsteps attempted to answer the question of how a distinctly *historical* objectivity arises, i.e. how we are to characterize history in a manner that is appropriate to it. Those indebted to Dilthey’s insights, especially Simmel, *historicized* the knowing subject in the process of investigating how history itself comes to be known (PRL, 29/GA 60, 41-3). While Simmel is concerned as much for the “reality” of history as for its affective “content”, he does not turn fully to the historicity of the factual situation. On the contrary, as Heidegger notes, for him “a reality in itself is not yet historical” (29/42). There is no underlying subjectivity in Spengler’s “ebb and flow of the becoming of ‘Being which rests in its midst’” (30/43), but with Dilthey he wishes to raise history to the level of a science (29/41-3). In his lecture course from the summer semester of 1920, Heidegger argues that Dilthey’s attempts to construct a life philosophy beginning from the very phenomenon of historical life itself go awry because of his objectifying approach to the “animated actuality” (*seelische Wirklichkeit*) of life (GA 59, 166; my translation). Dilthey orients the whole of his philosophy by the question of *constitution*, i.e. of the possibility conditions for understanding life as a unity (PIE, 127/GA 59, 166). Thus, the unity of life of the human being is approached from the standpoint of how it comes together from out of a primal complex of powers or drives. Thus, “[t]he self that holds together the unity of the mental [*seelische*] only plays the role of driving forces, of the impulse for the development” (PIE, 128/GA 59, 167). The original of the historical self is comprehended in terms of the objective conditions of its possibility.

Heidegger applauds historicist and life philosophies for their attempt to return to the initial historical situation from out of which philosophy arises without reifying it into static, supra-temporal structures. Indeed, by his own admission, much of the impetus for Heidegger’s own philosophizing comes from Dilthey’s work: “Life philosophy is for us a necessary station on the way of philosophy, in contrast to empty formal transcendental philosophy” (PIE, 119/GA 59, 134). But in the philosophy of religion, the objectifying tendency of life philosophy stands in the way of philosophy’s entering into the factual situation in its own manner of being. It tends to view religion as the culmination of primordial drives that push it along. It interprets religion
strictly as the construct or overflow of creative impulses, as Benjamin D. Crowe notes. Such a view remains at odds with religious life in its own factical self-understanding. Most religions do not hold that their gods are simply constructed, though they may view human culture and history as the medium of divine self-giving. Not only so, but Heidegger sees in the scientific desire of life philosophy to lay the foundations of historical objectivity (PIE, 120/GA 59,156) the tendency towards factical ruinance. “Culture,” argues Heidegger, is simply another name for the dispersion of factical concern into its desire for security against the turbulence of its own nature as historical being (PRL, 34/GA 60, 49). Life philosophy similarly neutralizes the shocking force of religion in its potential to bring us face to face with our own historical situation – perhaps as being addressed by something we know not what. The return to the historical situation – in this case to the religious sources that have been passed down to us culturally – thus requires a more originary way of appropriating it for ourselves.

What is retrieved in Heidegger’s Destruktion of Neo-Kantian and life philosophies? Through his careful dismantling of these philosophies Heidegger is able to formulate a guiding preconception for his own investigative foray into factical religious life. He rescues from the life philosophers the impetus to remain with the historical situation itself as the sole “site” of philosophizing. Heidegger also radicalizes the “ontological” motivation of the Neo-Kantians into the attempt to take up the historical situation in the “how” of its being and to carry it forth in a further repetition of its basic senses. Thus, Heidegger turns away from the positivism of contemporary philosophical interpretations of religion in their tendency to secure objectively stable “meanings” against or within the flow of history. Heidegger turns toward the factical concern motivating the desire for meaning and asks how this concern might play itself out in the situation of religious life (PRL, 35-7/GA 60, 52-4).

The goal of Heidegger’s investigation is to discover the original sense in which religious meaning is actualized or brought about in historical existence. With his dismantling of contemporary philosophy, the ideas of religion as instantiation of supra-temporal norms or as the cultural outworking of “consciousness” are discarded. Using factical concern as his guiding preconception, Heidegger sketches out a preliminary characterization of primordial Christian religiosity as originally historical life experience and as such, lived temporality (PRL, 52, 55/GA

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41 Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 55.
His earliest sketches of the “concern” characterizing religious life are gleaned from various thinkers who show some insight into the pre-reflective, tacit character of religious life as worldly experience and go some distance toward unpacking a phenomenological understanding of the object of religious devotion. I turn now to Heidegger’s retrieval of these thinkers and his more systematic sketches of religious life in Sts. Paul and Augustine.

1.3 The Ground-up Retrieval of Religious Life

In an informal lecture given in honour of his friend Heinrich Ochsner in 1917, Heidegger sketches out his own earliest views of religion in conversation with Schleiermacher’s second speech, Über die Religion. Taking his cue from Schleiermacher’s notion, Heidegger argues that religious intentionality is characterized by its feeling of complete dependence on the infinite (OR, 89/GA 60, 319). The infinite is the “given” field or topic of religious experience. Heidegger’s translates into phenomenological terms Schleiermacher’s call for an interpretive return to religion on its own terms – suspending “teleologies” or self-grounding notions not derived from religious experience. He calls for the bracketing or epochē of the “alien teleology” of theoretical thinking (OR, 90/GA 60, 320-21). Phenomenological investigation of religion “is a matter of revealing an original domain of life and of the performance of consciousness (or feeling) in which religion alone actualizes itself as a definite form of vital experience” (OR, 90/GA 60, 320-21). Thought from out of the intentional comportment of contemplation religion is understood here in terms of the dynamic interconnection of moments of receptivity and activity (90-1/321-22): It is the receptivity characterized by the feeling of absolute dependence on the infinite whole of life expressed in “dedicative submission” and the corresponding action or re-action that integrates this experience into the whole of one’s worldly existence. Obviously, these two “moments” cannot be ontologically separated, since they are part of the same dynamic receptive-active movement of religious life itself (91/321-22). Citing Schleiermacher, Heidegger thus determines that religious life is “‘nothing other than the constant renewal of this process,’” i.e. the return to a primordial experience of being-moving in further repetitions. Religion is thus radically historical. The “noetic” moment of radical dependence is folded into its “noematic” integration into the content of lived experience and arises only in and for this context (91/321-22). Schleiermacher is thus Heidegger’s earliest guide for the development of an ontological
analysis of religion as this “mysterious” phenomenon of an originary givenness which is only insofar as it is folded into the relational contexts of worldly historical existence.

A few other thinkers were instrumental in helping Heidegger work out a guiding preconception of religious life in its basic senses. Notwithstanding Schleiermacher’s influence, Rudolph Otto’s phenomenological study The Holy (1917) also had an impact on Heidegger’s earliest understanding of religious life, helping him to sketch out a sense of the content of religious life in plans for a course on Medieval Mysticism to be held in 1918/19. As already mentioned, Heidegger resisted Otto’s tendency to obscure the “religious world of experience” by way of an overly theoretical approach to the topic (PLR, 251/GA 60, 332-3). As Heidegger contends, “the holy may not be made into a problem as theoretical—also not an irrational theoretical—noema, but rather as correlate of the act-character of ‘faith,’ which itself is to be interpreted only from out of the fundamentally essential experiential context of historical consciousness” (251/322-33). Heidegger here notes that faith is a possible mode of pre-theoretical existence. The intentional character of faith can be made clear only where Otto’s rational projection/irrational counter-projection schema has been cleared away and the historical nature of religious life as a manner of being in the world is brought into view (251/333). Heidegger inquiringly suggests that the “original structure” of the noumenous includes both the ethical and rational aspects of worldly being, i.e. that these “moments” are not autonomous in the religious world but are directed or oriented by the “originary objectity” of the holy (252/333-34). Heidegger thus transforms Otto’s notion of the holy into the telos and intrinsic ordering of the religious world.

In the same 1918/19 sketches, Heidegger shows that his preconception of the content of religion was also guided by the phenomenological work of Adolf Reinach and the mystical reflections of Meister Eckhart. Reinach pursued the question of the possible meaning of the relation to God or the “absolute” (PRL, 245/GA 60, 324-25). The object, contends Heidegger, “receives its full concretion only in the way that it shows itself in a historicity [Historizität]” (246/325-26). Pursued in the direction of its “how” or relation, the content of the absolute is sketched out by Reinach as the experience of an absolute dependency on God in the feelings of “gratefulness and love” (PRL, 247/GA 60, 326-27). Reinach thus uncovered pre-reflective basic orientations to the world. As Crowe summarizes, Reinach noted that the experience of
dependency or “being-sheltered in God” (247/326-27) “contains a tacit awareness of God,” such that “the experience makes no sense apart from the supposition that God, in fact, is present.”

As Crowe rightly contends, Reinach’s insight helped Heidegger along in his formal indication of the tacit, worldly character of religious meaning along with the sort of content that characterizes the aim or telos of religious devotion. The problem, of course, is how to sketch out the sense of a relation to the absolute or to that which is “without determination” (as Heidegger notes in his reflections on Meister Eckhart’s mysticism) (240/316). Again, Heidegger destructively appropriates a concept from a religious thinker in order to sketch out a preconception of the structure of this relation. Eckhart’s “soul” – the pre-theoretical “ground” of experience in which wells up an understanding of the absolute as the “radical unity” in which one’s own life is hidden – is the precursor to Heidegger’s own attempts to point out the pre-reflective complex of practices in which the concrete presence of God is implicitly understood (440-41/316-19).

From the ground up these authors thus provoke philosophy to turn away from any attempt to grasp religion as cognitive belief towards an understanding of its factual character as living practices within the multilayered, multifaceted relational nexus of the “world.” Those familiar with Heidegger’s work will recognize that world is a technical term he uses to denote the network of significances that forms the tacit background or horizon of our activities (see BT, 93/SZ, 65). It comprises the relational, often goal-oriented contexts in which we move and live. The notion of world was already firmly in place in Heidegger’s early lecture courses, wherein he discusses three interweaving layers of this phenomenon, moving out from one’s immediate self-world (Selbstwelt) into the “with-world” (Mitwelt) of shared meanings and practices to the surrounding world (Umwelt) of inherited significances through which one moves (see PIA, 72/GA 61, 95-6). At every level, world is characterized by meaningfulness: Through its concern for itself life is oriented towards things and people in its world (70/92-4). The world becomes meaningful to factual life according to the way in which life is oriented to determine meanings that emerge in it (70-1/93-5). The world is meaningful in my life in accordance with the ways in which it forms the horizon of my various social roles and relationships, goals, projects, and concerns. Primordially, before I even come to think about the world and my life in it, I find myself already having been pre-reflectively oriented to its tacit meanings which could never be

42 Crowe, Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion, 73.
made fully explicit. Through his reading of religious thinkers, Heidegger discloses a sense of religion as precisely this pre-reflective orientation. Before even coming to “believe” anything in the sense of formulated doctrines, the religious person is bound up in a nexus of practices that orients him to the world. Although, doctrines and complex theological formulations, too, belong to and arise out of the lived contexts of the religious world, as Heidegger contends in his later (1927) lecture “Phenomenology and Theology” (which I address in Chapter 2), it remains the case that the basic attitudes and practices characterizing the religious life-world are primary.

Moreover, these religious authors provoke Heidegger to see that what characterizes the world of primordial religiosity is a basic direction or telos: The content of primordial religiosity – the givenness of the object of worship – is actualized in the relational contexts of world. What makes it uniquely religious is that it is given as the orienting meaning that grounds an understanding of the world as a whole. God or the holy is encountered “in” the world as the final or absolute aim of a given, intrinsic order of meaning. From the basis of this formally indicative sketch of religious life, Heidegger engages in more systematic readings of Paul and Augustine in two courses from 1921. I will thus give a brief analysis of Heidegger’s fuller indication of the three senses of religious life in these figures in order to trace out his formally indicative sketches of the structures of religious meaning.

1.3.1 Content-sense of Religion: Living Before God in the World

St. Paul and St. Augustine are two figures in the history of religious thought who develop a thoughtful response to pre-theoretical religious life. In his 1921 sketches for a course on religious life, Heidegger draws inspiration from these thinkers, following in the footsteps of their non-objectifying manner of thinking about religion. Religion cannot be fashioned into the object of a theoretical science in the mode of positivisms; rather, philosophy must find a way to point us towards the factual structures or senses of religious meaning so that we can come to understand them for ourselves from out of our own situation. Philosophy can only sketch out what we must grasp for ourselves in an originary appropriation.

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43 See also Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 67.
In his ground-up retrieval of Paul and Augustine, Heidegger sketches out the phenomenological meaning of the content (the “what”) of religious life as worldly existence that is enacted before God. The content of Christian existence is not originally an idea or belief about the divine; instead, it is a concrete mode of worldly being whose factual self-understanding is carried out in awareness of having already been addressed by and having already been pressed into a response to God (PRL, 93-4/GA 60, 131-2). In Paul’s letters, Heidegger argues, the *proclamation* of the Apostle to believers in his care is the form of this address. The content of the proclamation, Heidegger contends, is that which is “triggered in factual life experience, awakened, disturbed, *forced* in the basic self-worldly experience.” Even the “resistance” that believers expressed to Paul’s proclamation belongs to the basic content of Christian being-in-the-world (PRL, 93-4/GA 60, 131-2). Heidegger locates the content of religious life in Augustine in the latter’s response to his famous question opening the *Confessions*: “But what do I love, when I love you?” (130/178-9). Again, the content of the religious life is not a doctrine of divine substance or an idea about the nature of God. Instead, Augustine looks to his own inner life as a believer to discern the right way in which to understand the hidden source of this life (140/190-92). According to Heidegger’s phenomenological reading, Augustine determines the content of the religious life as the expression of a desire for the fulfilled life (*beata vita*) lived out “before God” (145/197-98). In the case of both Paul and Augustine, the content of concrete religious life is a mode of being-in-the-world – the sense of living towards and in God – and not the object of a possible cognition.

### 1.3.1.1 The content of the proclamation in Paul

According to Heidegger, Paul is an eschatological thinker for whom God is manifest in the cruciform transformation of the believer from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from slavery to sonship (OHF, 86/GA 63, 111). As van Buren notes, Heidegger retrieves from Paul the primal understanding of God in terms of “a mystery ‘hidden in suffering’ in the cross.”

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44 John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, 160
is *Deus absconditus* rather than *summum ens* of Scholasticism, the God hidden in absence rather than manifest in glorious presence.⁴⁵

The content of such manifestation, contends Heidegger, is the historical facticity of the believer himself. A phenomenological analysis of this content from the ground up must therefore turn to the mode in which the manifestation unfolds in and through the life of the believer: “Christian religiosity is in factical life experience, it actually is this itself. We attempt to understand this from out of the apostolic proclamation of Paul” (PRL, 93/GA 60, 132; italicizing removed). The proclamation is the basic phenomenon that shapes Paul’s self-world in relation to the communal world toward which he addresses himself: Paul expresses his situation to the churches of Galatia and Thessalonika through the epistolary form. Heidegger thus determines that the epistolary proclamation must guide our own appropriation of the content-sense of Paul’s religious situation (54/77-8). The content cannot without distortion be removed from the situation of urgency expressed by Paul’s letters and sketched out in the context of disinterested literary analysis of New Testament “history,” for example (58/80-2). It must be sketched out from a preliminary understanding of the factical urgency of the matters discussed. Heidegger calls this attempt to address Paul’s situation a “turning-around” (*Umwendung*) from the object-historical (*Objektgeschichtlichen*) to the enactment-historical (*Vollzugsgeschichtlichen*) meaning of the situation (60/90). It is the attempt to sketch out the sense of live temporality that determines the situation of the believers to whom Paul addressed his proclamation.

According to Heidegger, God is proclaimed by Paul in the figure of the *parousia*. The believers at the church of Thessalonika experience themselves, i.e. live out their self-understanding, as already having-becoming (*Gewordensein*) believers through Paul’s original proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ (PRL, 65/GA 60, 93-4). There has already been an original actualization of the “absolute turning-around” (from idols toward God) experienced in the life of the believers in the form of a transformation of one’s own self-understanding (66/94-5). The believer lives as though continually in the presence of God in a sharpened “anguish of life” and the “incomprehensible” joy of their sense of having been accepted into the divine life (66/95). But Paul admonishes the believers at Thessalonika that the “having” of God here is a continual transformation of life, or a continual turning-toward that withstands the tendency of

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life to become absorbed in the desire for the easily graspable, the “idol images” of the divine (56/95-7). The believer should not thus concern himself, writes Paul, with the determination of when his religious observance will be consummated in the final coming of Christ. Heidegger argues that Paul points the believer away from an objectivising attitude toward the *parousia* or return of Christ (i.e. searching for the “when”). His aim is to re-awaken and stir up the “uncertainty” of the Christian life in the factual situation of believers entrusted to his care (73-4/104-5). Expectation of the *parousia* must be experienced in the urgency of a call to a common purpose, to a common faith in Christ crucified and resurrected that anchors the very world-context of those who are called (PRL, 99-100/GA 60, 140-41). The question of the parousia “refers back to the enactment of life itself”; its content is “the day of the Lord” that surprises one like a thief (72-3/104-5). The believers of Paul’s day were asking him to disclose to them when the Messiah would return and instead of addressing the question Paul answered by pointing them back to the unexpected decision of faith that originally rose upon them, proclaiming that they must continually await the return of this form of the *parousia*, to continue to remain in the insecurity and uncertainty of faith (73/104-5).

There is thus a dual-movement in Heidegger’s sketch of the content-sense of primal Christian religiosity in Paul. On the one hand, the proclamation of the Apostle to the believers in Thessalonika, an admonition to come out of their absorption in the cares of the present world, must be placed back into the context of their having-become members of the community of the faithful (PRL, 66/GA 60, 94-5). That is, Paul’s proclamation cannot be understood in isolation from its belonging to an entire context of practices and significances that form the world of the believing community. On the other hand, the “world” of the believing community is re-understood through the proclamation which exhorts believers to take hold of its most fundamental sense, the *parousia* of Christ. This world is eschatological, or as Heidegger puts it, “absolutely teleological” (PRL, 93/GA 60, 132). The *world* of the believer, in all of its facets, is teleologically rooted in the eschatological form of the call that interrupts the believer and redirects him to the coming kingdom of God. In this very process of re-directing, the human being is appropriated to God, becomes the living expression of the divine *pneuma*, and even “becomes God himself” (88/123-24). The knowledge of God, the content of religious life, arises only from this “spirit” or *pneuma* which animates the life of the believer and gives meaningful direction to all of the aspects of his world.
Christian religiosity is thus originarily being-in-the-world. The Christian lives out his life as before God, but does so out of the factual situation of the self, communal, and surrounding worlds of concern. Things like basic dogmas and theological formulations are not themselves primary, since these arise out of the factual situation of the religious life-world (PRL, 79-80/GA 60, 112-13). As Crowe glosses, the “tacit or pre-thematic ‘understanding’ of religious meaning is ‘lived out’ in religious life, primarily in the concrete practices and attitudes that are characteristic of a religious community.” Notwithstanding this fact, “the more rarefied flowerings of religious life, such as theological reflection, are anchored in the same structure.” What is this basic structure? Heidegger interprets Paul’s “world” (kosmos) as the directedness of the entire historical-factual situation. In the context Paul’s cruciform and eschatological understanding of the parousia, the present world is fundamentally opposed to the world of the believer. It is directed by an antithetical telos – the dissipated aim for peace and security amid the uncertainty and insecurity of life: “Previously the pagans, no link in a complex of significance or even in a practical ‘earthly’ purpose!” (PRL, 72-3, 100/GA 60, 103-5, 142). Paul addressed the believers of his own time from the context of their own situational understanding of the world as eschatologically ordered by God. The believer’s understanding of world is first characterized by the sense of directedness by and toward God which s/he lives out with the sense of having been given over or appropriated to this directedness (110/154).

To summarize, the content of primordial Christian religiosity in Paul, according to Heidegger, is not dogmatic or theological beliefs about God. Rather, it is the factual situation of the believer in the context of world. The character of this worldly existence for the believer is relationally defined in terms of his directedness or turning toward God in the context of his basic practices. The believer is exhorted by Paul’s proclamation to remain in the original spirit

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46 Crowe, Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion, 65
47 Interestingly, Heidegger repeats the Pauline motif of an ordered cosmos significantly later in his 1928 lecture “On the Essence of Ground.” Here he contends, “Kosmos ontos in Saint Paul (cf. I Corinthians and Galatians) means not only and not primarily the state of the ‘cosmic,’ but the state and situation of the human being, the kind of stance he takes toward the cosmos, his esteem for things [...] Kosmos ontos refers to human Dasein in a particular ‘historical’ existence, distinguished from another one that has already dawned.” (Transliterated) In other words, “world” has a polyvalent sense in Paul. Phenomenologically, it means both the situation of believing Christians, i.e. their being bound up in a primal context, and the aim or direction, the basic orientation, of their attitude towards this complex of relations.
(pneuma) by which s/he first turned toward God. The content of this turning is not some new bit of knowledge about God but the transformation of the believer in terms of her most basic understanding of the world. God can be known and experienced only in such a “turning”.

1.3.1.2 The content of religion as the happy life in Augustine

Heidegger further develops his sketch of the content sense of primal Christian religiosity through his reading of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. Heidegger is drawn to Augustine because he is not only a formative figure in the history of the development of Christianity, but because his existential reflections on the nature of the Christian life from his own concrete situation have the potential to break through tired theological formulations, heavily influenced by Hellenistic conceptions, bringing reflection to bear back on the primal sources of religious life (PRL, 122-23/GA 60, 169-72). Augustine indeed appropriates the conceptual tools of his day; but he does so in a way that forces a fundamental shift in attitude, from the “metaphysical” desire to know in an objective way that characterized the Greeks to the posture of confession as response to a call (129/177-78). Heidegger thus contends that his formally indicative analysis must begin from this basic attitudinal stance in order to sketch out “what” Augustine is fundamentally after (121/167-69).

As Heidegger notes, Augustine seeks after the content or “what” of the religious life, not in an objectifying way, but only out of the basic mode of relation. Augustine’s work itself takes the form of a “confession.” The work is guided by Augustine’s famous inquiry, “But what do I love, when I love you?” (PRL, 130/GA 60, 178-79). Read through the lens of Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis, the work thus begins from the factual situation of Augustine’s certainty of his relation to God – his love of God – and aims to sketch out from there a sense of what it might mean to be pulled intentionally in this manner and what it might mean God intuitively to fulfill such an intention (130/178-79). What could it mean to love God? And what could an experience of God possibly amount to? The questions themselves are motivated only by Augustine’s desire to deepen his understanding of his own situation, as a lover of God. To wit, Heidegger contends that his own task is that of an interpretation of Augustine’s own self-interpretation, for the sake of further appropriation of his questioning, since “[a]pure exposition,
as description, does not exist. That could be, at most, a bad interpretation which is unclear about itself, which takes itself to be absolute” (128/176-77). The point is to sketch out the content of Augustine’s Confessions in a manner that transforms our own understanding of religion from our own situation.

Through this reading of Augustine in his SS 1921 course Heidegger sketches out his basic notion that religious life consists in the directedness of the factual situation toward some object of ultimate love or desire. To understand what religious life is, Heidegger summarizes, Augustine argues that his own basic desire for God must be scrutinized. He must understand precisely what he desires, in what way he desires it, and how that desire is fulfilled (PRL, 129-32/GA 60, 177-82). These questions guide Augustine’s almost proto-phenomenological examination of the structure of desire itself. Desire for God is something of an ontological limit case of desire for Augustine, since the utter transcendence of the divine nature renders it unclear as to precisely what is desired subjectively, to how God could appear objectively, and to how the “soul” or animated aspect of human life could ever reach back and somehow relate itself to the source of its life (PRL, 129-32/GA 60, 177-82). It seems equally true for Augustine both that the religious life is impossible and that it somehow deeply characterizes his own situation, for he is certain of his desire for God, and the form of the confession makes it such that he already finds himself having made a leap into a religious existence of sorts (130/178-79). It is precisely the nature of the religious life to find oneself in the throes of this situation wherein one finds oneself “confessing” or speaking with the ultimate source of life that already reaches “expression” through oneself (140-41/192-93).

As Heidegger contends, Augustine argues that his desire for God is basically expressed as the desire for the happy or fulfilled life (beata vita) because Augustine has already confessed that, since his life springs forth only from the divine life, the way truly to know the divine life is by being appropriated to it and accordingly delighting in it (PRL, 141-42/GA 60, 193-94). To seek God is to seek fulfillment in the very aim of one’s life as desiring agent. According to Augustine, on Heidegger’s reading, all factically existing life is characterized by this desire or pull towards fulfillment, by this love and longing to delight in the proper end of life. One finds oneself always already having taken delight in some particular end toward which one has ordered one’s life and habits, one’s basic aims and desires (143-44/194-97). The desire for the happy or
fulfilled life is thus the intentional content-sense of the religious situation. The latter begins from this basic desire and finds its fulfillment in the experienced joy that comes in worshipping God alone as the true source and end of life (145/197-98). As Heidegger selectively quotes Augustine: “For there is a joy which...is granted...to those who worship you voluntarily...And this is the happy life, to rejoice toward you, by your side, and because of you; this is the happy life, and there is no other” (145/197). Religious life is thus characterized by desire for the genuinely fulfilling life, and for Augustine (on Heidegger’s reading) all are characterized to some extent by this desire (since all desire that which is true), though not all find its genuine object (146/199).

The objecthood of God is thus located in the manner in which one’s desire for the genuinely happy life is fulfilled (or not), not in some discrete experience of divine, but in the whole of life in its directedness. God shows up in the “joy of truth” itself, that is, in the properly ordered life. This is the life that properly makes use (uti) of creation for the sake of the enjoyment (frui) of the Creator. Delight in the Creator is the end of our factual concern (delectatio finis curae) (PRL, 153/GA 60, 206). This delight is not universally enacted, since in their search for the happy life many “fall back upon what they have the strength to do, resting content with that” (PRL, 145/GA 60, 198). Many misappropriate their desire to delight in the happy life through the worship of idols; their cares are dissipated and absorbed in the world through the misuse and disordered enjoyment (frui) of creation. Augustine thus appropriates Paul’s notion of the “turning” towards God away from idols in terms of the rightly ordered soul, that is, the soul that lives out in a worshipful awareness of God in the world (87/122-23).

Heidegger also subjects Augustine’s notion of the right order of love (ordo amoris) to phenomenological Destruktion, removing what he views to be its lingering tendencies to arrest religious life, forcing it into categories of static presence. Heidegger hints at his own view that Augustine remained somewhat within the historical tendency of Christianity to uncritically adopt “Greek” ways of conceptualizing the lived situation in terms of the desire for the eternally unchanging and self-evident (PIA, 6/GA 61, 6). As van Buren has noted, Heidegger contends

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48 Heidegger’s translation of Augustine’s “Cadunt in id quod valent, eoque contenti sunt.”
49 “The Christian life-consciousness of the early and high-scholastic eras, the consciousness in which was carried out the genuine reception of Aristotle and thus a quite definite interpretation of Aristotle, had already passed through a ‘Greekanizing.’ The life-nexus of the original
that Augustine’s quasi-theoretical reduction of the *parousia* and eschatological dimensions of Paul’s thought (i.e. into contemplative enjoyment of God) is the mark of his subservience to Greek metaphysics and its emphasis on conceptual grasping (6/6).\(^{50}\)

However, from the ground up Heidegger re-awakens and re-animates Augustine’s radical questioning with respect to the proper content of religious life, sketching out its existential implications in resistance to any objectivising or positivist tendencies to reduce religion to some region of life that is inherently graspable.

To summarize, we can begin to see the broader formal picture of religious life that Heidegger begins to sketch out through his readings of Paul and Augustine. I would summarize the content-sense of religion in these sketches as something like the following. Religious life, at least primordial Christian religiosity, is the situation of being oriented by and to a communal world of shared basic comportments (i.e. practices, attitudes, concerns, etc.) characterized by an overriding desire for something ultimate, by a longing for fulfillment. The fulfillment of this desire concerns the whole of one’s own life. One is continually turned toward God through a transformation of one’s basic attitude to the world (Paul) or through a striving joy in the happy life (Augustine). One is initiated into religious life primarily through habituation, not doctrine or theology, since it is being-in-the-world. This is my attempt to summarize Heidegger’s sketch of the content-sense of religious life from his ground up analyses; it is not intended to offer anything like an “objective” definition of religion. Instead, it is a preliminary sketch intended to re-orient our understanding of religion towards the mode or manner in which it is lived out concretely. The preliminary sketch of the content-sense stirs up our attentiveness to this deeper “how” in its relational-sense.

We must now turn to Heidegger’s further sketching out of the phenomenological meaning of the “how” or relational-sense of religious life. How does religious life play itself out in concrete existence? How is it distinctively *religious*?

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50 John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, 158.
1.3.2 Relational-sense of Religion: Dependence and Care

The question guiding Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion, we recall, is how philosophical analysis can bring concrete religious existence to the level of conceptual articulation without undue distortion or reductive dismissal of the understanding of self and world implicit in the experience of believing individuals and communities.

I have been arguing that Heidegger’s early lectures on factical life transform the very orientation of the philosophical approach, from the stance of scientific grasping, to that of a hermeneutic “sketch” of the topic for the sake of existential transformation of the philosopher’s own situation. The phenomenologist of religion must “form out” in an interpretive sketch the basic senses or modes of being in which religious life takes place, placing the most emphasis on the question of the “how” or manner of existing of this life. Heidegger redirects his phenomenological questioning toward life in its very concreteness, not in order to find in it some objective nature or static a priori structure, but to allow conceptual analysis to be directed by the dynamism of life, its irreducibly temporal and historical character. The best that concepts can do is to formally indicate this concrete field so as to initiate a sort of self-reflective wakefulness to it which is inherently and fundamentally interpretive. The aim of philosophical hermeneutics is to bring the self-interpretive unfolding that is concrete life into a kind of sober, reflective awareness of itself and its situation as historical being, to mature it into a more authentic or genuine expression of itself and its possibilities for being, whatever that may amount to in the concrete situation.

In the phenomenology of religion, this aim calls for a return to the “primordial sources” (i.e. religio-historical texts) from which believing individuals and communities gather a sense of their situation, retrieving these sources in a radically transformative way, i.e. one that points to the way in which they make concrete life a problem for itself. For the early Heidegger, any genuine retrieval of inherited religious texts that have formed the West will unlock their potential to speak to our own concrete situation. Hermeneutics clears away the accumulated conceptual debris generated by tired patterns of life and thought, including those habits that shape our philosophical desire for objectivity, which lulls facticity into a kind of tranquil (if not always unreflective) ease and complacency. The turn toward life in its genuinely concrete senses is
according to Heidegger the only genuine way in which philosophy can return to something like religious life and its sources and to bring these to expression.

One particular reason for the necessity of this turning is that, since (as we saw) religious life has to do primarily with basic ways in which the believer and believing communities are habitually comported to the world through practices, it does not make sense to investigate the phenomenological nature of religious comportment with an emphasis on ideas or even on doctrines. If with respect to the content of religious life, Heidegger showed us that that the practices and attitudes that shape the believer are most primordial, then we must look for an equally primordial understanding of the intentional modes in which the believer finds herself related to God or to the object of her worship in these practices and attitudes. What is the most prominent or prevalent relational mode of factical care operative in religious life? Phenomenology will have to refer us beyond ideas and doctrines to the intentional meaning of worship from which these arise. Again, I will refer to Heidegger’s substantial readings of Paul and Augustine; it seems to me that he sketches something like the sense of radical dependency on the absolute as the crux of religious life. Although, following Schleiermacher, Heidegger interprets this sense in Paul and Augustine as the continual creative unfolding of religious life and action and not as some nebulous mystical experience, his sketch of the relational meaning of this action points to something like a way in which the believer experiences herself to be dependent upon radical transcendence, in the sense that she comes to understand that she is mediated to herself and is thereby radically directed beyond herself toward that which is inexpressibly higher.

As I noted earlier, figures such as Luther, Schleiermacher, and Reinach were formative influences on the young Heidegger and also in some respect guided him in his more systematic reading of some of the central texts of Western Christendom. In his sketches for a 1918/19 course on mysticism, which was never held, Heidegger glosses Schleiermacher’s notion of an intuition of the infinite whole in all things as the receptivity of a feeling of absolute dependence. As Heidegger states in his notes on Schleiermacher’s Der christliche Glaube (Christian Faith), the relational-sense or “how” of religious experience is a “having-been-affected-from-somewhere” (PRL, 250/GA 60, 330). The worshipper relates to herself and her world out of the basic sense that she is not the origin of her existence, that the life which wells up into intimate
self-expression in her is somehow more primordial than and “other” to her very identity, even absolute. Yet, the experience of the absolute “happens” only in the context of a basic posturing, a relation to the world in which the worshipper remains open to it. In Heidegger’s words, it “is possible only on the basis of the essential openness to values and primary love of meaning of the personally existing being” (PRL, 250/GA 60, 330-1). The worshipper cultivates habits and ways of being directed to the world whose phenomenological sense is a receptivity or responsiveness that emerges from her being attuned (Schleiermacher describes this as “feeling”) to some source of values and meaning beyond herself. She can be attuned to this hidden source only in worshipping, despite the fact that she genuinely worships only in being attuned. The feeling of dependence arises in the whole context of religious existence and directs the worshipper’s care toward the hidden source of the implicit meaning, bound up in her life and actions.

The circular character of the relationality implicit in religious life is also evident in other of Heidegger’s early reflections. In a lecture on the relationship of phenomenology and theology given in Tübingen in 1927 – only a few years following the end of the early Freiburg period – Heidegger draws heavily from Luther in noting that faith (Glauben) is the basic attunement of the Christian believer. “The essence of faith can formally be sketched as a mode of human existence which, according to its own testimony – itself belonging to this mode of existence – arises not from Dasein or spontaneously through Dasein, but rather from that which is revealed in and with this mode of existence, from that which is believed” (PM, 43-4/GA 9, 52). Heidegger argues here that faith for the Christian is fundamentally a part-taking (Teil-nnehmen) in the historical event of the disclosure of the divine nature of Christ in his crucifixion. Obviously, the modern Christian has no direct access to anything like the objective historical event of the crucifixion. The mode of access to this event is faith (44/52). Faith subjects the believer to a rebirth (Wiedergeburt), allowing her to undergo a fundamental shift in her most basic comportment to the world. Heidegger quotes Luther’s definition of faith as the act of “permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see” (44/52). Faith is thus an act, but one whose basic relational sense is that of being turned to God in radical dependency.

The relation between being seized by God and the notion of a turning around is made clear in Heidegger’s reading of Paul in the winter semester of 1920/21. As already noted in the previous section, according to Paul, on Heidegger’s reading, there must be an “absolute turning-
around” for genuine faith to take root; but not only so, the believers must continue to turn away from idols toward God through their sustained devotion (PRL, 66/GA 60, 94-3). As Heidegger recounts, Paul admonishes the believers at Thessalonika to continue serving (doyleuein) and waiting (anamenein) (66/ 95). Without becoming entangled in the conceptual “images” (eidos, idea) of Greek philosophy which looks for God as though for an object of experience, the believers are to wait patiently, even obstinately (Erharren) to be turned toward God in Christ (PRL, 66-7/GA 60, 97). Serving constitutes a vigilant remaining (menein) within the call.

Heidegger contends that this remaining has the distinctive temporal sense of retrieving what one has been in light of what is yet to come; Paul addresses the Thessalonians as those who both have already responded to a call and who are being called out beyond themselves toward something which has not yet come (85-5/118-20). Turning around toward God has an originally temporal sense and is expressed in the mode or manner of continually being called out and brought into the situation of having to respond.

The relational sense of religious life in Paul has a passive and an active side. On the one hand, the relational sense of Christian religiosity is characterized by the sense of having been radically subjected to a call (PRL, 87/GA 60, 121-22). As temporality, factical life cannot secure itself in its own happening. It is always some having-been which remains open to possibilities for future being: “Factual life, from out of its own resources, cannot provide the motives to attain even the genesthai [coming into being]” (87/121-22). On the other hand, primal Christianity is actively a kind of knowledge of the world. Serving and waiting are for Paul ways of comporting oneself to God: They are a kind of “knowledge” of the divine in a pre-thematic sense which takes hold of the self and the world in a particular way. Knowledge here has the character of pneuma echein, of life that takes hold of itself or that actualizes possibilities in its directedness toward itself (88/123). Pneuma can be locked in the bondage (douleuein) of flesh in which the cares of life and the worship of idols cultivate a kind of blind or unseeing opposition to God. But it is not disembodied intellect, a reified scientific consciousness; rather, pneuma is an affective kind of knowledge that feels itself bodily through the world in and through all of its day to day practices.

By analogy, we might say that one who is good at a particular task has developed a “feel for it”. A master pianist “knows” how to play the piano on more than a merely theoretical level.
The piano almost becomes an extension of her body as her hands move over the keys with a seeming effortlessness. Through her bodily disciplines, she has cultivated a kind of pre-thematic, habitual “knowledge” of how to listen to the music and to respond to the piano. The best pianists become absorbed in the “spirit” of the music and their bodies are led and directed by it in all sorts of improvisations. Serving and waiting are for Paul basic modes in which the believer, through her habits, is drawn into the life of the divine. Elsewhere, Heidegger notes that Paul speaks of love (Liebe) as the fundamental mode of the relationship of God to human beings (PRL, 50/GA 60, 71). The believer is related to the object of her worship through a kind of practical, spirited knowledge that animates her ways of being in the world and shapes her manners of relating to herself and others. This mode of knowing is more primordial than theoretical knowledge. It is fundamentally the way in which the believer postures herself to remain in the spirit that animates her activities in response to something ineffable that draws her toward her genuine possibilities for being a self.

The following summer, Heidegger went on to flesh out this notion of love in a reading of Augustine, interpreting it as a sort of desire that animates the believer’s life but which is guided or directed by its object. As already noted in the previous section, for Augustine we desire to delight in the happy life. Desire for the happy life is also desire for truth, since (Augustine reasons) we all implicitly prefer that which is true to that which is false, though we may be deceived about the object of our desires (PRL, 146/GA, 198-99). Love and desire for the happy life can be perverted or distorted into love for what presents itself in the moment, in the pursuits of life that delight our faculties (PRL, 158-75/GA 60, 213-35). Human beings then call “true” what they desire to be the truth, in an effort to insulate life against the shock of being bound over to absolute truth (148/200). As Heidegger glosses, “[w]hen it [truth] concerns them themselves, and when it shakes them up and questions their own facticity and existence, then it is better to close one’s eyes just in time, in order to be enthused by the choir’s litanies which one has staged before oneself” (148/ 200). The object of perverse desire is self-importance, a kind of pre-reflective regard that places oneself and one’s own interests at the centre of existence (175/235). By contrast, genuine desire delights in God by receiving selfhood and the world as gift (176/ 235-36). Again, the believer is comported to the absolute in the fundamental posture of dependency.
To summarize the relational sense of religious life in Heidegger’s sketches, we might say that the way in which the worshipper relates to the object of worship has to do with the mode of her factical concern, which is primarily temporal. The worshipper comports herself to the world in the basic attitude of love and desire (Paul, Augustine), faith (Luther), or in the feeling of dependence (Schleiermacher); in each case, the worshipper relates to herself as one having responded to and been called out towards something greater than herself or anything she can encounter in her world. We are thus left with the question of the actualization of this meaning in the life of the worshipper. How is the worshipper initiated into the “circle” of call and response, given the fact that the former is discerned only in the latter, while the latter follows from the former?

1.3.3 Enactment-sense of Religion: The event

Heidegger consistently argued in the early courses at Freiburg and beyond that philosophy is done out of the lived situation. It is an interpretation of the lived situation that unfolds it in a particular direction, i.e. in the direction of questioning. Thus, philosophy grasps its object in a peculiar way. It “circles around” the particular concrete, lived situation from which it springs with the aim of taking up this situation in an authentic manner. Whatever else authentic existence might entail, it is for Heidegger the kind of self-comportment – the relucence – that takes place when one becomes initiated into philosophical questioning. In the winter semester of 1921/22, Heidegger states, “To grasp philosophy authentically means to encounter absolute questionability and to possess this questionability in full awareness. The fixed ground (ground is something that always needs to mature, just as an appropriation does) lies in grasping the questionability; i.e., it lies in the radical maturation of the questioning” (PIA, 29 / GA 61, 37).

We recall that for Heidegger the central problem of philosophy in these early courses is the question of the “how” of concrete existence. Factual life is eminently questionable to itself in its very historicity and utter singularity. It cannot be grasped in the manner of the scientific grasping of objects because it is the very ontological condition of this and all other kinds of comportment. The problem, of course, is how philosophy as a cognizing (i.e. reflective) kind of comportment can grasp the matter precisely in its radical singularity and concreteness. If philosophy springs out of the lived situation, how can it then grasp this very situation without forcing it into the still
life of abstract conceptuality? We will recall that Heidegger proposes the method of formal indication as a non-reductive and non-objectifying way for philosophizing comportment to point back toward itself. The point is not to capture some kind of objective “picture” or re-presentation (Vor-stellung) of factical life, but formally to trace the contours of its structures in an “indication” whose ultimate purpose is to re-awaken our sense of life’s radical questionability and irreducibility. Genuine philosophizing makes life more rather than less questionable to itself (PIA, 29 / GA 61, 37).

Presumably, then, the question of how the worshipper becomes initiated into the hermeneutic circle of the religious call and response will be genuinely answered only where factical life is made questionable to itself. Philosophical questioning of the “how” of this life is something of a catalyst to the repetition of this life in its fullest actualization (Vollzug) as self-interpreting, self-articulating existence. Holding factical life open to philosophical questioning presumably, then, also potentially opens the possibility of discovery of something like a religious call or the call to worship. As Heidegger contends, “Philosophy is a basic mode of life itself, in such a way that it authentically ‘brings back’ (wieder-holt), i.e., brings life back from its downward fall into decadence, and this ‘bringing-back’, as radical research, is life itself” (PIA, 62 / GA 61, 80-81).\footnote{I have omitted the translator’s bracketed insertions. Bracketed insertions here are mine. Wieder-holt can be translated “bringing back”, but it also carries the sense of both a re-seeking and a re-petition, as Richard Rojcewicz notes in the translated edition.} Philosophy brings factical life back from its tendency to close off from itself its genuine possibilities for being through forcing it continually to repeat itself as a problem for itself. Unless factical life becomes a problem to itself, i.e. the problem of its own relation to itself, nothing like the religious call/response structure will make sense to it.

But here we are faced with a problem. Is it the case that religious life is actualized in philosophical questioning? Or is it that philosophy merely points out possibilities for religious life that it cannot actualize on its own accord? If the former is the case, then it would seem that the concrete meaning and fulfillment of the religious call/response structure is properly met only in philosophy. We are then still left to question how this structure is initiated, i.e. how factical life comes to hold itself open to questioning and how it brings itself to respond factically. It would then also seem to be the case that genuine faith or dependence in a religious sense is at bottom philosophical questioning, a position that Heidegger explicitly comes to reject in later
developments of his thought in the Marburg period. If the latter is the case, and there is textual evidence to support the claim that this is what Heidegger himself believed during the years of the early Freiburg courses, then we are back to the question of what initiates the call/response structure of religious worship and actualizes the believer’s sense of dependency for its own self-understanding on something greater than itself (cf. PIA, 148/GA 61, 197-98). Moreover, Heidegger contends in the same courses that philosophy is never merely or exclusively descriptive, i.e. as I have shown, philosophical questioning is always in part a way of actualizing and of bringing to fulfillment the very object (life) that is sketched out in the descriptions. It follows that, while philosophical questioning may not in itself constitute something like a religious decision, it is the necessary condition for being “genuinely religious” in a circumspective and self-critical manner (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197). But then what is sufficient for both genuine religiosity and for genuine philosophical questioning? In either case it is the actualization of life itself that constitutes the sufficient condition. Such a condition is only approximated by way of descriptive sketches of its structure; it is genuinely itself only in remaining indeterminate, as a kind of vaguely anticipated event whereby, repeatedly, factual life is brought to itself.

The descriptive sketches of what I have called the event begin from the ground up, where Heidegger formally indicates the Pauline notion of kairological time and traces the development of this notion through the work of subsequent thinkers and religious figures. But as I have indicated, the descriptive sketches are themselves anticipations of further actualization of the object, and in some sense are the beginning of this actualization. We cannot answer definitively and with objective certainty where the actualization of the movement of religious life and of philosophizing comes from. The point of Heidegger’s philosophizing is thus merely to awaken us to a movement of life that is already temporally actualizing. Accordingly, Heidegger subjects thinkers subsequent to Paul to Destruktion in order to retrieve the fully temporal sense of Paul’s notion of kairos operative in the tradition. In the winter semester of 1921/2 Heidegger defines kairos as the determination or mode of time of the occurrence (Verkommen) of the very

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52 See, for example, Heidegger distinction of philosophical questioning from religious faith in “Phenomenology and Theology,” (PM 46). Faith “understands itself only in believing,” whereas philosophical questioning is a form of existence that is somehow radically different, even opposed, to faith. (53) Heidegger’s distinction here raises a whole slew of problems of its own, which I will not address here. I address this distinction in Chapter 2.
actualization of life in its factical caring for itself (PIA, 102/GA 61, 137). This kind of occurrence is clearly not of the sort of a mere factual happening which can be fitted into a story, accounted for chronologically. It is not the sort of occurrence of which one speaks when one, e.g., claims that such and such happened today or even that such and such is expected to happen a day from now. These are ordinary occurrences or expectations of such, factually present in a kind of objectivity. Since the self-caring reflexivity of life is presupposed in these kinds of references to factual events, the event of life’s actualization as factical cannot be a happening of the same basic kind as these others. Nevertheless, this sort of event can be formally indicated, i.e. can be sketched out according to a particular logic (logos). This is the logic of the kairological occurrence (PIA, 102/GA 61, 137). The guiding kairological question is how life is enabled to announce itself (sich meldet (vorkommt) und melden (vorkommen) darf) in factical apprehension of it (102/137). The kairological question asks about the mode by which this announcing takes place. The mode is temporal in the sense of the very movedness of life (PIA, 103/GA 61, 138). The question signifies a kind of jointure in life itself between the temporal opening of a horizon whereby life factically announces itself in caring, and the corresponding emergence of a horizon of expectation and anticipation of that which weighs upon it, even tormenting it by its continual withdrawal (103/138-9).

As mentioned Heidegger gleaned the concept of kairos in the context of his discussion of St. Paul, in particular his first letter to the Thessalonians. Kairos comes into play in Paul’s response to the church as to when to expect parousia or the fullness of Christ’s historical coming. The question obviously has a temporal dimension. But Heidegger points out that in Paul’s hands the question is turned back on itself. The question of when now concerns the decisive moment (Augenblick; a term adopted from Kierkegaard) that will come unexpectedly to those who are unprepared for it, i.e. who have not related to Christ in the right manner of hope (PRL, 106-7/GA 63, 150-52). Heidegger’s gloss of Paul’s notion of kairos thus renders the concept to mean, in the words of Ben Vedder, “one’s delivery to a moment of decision, a moment that cannot be reached through calculation.”53 Kairos comes “like a thief in the night,” bringing factical life to the threshold of a momentous decision, where everything is at stake for

53 Vedder, Heidegger’s Philosophy of Religion, 36
Heidegger formally sketches the factical structure of the kairoligical event in the phenomenon of the limit-situation, which he gleans from both Jaspers and Kierkegaard.

Otto Pöggeler has traced the Kierkegaardian roots of Heidegger’s search for an authentic relation to time. In his 1919 review of Jaspers, Heidegger followed the latter in taking his point of departure for philosophy from “limit-situations,” where factical life comes face to face, as it were, with the groundless character of the upsurge of life that constitutes it. Out of the anxiety in the face of this groundlessness, factical life is thrust into the moment of decision (Augenblick) where it can take up the project of its existence in a more authentic manner. For Kierkegaard, this meant “the overcoming of sinfulness in repentance as the beginning of another life.” Indeed, we can find evidence in Heidegger’s own earliest writings that his notion of factical life was profoundly structured around this notion of the limit-situation as momentous event. And even with the publication of Being and Time in 1927, we continue to understand the Dasein of human beings to mean something only in the face of the limit situation of the possibility of “no-longer-being-able-to-be-there” (BT, 294/SZ, 250). Heidegger makes explicit in Being and Time the implicit relation of the limit situation, especially that of death, to the temporality of our being-in-the-world. “Its existential possibility is based on the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself, and disclosed, indeed, as ahead-of-itself” (294/251). That the being-there of human agency is always “not-yet” means that it always stands in relation to its uttermost end “which is not to be outstripped” (BT, 294/SZ, 251). An authentic relation to time will thus occur in the moment precisely where the limit situation announces itself in the phenomenon of care as the moment of decision.

Kierkegaard’s philosophizing from out of anxiety in the face of the limit situation interested Heidegger because it represented a departure from traditional philosophy, one carried out in the manner of its destruction and retrieval. Again, Pöggeler has summarized this quite well. Traditional philosophy since Plato conceives of the limit encountered in the moment of decision as the a-temporal eidos, the unity in plurality grasped in thinking. The moment itself turns out to be an illusion, the fleeting and transitory character of change. Thinking arrives in the moment as the recollection of eternal or transcendental truth. Thus, the sudden in-breaking of

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54 Vedder, Heidegger’s Philosophy of Religion, 36
thinking is finally without place and without time. The moment is not, after all, decisive. “The transformation of basic concepts has no place in time because it leads temporal being to a limit, that is, it refers it to the eternal.” With Kierkegaard, Heidegger contends that traditional philosophy relates to time only by fleeing from it. It attempts to make life present to itself in theoretical gazing, to transcend the situation into the realm of timeless truths that will enable the philosophy, as in Plato’s allegory of the cave, to achieve some kind of grasp on the transitory character of life. Heidegger does not so much argue against this direction of philosophy as he does call it into question. Traditional philosophy cannot allow itself to be beset by anxiety over the factical situation because it looks for eternal verities from the standpoint of objective thinking. But because of this fact, traditional philosophy cannot bring itself to the moment of an encounter with the truth which arrives only in the moment, not eternally recollected, but non-identically repeated forward.

Heidegger’s formal sketch of the event or decisive moment from the ground up in these religious thinkers, of course, also has its corresponding movement of Destruktion. In the summer semester of 1925, for example, Heidegger contends that Luther, and Kierkegaard render the phenomenon of Angst (i.e. in the face of the limit situation) too much in psychological terms, and that this problem traces back to Augustine (HCT, 292/GA 20, 404-5). Heidegger repeats here his earlier criticism of Augustine’s notion of the happy life (beata vita), that as a concept it covers over the ontological insight into temporality partially gleaned in the Confessions. Insofar as these thinkers view Angst as a problem to be resolved in a life of tranquility and enjoyment, according to Heidegger they succumb to the self-alienating movement of inauthentic life (HCT, 281/GA 20, 388-89; PRL, 218-19/GA 60, 288-90.).

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57 Pöggeler, “Destruction and Moment,” 143-44. Cf. also Sören Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 154-57.
58 As Pöggeler puts it, “They [the Greeks] understand the moment, and with it the opening-up of the distinction between past and future, in such a way that they seek an eternal present from out of the past and include the future in this connection.” “Destruction and Moment,” 145.
59 This is the thrust of Heidegger’s reading of Augustine on sin. Sin is for Augustine the failure to “see” God rightly in one’s dealings. One falls into sin and consequently into the anxiety of sin because one has failed to respond to the gift of life in the right way. One has turned the focus of worship away from the Creator and toward the creation. The one who has been rightly ordered by grace sees God in the right way, not as an object of calculation but as the entire focus of one’s life energies. In this re-direction of the heart and the mind, factical life finds rest from the burden of care. For Heidegger, this theology is another form of the flight of factical life from itself, i.e.
these thinkers from the ground up in order to rid them of traces of objectivising and psychologising thinking, to retrieve the robustly ontological emphasis of the event, cursorily sketched out in Paul, as the upsurge of life which opens the horizon of factual anticipation. This is the irreducibly historical and temporal phenomenon which Heidegger will later (in the Marburg period) refer to as the transcendence of life out toward itself.

We are thus left to understand in the earliest writings that the actualization of factual life is the kairological event. Heidegger sketches out the structure of this event from the ground up through his investigation of religious thinkers. The moment of decision, of a crisis or turning point in the life of the believer is the temporal event that opens up the believer in his very factual caring to the possibility of being called forth, out of a self-sufficient, complacent way of life into one marked by the sense of utter dependence on the mysterious source and ground of life itself (PRL, 107/GA 63, 150-2). Heidegger is thus able to respond to the question how religious life is actualized or initiated. The call/response structure of the religious relation to the divine is opened up in the primal event of the call, which has a kairological, not a chronological, beginning. Philosophy cannot produce this call. Neither can philosophy complete it in the response (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197-8). Because the call and response are bound up in the pre-philosophical actualization-sense (Vollzugssinn) of factual religiosity (i.e. the event), philosophy sketches out this sense in its questioning, but does not actualize it.

However, through its own actualization, philosophy opens in part the possibility of the religious response. Though religion is never completed or brought to maturity in philosophical questioning, it requires the latter to continually hold it open to the call and to its own possibility for response (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197-8). What we see with the analysis of the actualization-sense of factual religiosity is that philosophy is never a completely abstract questioning because as the process of questioning and formally indicating/sketching out factual life it belongs to the very movement of this facticity. Philosophy therefore anticipates the fulfillment of that concrete life which it sketches out in formal-ontological categories. This fulfillment of the actualization of religious life takes place, I have argued, in the circling back movement that “repeats” this life non-identically and in a transformative way. “[T]o philosophize and, in so doing, to be genuinely from experiencing itself as radically questionable. I return to question Heidegger’s thinking relation to theology in Chapter 2, and his self-distancing from “religion” in Chapter 4.
religious: i.e., to take up factically one’s worldly, historiologically-historical task [historisch-geschichtliche Aufgabe] in philosophy, in action, and in a concrete word of action, thought not in religious ideology and fantasy” (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197). To be sure, there is a tendency towards the de-mythologizing of religious life (“not in religious ideology and fantasy”) evident in Heidegger’s early philosophizing. But to be “genuinely religious” is in some sense to retrieve the pre-philosophical roots of religious life in a genuinely self-transformative way. It is to retrieve religious life in a non-identical repetition reminiscent of Kierkegaardian Wiederholung. Philosophy’s task is thus to point beyond itself to the possibility of a decision which always remains beyond the pale of self-determining or objectifying thinking.

Philosophy therefore acquires something of a critical role in its formally indicative sketches of religion, insofar as concrete religious life itself has the tendency to become inauthentic and stale, to cover over the dynamism of the transformative event through lax and unreflective acceptance of modes of being and speaking for their own sake. Religion becomes an abstracting source of comfort to itself, falling prey to the “way of the world” or the sacrifice of the individual to the rule of impersonal norms in Hegel’s language, or das Man (the “they”) as Heidegger puts it in Being and Time (BT, ¶24-5; 148-49/SZ, 114-15). It becomes the default perspective which demands assent, belonging to everyone and no-one in particular. The formal indication helps religion to re-gather itself, to recover its roots and its aim through a transformative event in which the object of religion shows itself anew.

But here a deeper question presents itself. Can this philosophizing from “within” – so to speak – call into question this very object? Is it not the case, on this account, that philosophy must end up privileging some given historical and cultural framework for experiencing the world? Does not this fact alone jeopardize the properly critical endeavour of philosophy? While a fuller response to these questions will arise as I proceed through the argument of this study, I can offer a few words of response here.

First, Heidegger seems to have suggested in the earliest period of his thought that philosophy can indeed call into question the very nature of the object of religion, insofar as this object can be construed in such a way that factical life falls into inauthentic or ungenuine desire

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to escape its inescapable condition of being finite and utterly contingent. But does Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion allow for the possibility that religion’s absolute object might in fact be nothing but empty abstraction? I think that it does: If Heidegger is correct in his *Destruktion* of theoretical objectivity, then it seems to follow that what he has shown is that critique cannot ever flow from an absolutely neutral starting point. It must remain bound up in commitment to a particular tradition. It does not follow from this that a tradition cannot engage in self-critique or that the philosophical imagination is constrained to imagine only a singular perspective belonging to its cultural-linguistic tradition. However, what Heidegger does argue in these early researches is that religion is obscured by the claim to objective insight as to the final meaning or significance of the object (or aim/telos) of religion. Thus, it remains always a possibility that any particular religion is self-deceived as to its object or what it is really after, but this discovery depends always in part on the disclosure of something more genuine within that very tradition that appeals to its own sense of continuity. This seems to be the very strategy of the young Heidegger in his critical reception of primordial Christian religiosity. Heidegger does not rule out, and in fact affirms, the possibility of radical transformation from within – though just what this might amount to he, at least in his earliest work, leaves quite open.

Secondly, if it is impossible with finality to deem any tradition a failed attempt to achieve authentic self-disclosure, we might of course still ask why phenomenology should take an interest – except for purely scientific reasons – in forms of life that may appear unappealing and futile to many. Yet Heidegger’s aim seems to be to initiate us into an encounter with something that rings true to us individually. This is, as Crowe also argues, the sense that meaning is somehow irreducibly given to us or unfolded in and through our own expressive self-reception.\(^61\) To add to Crowe’s analysis, I would also emphasize that Heidegger’s argument also implies that participation in an historical tradition in its concrete particularity may in fact be the very condition of the possibility for adequate disclosure of this phenomenon. That is to say, for phenomenological reasons, it may in fact be a necessary condition to participate in some way in a given historical-cultural-linguistic tradition for the sake of disclosing something universally true of human experience. This is because Heidegger’s work, as I shall continue to argue in Chapter 2, undermines the separation in philosophy of the historically determinate and particular

from prior understanding of the universal. The separation still designates transcendental structures of the possibility of the emergence of history and language. But if (as Heidegger argues) our immersion in history and language is the insurmountable vantage from which are disclosed and legitimated universal normative structures – i.e. the necessity of our responding to an irreducible “otherness” in meaning to which we are bound over – then we are able to recognize that the desire to unearth these structures from their historical soil is itself borne of the peculiar philosophical prejudice of objectivity.

It does not follow, as James K.A. Smith aptly notes, that claim to the universal legitimacy of a structure of experience disclosed in religious life demands its demonstration outside of the historical-contextual framework of that tradition. Smith speaks with respect to the work of Kant, Levinas, and Derrida, but the point he makes is basically the same: “The (Jewish) understanding of obligation outlined by Emmanuel Levinas [...] is also understood to be universal in its scope; that is, it characterizes all human intersubjective relationships. But it is only disclosed through a particular tradition, even a particular revelation, which must be shared by any who would understand this structure.”

Similarly, Heidegger unearths something of the mystical experience of dependence on and response to an absolute origin in Western religions, particularly Christianity. But might it be possible that the supposed binding structure “revealed” in this context is false or illusory? There is no guarantee of the universality of the form outside of its legitimating context. Put positively, participation in the historical-linguistic context makes up the criterion of legitimation for the universal structure. It is phenomenologically questionable to infer a structure’s ontological independence from historical-linguistic contexts that disclose it, since such an inference rests on the epistemological assumption that objectivity means precisely the separability of formalizable “essential” aspects of meaning from nonformalizable (and so ultimately indifferent) “accidental” particulars. Heidegger calls into question precisely this philosophical assumption that aims to unlock and liberate the objective content (as higher form) from its imprisonment in the messiness of time and history. But the upshot of Heidegger’s analysis seems to be the reaffirmation precisely of the locality of concrete forms of life as the

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very condition, not only of the disclosure, but of the animation and institution of universal structures of experience.\footnote{I address this theme in more detail in later chapters. I argue in Chapter 2 that Heidegger in fact subjects his own work to rigorous critique for the ways in which it holds on to an Enlightenment “critical” perspective, a perspective he exposes to be at root radically \textit{uncritical} in its dogmatic affirmation of the epistemic standpoint outside of or alongside language.}

Finally, it may well be that our age has moved beyond any need of religion, but Heidegger does not think so for the reason that human experience seems constituted in response to an ultimate aim or \textit{telos} that binds human beings over to the task of unfolding particular normative structures. Religious life in the West seems to have pre-reflectively “carried” a sense of this structure and in fact may be the very condition of its philosophical unfolding. Heidegger thus puts out of play the objective or “positivist” attitude that obscures the implicit normative structure of religious life – as response to an unconditionally binding source of meaning – in its cultural-historical unfolding.

Thus, in his earliest work, Heidegger’s questioning primes us for the retrieval of factual religious life in a transformative repetition through which the structures or modes of religious life sketched out in the hermeneutics of facticity might be re-enacted for us in our own situation and context.

\textbf{1.4 Conclusion: Directions for circling back on religious life}

In conclusion, Heidegger’s ground up retrieval of factual religious life is potentially transformative in two ways. It has the potential to transform the nature of our philosophizing and even the basic character of religious life itself. As we have seen, according to Heidegger’s own earliest ambitions, these transformations must take place in a way that does reductive violence neither to philosophy nor to its object.

On the one hand, Heidegger brings out his secret conceptual weapon, the formal indication, as a way of \textit{describing} religious life in its various modes of being without reducing it to a sphere of human culture or to some manageable object for the gaze of disinterested science. Factual religion must be re-enacted in a philosophical questioning that allows it to “speak” in
and to our present situation. Philosophy must conceptualize factical religiosity without converting it to an object for static gazing. This process requires the transformation of how philosophizing is done, a *Destruktion* of the categories and methods of standard philosophy. Religious life must be allowed to show itself from the ground up, without the interference of foreign conceptual structures.

On the other hand, through its conceptual self-articulation in philosophy, religious life transforms itself, or Heidegger at least anticipates such a transformation. Philosophy sketches out the *ontological* structures or modes of being of religious life in order to open up the possibility for a circling back retrieval of genuine religiosity in an *ontic* sense. Just what this means remains radically open to question. Famously, Heidegger never *explicitly* closes off from factical life the possibility of being called into response by God or a god, though he insists that philosophy remains radically *a-theistic* (PIA, 146/GA 61, 197-8). “The more radical philosophy is, the more determinately is it on a path away from God; yet, precisely in the radical actualization of the ‘away,’ it has its own difficult proximity to God” (146/197-8). Heidegger does not explicitly deny the possibility of entering into relation with *some* God. Yet he remains ambivalent as to the meaning of this possibility, in keeping with his notion that philosophy can neither name the call nor by itself fulfill the response implicit in religious life.

This is precisely where we might ask whether Heidegger indeed violates his own intent to retrieve religious life in a non-reductive way. Heidegger refuses the reductive construal of religious life in objective terms as an object of scientific cognition. But is there the possibility that religious life has been reduced in its temporality to the transcendental event of the self’s *opening onto itself* through its relation to the objects of its concern? Is religious life, then, the project of radical self-discernment or self-actualization, a kind of subjective interiority which ultimately *excludes* any notion of an exterior harmony or created order of being (as found in, e.g., St. Augustine)? Does God or any god really speak in this kairological event? Everything hinges on how the “being” of the temporal or kairological event is interpreted.

In Chapter 2 I explore Heidegger’s circling back retrieval of religious life in the Marburg period, and his subsequent self-critical response to the problem of this second kind of reduction of religious life (i.e. what I am calling the transcendental reduction). The latter move prepares Heidegger’s thinking for the ground up retrieval of religion in Hölderlin (Chapter 3).
Chapter 2: Turnings: Heidegger’s Philosophical Retrieval of the Event

2.1 Introduction: The Problem of Religious Self-Determination

At the close of Chapter 1 I raised the point that Heidegger leaves indeterminate in his earliest courses the precise ontological nature of this self-responsiveness of life through the event. Such indeterminacy falls in line with the formally indicative character of the early sketches in their constative nature, which find fulfillment only in the performative retrieval of the self-responsiveness of life in its finite expressions. However, I also raised the concern at the close of the chapter that Heidegger seems to interpret religious life in the fundamental direction of the self-determination of life (if even as response to something primordially ungraspable in itself) and that such a retrieval may threaten religious life in its particularity with another reductive formalization. To what extent is factical religiosity now the expression of the deeper opening onto itself of life? Does this represent merely the retrieval of religious life in the primordial direction of its basic temporal sense? Where does God or the divine fit into the self-interpretation of life? What remains of the content of categories meaningful in the context of factical religiosity when these categories are transposed in ontological terms? Is there another, alternative sort of violence – the transcendental violence of an interiorizing subjectivity which excludes revelation of anything “higher” than itself – implicit in the project of a phenomenological sketching out of religious life?

In this Chapter I argue that such is not necessarily the case but that Heidegger himself comes to contend (often self-critically) with what I am calling the transcendental reduction in its various forms during his tenure at Marburg (1923-1928) and in the early years of the second Freiburg tenure, into the 1930s. During this time Heidegger continued to distinguish his notion of
the Da-sein of human beings as thrown (geworfen) into the world in the fundamentally temporal mode of enacting possibilities of its being. In notes for a 1941 course on Schelling, Heidegger carefully differentiates his notion of Da-sein thrown toward its possibilities from the transcendental subjectivity of modern philosophy which takes up its position in being as the unconditional priority of self-determination in knowledge or will (ST, 180). The highest form taken by this metaphysics of unconditional subjectivity is the absolute identity of thinking and being in onto-theology. Heidegger’s first reference to onto-theology comes in his lecture course on Schelling’s treatise On Human Freedom (1804), held during the summer semester of 1936. Heidegger’s questioning of thinkers, from Kant and Cassirer to Schelling and Hegel, turns on his attempt to retrieve a sense of the transcendence of our being thrown toward possibilities without the self-determining immanence of transcendental subjectivity. As I shall argue, Heidegger retrieves from these thinkers the radical impetus to think the absolute object of philosophy in a way appropriate to it. The task intersects with Heidegger’s earlier concern to retrieve philosophically that toward which religion comports itself and has transformative implications for philosophy.

I begin by reading Heidegger’s initial attempts to respect the manner of comportment of religion (faith) by tracing out its difference from philosophical rationality. Heidegger later problematizes and calls into question the ontological conceptuality that holds up this distinction. Thus, by default, his thought also calls into question the idea of radical separation of faith and reason. I examine Heidegger’s thoughtful encounter with Cassirer and Schelling and his attempt to recover a sense of primordial myth as the situation into which human beings are “thrown” interpretively. Heidegger thus also re-opens the question of the divine within his own thinking and in response to the “onto-theological” notion of self-determining thinking. Heidegger thus also opens the way for further reflection on the object of religion in thinking encounter with the poet.

2.2 Phenomenology and Theology

Heidegger gave a lecture entitled “Phenomenology and Theology,” in Tübingen in 1927, in which he attempted further to articulate the phenomenological account of Christian religiosity
he had developed in the earliest Freiburg courses. Heidegger’s overriding concern in this lecture is to account for the possibility of a phenomenological treatment of faith (in particular, Christian believing comportment), one which is capable of affirming the self-articulating self-interpretation on the part of the faithful without philosophically endorsing the dogmatic content of this self-interpretation. Here Heidegger repeats in a peculiar fashion his earlier emphases on a phenomenology that sketches out the ontological sense of religious life in order to stir up a more genuine enactment of this way of being. Thus, on the one hand, Heidegger continues to resist reductive philosophical accounts of faith, to allow the self-interpretation of faith to articulate itself, even theoretically, for the sake of cultivating its own self-understanding as faith. On the other hand, however, phenomenology is able to articulate the ontological basic structures of which faith is a particular direction or modification in a way that theology cannot. Phenomenology thus plays a role in the retrieval of genuine faith, though it “has” no particular faith of its own.

2.2.1. Making Room for Faith

Heidegger’s analysis in the Tübingen lecture turns on the question of the relationship of theology and philosophy. He resists the modern scholastic method for treating these two areas of concern on the basis of the fundamental dichotomy of faith and knowledge (Glaube und Wissen) or of revelation and reason (Offenbarung und Vernunft) (PM, 40/GA 9, 47). Heidegger rejects this dichotomy as the basis for a distinction of theology and philosophy on account of the twofold fact that it tends toward the collapse of faith and revelation into positive theological categories and that it tends to relativize the distinction of philosophy from theology on the basis of a view toward their fundamental rootedness as worldviews (weltanschaulicher Positionen). Philosophy could align itself with a theological worldview, or it could become an “interpretation of the world and of life that is removed from revelation and free from faith” (40/47). Here the resistance of 20th century scholasticism to supposedly atheistic modern philosophy is clearly at stake. But Heidegger shifts the terrain of the questioning, from that of the distinction between two ways of understanding the world, to that of human being in its existential possibility (Dasein). Accordingly, he defines philosophy and theology each as a kind of science, and draws a distinction between them on the basis of the very possibilities for comporting itself.
scientifically to the world that are available to the existing human being (41/48-9). Heidegger thereby aims to release each of these distinctive manners of comportment – faith, theology, and philosophy – into their genuine way of being.

Heidegger thus first defines theology as a positive science in relation to faith, the basic field of its comportment. Heidegger sketches out a working definition of “science” (Wissenschaft) in this lecture as “the founding disclosure, for the sheer sake of disclosure, of a self-contained region of beings, or of being” (PM, 41/GA 9, 48). The science that treats of beings in a thematic way – i.e. as conceptual inquiry into something which is already pre-scientifically disclosed in the context of a particular way of relating to them – is “ontic” in character (42/49). The positum of ontic science is distinct from the science itself, in the sense that it has a manner of being disclosed that precedes any objectifying investigation. Heidegger is thus able formally to sketch out a pre-theological sense of faith to which theology subsequently comes to relate in its own manner of comportment. “Theology is a conceptual knowing of that which first of all allows Christianity to become an originary historically event, a knowing of that which we call Christianness [Christlichkeit] pure and simple” (43/52). Heidegger here draws on Luther’s notion of faith as a basic way of comporting to the world, a basic attitude to which something is revealed. “For the ‘Christian’ faith, that being which is primarily revealed to faith, and only to it, and which, as revelation, first gives rise to faith, is Christ, the crucified God” (44/52-3). Again, as we saw in Chapter 1, faith in its factically historical character cannot be originally disclosed in and through any scientific comportment to the world. Faith is “an appropriation of revelation that co-constitutes [mit ausmachen] the Christian occurrence” (45/53-4). This occurrence, as Heidegger defines it here (following Luther) is rebirth (Wiedergeburt) (44/53). As an occurrence, faith is historical, has a peculiar way of unfolding temporally as this re-birth. Thus, “Theology has a meaning and a legitimacy only if it functions as an ingredient of faith, of this particular kind of historical occurrence” (44/53). Theology is a reflexive moment within the life of faith itself, where motivated by faith, theology re-presents its object in its modified manner of self-comportment (PM, 44/GA 9, 53).

Thus, theology is scientific in character; it is distinct from the faith which precedes it, and yet arises from faith and is justified by it. Moreover, theological objectification of faith is carried out only for the purpose of cultivating faithfulness in individuals and communities of believers.
Heidegger’s analysis of theology is in part a ground up retrieval of its rootedness in faith and the corresponding *Destruktion* of theological conceptuality that draws from modes of discourse which are not rooted in faithful comportment, such as metaphysical reflection on the relationship of God to human beings, or psychological analyses of religious consciousness or experiential states (49/60-1). Heidegger thus preserves the autonomy of theology and its conceptuality in relation to other positive sciences and safeguards the integrity of the basic mode of existing from which theology springs forth: “The conceptuality proper to theology can grow only out of theology itself. There is certainly no need for it to borrow from other sciences in order to augment and secure its proofs [...] Likewise, the shortcomings of the nontheological sciences with respect to what faith reveals is no proof of the legitimacy of faith [...] The substantive legitimacy of all theological knowledge is grounded in faith itself, originates out of faith, and leaps back into faith” (50/61). Clearly, then, Heidegger acknowledges that faith – at least *Christian* faith – develops historically, at least in part, through theological reflection.

### 2.2.2. Phenomenology as Corrective to Theology

We are of course left to ask how phenomenological investigation stands in relation to both faith and its theological self-articulation. Whereas in his earliest sketches of primordial religious life Heidegger does not sharply delegate as theological the task of sketching out the basic senses of faith as a mode of comportment, here he is clearly working within the schematic distinction between formal *existential* structures of Dasein and particular *existentiell* ways in which these structures are concretely enacted developed in *Being and Time* and the lecture courses of this period. This distinction represents Heidegger’s first attempt to circle back on central thought of his earlier analyses of factical life, putting into play factical self-retrieval in a way that holds the temporal character of its enactment in view. According to Heidegger, philosophy, as phenomenology, embodies the other basic possibility for scientific comportment besides that of the *positive* sciences. It inquires into, not the ontic, but the *ontological* sense in which something can be said to “be.” In the language of Heidegger’s earlier sketches, phenomenology questions the “how” or manner of factical comportment. But Heidegger pushes these early analyses further by adding the claim that, as the result of its basic direction of questioning, phenomenology arrives at something like the formal possibility-structures that are
schematized through their enactment as a particular historical way of being. Thus, whereas we have the language of the sketch or of forming out in the early courses, in *Being and Time* Heidegger now speaks of setting forth the structures of Dasein in advance of concrete interpretations of being-in-the-world: “But in so far as any faith or ‘world view’, makes any such assertions [i.e. with respect to the religious meaning of the existential-ontological phenomenon of falling as sin], and if it asserts anything about Dasein as Being-in-the-world, it must come back to the existential structures which we have set forth [vorausgesetzt], provided that its assertions are to make a claim to conceptual understanding (BT, 224/SZ, 239). Faith is merely a particular existentiell direction of interpretation given to the formal-existential structures laid bare or let free (freigelegt) in the Daseinsanalytik (224/239). Theological questioning has to do with the historical character of this existentiell directedness, as it testifies to itself conceptually in and through faith (PM, 47/GA 9, 57). But then, Heidegger asks in his lecture, “How does one ontologically disclose the what (the essence) [Wassein] and the how (the mode of being) [Wiesein] underlying these fundamental concepts that are constitutive of Christianess? Is faith to become the criterion of knowledge for an ontological-philosophical explication? Are not the basic theological concepts completely withdrawn from philosophical-ontological reflection [Besinnung]?” (50-1/61-2) Heidegger ask how phenomenological explication could arrive at a basic ontological description of the structure of faith without rooting said description in faith and its ontic conceptuality, on the one hand, or compromising the autonomy of the latter, on the other.

Heidegger responds that ontological questioning must have its own mode or manner of factical interpretation which somehow both remains wholly distinct from faith and is yet able to fine tune and correct basic theological concepts on account of its unique insight into the pre-Christian existential structures which theology presupposes in order to carry out its task.

Though faith does not bring itself about, and though what is revealed in faith can never be founded by way of a rational knowing as exercised by autonomously functioning reason, nevertheless the sense of the Christian occurrence as rebirth is that Dasein’s prefaithful, i.e., unbelieving, existence is sublated [aufgehoben] therein. Sublated does not mean done away with, but raised up, kept, and preserved in the new creation. One’s pre-Christian existence is indeed existentielly, ontically, overcome in faith. But this existentiell overcoming of one’s pre-Christian existence (which belongs to faith as rebirth) means precisely that one’s overcome pre-Christian Dasein is existentially, ontologically included within faithful existence (PM, 51/GA 9, 63).
Faith is not reducible to a subjective projection, nor can an “autonomously functioning reason” found the inner truth or meaning of faith, as it does in a certain construal of transcendental philosophy. But faith as rebirth is the historical recollection of the event of Christ, the retrieval of one’s past having been (pre-Christian existence) out of what continues to be revealed in this event. The theological concepts that explicate this temporal movement must therefore take for granted some understanding of the ontological sense of this movement, i.e. the basic way in which meaning “works” for human beings generally. Theological concepts are thus marked by a sort of “content” that is pre-Christian, in the sense that the phenomenon of Christian rebirth could not be possible without it (PM, 51/GA 9, 63-4). This content is nothing in itself (Heidegger rejects any notion of a transcendental subjectivity somehow lying behind or beneath experience as its unifying principle), so then it must refer only to the particular manner or way in which the ontic meaningfulness of faith is concretely enacted. Phenomenology sets out (vorausgesetzt) the genuinely temporal sense of all ontic meaningfulness in the framework of an ontological conceptuality which helps direct it back to its original ground in the groundlessness of existence. Ontological conceptuality thus functions as “corrective,” a kind of philosophical tuning fork that keeps theological concepts attuned to the manner of being of faith, and not just to a conceptual content abstracted from it.

So, for instance, the theological concept of sin presupposes the pre-Christian notion of ontological guilt (Schuld), which Heidegger brings to light in Being and Time. Dasein is basically “thrown” (geworfen) to itself as its own basis for existence, for taking up possibilities for being itself (BT, 330-31/SZ, 285). What this means, Heidegger explains, is that in virtue of its being thrust into possibilities for being, the self becomes individuated as a finite self. Dasein’s mode of being must be such that it enacts determinate possibilities for itself, since it is thrown precisely as these possibilities, continually taking itself up as a project (Entwurf) for itself. Dasein therefore must be as the thrown basis that it is, and this means that it must understand itself in terms of its possibilities, since it could never make its being wholly present to itself (BT, 330-31/SZ, 284-5). Dasein is “guilty” in an ontological sense because it is always not other possibilities. In virtue of being a finite, individuated self, Dasein is nothing in itself. Its own being consists in the continual taking up of possibilities in its being thrown (331/285). Such
being thrown is indeed nothing as such besides the very enactment of Dasein’s possibilities, which are nevertheless always before it. As Heidegger says, “Dasein is not itself the basis of its Being, inasmuch as this basis first arises from its own projection; rather, as Being-its-Self, it is the Being of its basis [als Selbstsein das Sein des Grundes]” (330/285). Being guilty is thus the ontological condition of Dasein’s being called or summoned forth in awareness (conscience) of its radical nullity and indeterminateness, and consequently, awareness of its own being as potentiality (334-35/288-89). When one learns that there is no basis for one’s own life outside what one has been in light of what one is becoming, then one has come face to face with the utter responsibility one bears to his life as a whole. In virtue of being, I am answerable to the life that calls itself forth to itself in my own individuation as a finite agent. In conscience I come to see that this life is at basis nothing outside the very direction I have given it; I am the being of this life’s basis. But I am the being of its basis in the sense that I am always open to the potential for being a self, for standing out into some existentiell possibility that has opened up for me.

Described above is the ontological meaning of guilt in Being and Time: a basic structure of being that precedes and is the very condition of the possibility for any moral or religious notion of guilt. The latter, according to Heidegger, presuppose some lack or privation to be the original meaning of this phenomenon. But as care Dasein does not lack anything, does not like Descartes’ subject stand as the inherent lackingness of finite being between nothing and infinite actuality. Moreover, if we were to define Dasein’s guilt by its constant failure perfectly to live up to the moral law, for example, then this would mean that Dasein’s care is characterized by its missing certain qualities, such that it constantly fails to measure up or is always indebted in some way (BT, 328-29/SZ, 283). But one could object that Dasein need not be essentially guilty, that it could perhaps live up to the moral law at least sometimes. However, the very notion itself of a moral law still presupposes the positive potentiality for being a self, and so the moral law cannot be the basis for this potentiality. If it were, then both the fulfillment of the moral law and its transgression would lead the self to sink back into nullity.

So too, according to Heidegger, the theological concept of sin presupposes the ontological structure of guilt, according to Heidegger. In notes from a series of talks on Luther’s theological concept of sin in 1924, Heidegger acknowledges that sin is a mode of being of human beings, and as such, “is defined by a very specific state of being disposed toward the
world” (PSL, 190). Heidegger tells us that sin for Luther is the horror-stricken comportment of those whose way of being in the world is constituted by the movement of turning away from God. It is not fundamentally a moral concept but a religious one which stands in relation, therefore, to faith (192). “God is unbearable to humans. They are frightened by God even in the slightest rustling of leaves, because they are shaken and unsettled in their being. They flee from God and thereby betray their intellectum depravatum [depraved intellect]” (193). Sin is thus a particular tendency of life, of the transfer of guilt to God, of the loss of an “original being before God” (193-94). The task of theology is to elucidate the basic relation to God that is still at play even in this loss – to bring the believer face to face with the fleeing aspect of his sin – so that faith can then disclose itself in him (PSL, 194). Conversely, the theologian “must first go to the cross before he can say id quod res est [how things really are]” (191). Sin and faith are mutually defined by the particular way in which they are enactments of being-in-the-world. But Heidegger later tells us in 1927/28 that “[t]he more originally and appropriately the basic constitution of Dasein is brought to light in a genuine ontological manner and the more originally, for example, the concept of guilt is grasped, the more clearly it can function as a guide for the theological explication of sin” (PM, 52/GA 9, 65). The concept of guilt is not originally grasped theologically but ontologically-existentially. Luther recognized over the scholastic (according to Heidegger) that sin is a concept of existence, and not just a simple addition to or perversion of a metaphysically defined basic nature (PSL, 190). But even Luther’s concept of sin stands to be corrected by an ontological investigation of the original positive meaning of guilt which it presupposes. In fact, Heidegger suggests that, the more theology allows itself to be guided in part by ontological explication of its basic concepts, the better able it is to carry out its function in deepening the God-relation manifest in faith.

Heidegger thus fleshes out in the Marburg period his basic claim that phenomenology is able to formally indicate the basic structures of religious life with reference to its theological concepts without interfering with the autonomy of the former in relation to the latter. However, the lecture “Phenomenology and Theology” is the mark only of a beginning for Heidegger, as it leaves certain glaring problems unaddressed. As we recall, Heidegger’s earliest courses develop the thought that the formal indication brings factual religious life into maturation (Zeitigkeit) by explicating its ontological senses, preparing it for re-enactment or re-petition. Here, Heidegger leaves the task of the repetition of religious life squarely in the hands of theology, while he
continues to affirm the power of the formal indication for explicating the basic ontological senses presupposed in theological self-explication of religious life. But phenomenology cannot be for Heidegger the self-unfolding of some autonomous, self-determining reason into purely formal structures and categories. The whole thrust of his earliest lecture courses and even his notion of Dasein in *Being and Time* affirms his view of the radically hermeneutic character of philosophy, as the unfolding of an interpretation on the part of an agency that is already constituted as radically self-interpretive. Tom Rockmore puts the matter quite frankly in a recent essay: “Heidegger inconsistently tries to maintain an absolute distinction between philosophy as intrinsically aperspectival and a mere perspective, a distinction that he himself calls into question in his view of Dasein.”64 Rockmore overstates his case. But Heidegger indeed seems to want a hermeneutic phenomenology that is yet able to elevate itself as an interpretation of Dasein to the status of a transcendental science of phenomena, as he says in *Being and Time*: “Every disclosure of Being as the transcendens is transcendental knowledge. *Phenomenological truth (the disclosedness of Being) is veritas transcendentalis*” (BT, 62/SZ, 38). In the context of a distinction he draws between the ancient and medieval understanding of care as cura (i.e. in relation to God) and his own interpretation of the phenomenon, Heidegger makes the provocative claim that:

As compared with this ontical interpretation [Auslegung], the existential-ontological Interpretation [Interpretation] is not, let us say, merely an ontical generalization which is theoretical in character. That would just mean that ontically all man’s ways of behaving are ‘full of care’ and are guided by his ‘devotedness’ to something. The ‘generalization’ is rather one that is ontological and a priori. What it has in view is not a set of ontical properties which constantly keep emerging, but a state of Being which is already underlying in every case, and which first makes it ontologically possible for the entity to be addressed ontically as ‘cura’. The existential condition for the possibility of ‘the cares of life’ and ‘devotedness’, must be conceived as care, in a sense which is primordial—that is ontological (BT, 243-44/SZ, 199).

The problem is that the content and relational senses of religious life have now been so formalized as to drop out of view in their particularity in Heidegger’s interpretive retrieval of

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Dasein. Yet, at the same time, the theological self-explication of faith must manifest in accordance with the structures laid bare in the *Daseinsanalytik*.

Adding an additional layer of complexity to the problem, Heidegger insists in his lecture “Phenomenology and Theology” that faith and phenomenology are distinct, even mutually opposed, forms of existence. The peculiar relationship of phenomenology to theology “includes the fact that faith, as a specific possibility of existence, is in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy and that is factically ever-changing. Faith is so absolutely the mortal enemy that philosophy does not even begin to want in any way to do battle with it” (PM, 53/GA 9, 65-6). Phenomenology as philosophical questioning does not commit itself to any particular world-view, whereas faith remains so committed. The person of faith, at least in the Abrahamic traditions, holds to the view that God ultimately is. But, Heidegger reasons in a course from 1935, such a view cannot stand as a philosophical response to the question of why there is anything at all, rather than nothing (IM, 7/GA 40, 8-9). Philosophy cannot turn to the content of faith for an answer, because it seeks not to explain but to enact the unfolding of a radical questioning of being (7-8/8-9). Moreover, faith cannot itself enact this questioning, though the person of faith can allow his world-view to be radically and fundamentally shaken by its disturbing call.

Yet, this construal of faith conflicts with Heidegger’s hermeneutic account of philosophy. As hermeneutic, phenomenology is never distinct from a particular form of existence manifest in an *existentiell* direction of Dasein’s self-interpretation. And Heidegger insists that the kind of interpretation manifest in philosophy is such that it pulls against faith. The person of faith remains fixed in a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), unable thus to bring about any radical retrieval of fundamental phenomena, while the philosopher makes this transformative leap, letting Dasein emerge in its wholly *positive* character as transcendence or the clearing of being (BT, 244/SZ, 199). A couple other issues emerge here. On the one hand, it seems that Heidegger cannot on this basis affirm the complete autonomy of religious life, since in some respect it still requires transcendental science to bring it to full maturation (*Zeitigkeit*), even if Heidegger rejects the mediating role of this science in favour of a view of it as corrective. On the other hand Heidegger’s distinction of the ontic direction of faith from the ontological direction of philosophy seems to rest on a shaky foundation, of denying the participation of philosophy in
“worldview,” on the one hand, and of erasing religious life from the process of any genuinely ontological retrieval of Dasein, on the other. As we will see, Heidegger eventually subjects this transcendental reduction of faith and philosophy to further Destruktion and retrieval, in his reading of Kant and Cassirer.

2.3 Destruktion of the Transcendental Standpoint

I argued above that in “Phenomenology and Theology” Heidegger partially dismantles transcendental subjectivity in response to religion, insofar as he denies the reductive notion that the revelation which occurs in/as the phenomenon of faith must be at bottom the subject’s own idealistic activity of knowing itself. Phenomenology leaves faith to itself, to articulate its meaning in theological categories that have nothing to do with the “science” of philosophy or even with practical reasoning. However, Heidegger also contends that, if faith is to articulate itself conceptually in theology, the latter must presuppose in virtue of the relational sense of its basic phenomena, certain existential structures laid bare in phenomenological analysis. While phenomenology leaves the content of faith up to theology, it discloses the relational sense of the being of Dasein upon which theology relies for its basic concepts. Faith articulates itself theologically, but its success as a positive science depends upon phenomenological disclosure of the originary sense of the positum. This sense is an ontological, and not a theological, appropriation of the event and its temporal structure. I asked in the last section whether Heidegger’s notion of a fundamental disclosure of the logic of being is stable and whether it fundamentally departs from the transcendental subject. Does Heidegger’s retrieval of phenomenology constitute yet another science to which religion must essentially pay homage? Whatever “truth” is revealed in the God-relation embodied in the historical facticity of Christian existence is formally bound to an ontological analysis that recognizes only the temporal self-transcendence of human existence, as Jean-Luc Marion argues.65

65 Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “The Final Appeal of the Subject,” translated by Simon Critchley, in Deconstructive Subjectivities, ed. Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1996); “The conscience which experiences its debt there perceives an appeal or call, whatever that appeal might be; yet this appeal does not evoke or demand any response, any reparation or any ontically assignable price [...] The indebted conscience therefore opens Dasein not onto whatever
In answering these questions, it proves useful to trace the further development of Heidegger’s thinking in his 1929 review of Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1925) and his 1929/30 lecture course entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In these works we can detect two developments in Heidegger’s thinking in this period which are quite significant also to his specific thought on religion. These developments have to do centrally with Heidegger’s retrieval of the notion of world and of the structure of the relation of human beings to things. On the one hand, Heidegger suggests in his review of Cassirer that “myth” is “an original possibility of human Dasein, which has its own proper truth” (KPM, 180/GA 3, 255). The suggestion here is that the form of myth belongs quite essentially to the manner in which human beings exist, that it cannot without undo reduction be fitted into sociological categories. Instead, myth is a way of being that bears witness to the “overpoweringness” of the hidden origin that holds human beings and things in relation. Heidegger thus opens the way for a phenomenological understanding of being-in-the-world that itself inhabits the “mythic” opening of time and relationality. On the other hand, Heidegger eventually subjects to Destruktion his own interpretation of phenomenology as fundamental ontology, questioning the very notion of an ontological basis for the difference of actual beings and the very possibility for their manifestation as beings. He arguably deepens his thinking relation to religion.

2.3.1 Mythical Dasein: Heidegger’s Review of Cassirer

In his review of Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Heidegger applauds the author’s attempt to take up Schelling’s admonition to understand myth on its own terms and not to try to decode it into something else, whether sociological or theological. Only this way will philosophy allow myth to speak for itself from the ground up and will it be able to articulate its basic form as a particular manner or “how” of the existence of human beings (KPM, 180/GA 3, 255-56). But Heidegger also takes Cassirer to task for his interpretation of myth as at bottom a phenomenon of productive consciousness. Heidegger contends that this idealist interpretation fails in the end to elucidate the ontological sense of myth as the opening of world because in the innerworldly beings there may be but rather to its own transcendence in the encounter with beings in general, a transcendence which alone opens a world” (88). I discuss Marion’s critique of Heidegger in detail in Chapter 5.
end, for Cassirer, world is produced in the spontaneity of understanding (188/266-68). Thus, Heidegger submits Cassirer’s work to phenomenological *Destruktion*, to retrieve its most radical thought of a mythic world that is originally *given as disclosed* rather than produced. Most importantly for my purposes here, in his retrieval of this thought of the disclosure of world, Heidegger questioningly intimates that myth is “an essential phenomenon within a universal interpretation of Being as such and its modifications” (KPM, 190/GA 3, 269-70). That is to say, myth belongs to the *existential* structure of *Dasein* and as such, is subject to ontological analysis. Heidegger attempts to think myth more primordially in terms of the “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) of its manner of being. Such is the originary occurrence of “a being-delivered-over of Dasein to the world” (ein Ausgeliefertsein des Daseins an die Welt) (188/267). This being-delivered-over to world is not the spontaneous production of subjective experience or of self-determining spirit. Following Schelling, Heidegger identifies this thrownness into world as a kind of irruption of an event, the fundamental occurrence that opens up the relationality of human beings to things (*Da-sein*), and thus also holds human beings open “for what is always in each case the suddenly extraordinary” in these relations (188/267). Resisting Cassirer’s subjective idealism, where mythic *meaning* springs ultimately from thought, Heidegger retrieves a sense of myth as the very manner in which the the overpowering force emerges into the *Da-sein* of human relations to things, as the binding *occurrence* that opens up these relations (189/268).

As Heidegger contends in the review, Cassirer already sees that myth is the opening up of an expressive dimension of understanding wherein the basic forms of space, time, and number are delimited and fixed in light of the immediacy of an overpowering force (*Übermächtig*) (KPM, 182/GA 3, 257-8). Cassirer is no sociological positivist; he avoids the pitfalls of an interpretation of myth as in terms of the cultural-symbolic coding of certain universal structures of “human” experience. In each case, rather, mythic symbols and their ordering of experience are the *forms of that experience itself*, i.e. the organization of space, time, and number around the poles of sacred and profane (e.g. sacred temples, burial sites, places of ritual; ceremonial times organized around the motions of the heavenly bodies; etc.) are *ontologically* central to the “mythic” existence of a particular people. The content-sense of said existence is not any particular object-structure or complex of said structures. It is the organization of the world and the opening up of the possibility of subjective experience which arises out of the occurrence of
an overpowering actuality (mana) (KPM, 182/GA 3, 257). Mana opens “the dimensions in which Dasein as such always already moves” (182/258). Heidegger affirms Cassirer’s claim that the mythical order opened up through the mana-occurrence is disclosed to human beings. Thus, myth is not merely a story added to a more fundamental experience of space or time in itself; instead, human beings are in their being the very opening of mythic delimitation of space and time: “This ‘basic division’ between the sacred and the profane is the basic articulation of the actual, to which mythical Dasein ‘comports’ itself, whatever that being in its constitution may be” (182/257).

Mythical Dasein comports itself in a “mana-representation” (Mana-Vorstellung) (KPM, 182/GA 3, 257). Said comportment is the relational-sense of mythical Dasein, the manner in which human beings come into relation to things in the world. On Heidegger’s reading, Cassirer thus turns to examine, not the objective basis for myth, but the subjective structure of mythic consciousness, to sketch out the ways in which consciousness discovers itself through its activities. At first, there is no subjective consciousness at all, as human beings are bound over in their doing to a kind of magical identification of self with all that is actual (184/260-2). Every form of human activity is the force of the divine operating in the world, a divine form. But the self cannot complete its identity in the infinitely multiplying forms of the divine, and progressively develops a kind of reflective distancing from its actual doings, culminating eventually in the manipulation of tools and in the recognition of individual forces of “soul,” a movement which gradually interiorizes daimonic powers as the ethical subject that acts from its own capability (185/262-63). Heidegger is drawn to Cassirer’s reading of mythic opening to the divine as fundamentally a practical comportment that dynamically takes place as cult and rite, and not in some static idea or intuition (KPM, 185/GA 3, 262-63): “All mythical narration is always only a derivative report of sacred dealings. In these sacred dealings, in contrast, mythical Dasein presents itself immediately.” There is no “religious” relation to the divine prior to the mythic expression. The mythic mana-representation is thus inextricably bound up in the formation of world. But world cannot be reduced to mere myth as “story.” In a much profounder sense world is identical to mana-representation in mythic Dasein (182/257). Cassirer holds open myth in its relational sense as the opening up of world. The sacred is not the “otherworldly.” It is the infinitely actualizing which opens the productive tension or “between” of an ordering of world in both its subjective and objective facets.
Despite his affirmation of Cassirer’s resistance to positivist analyses of myth, Heidegger also submits to Destruktion Cassirer’s notion of the dialectical development of mythic shapes into higher forms of autonomous, rational spirit (KPM, 185-86/GA 3, 262-65). On Heidegger’s reading, Cassirer’s analysis remains bound up in the Neo-Kantian problem of the consciousness of objects and thus misses the more fundamental question of how mythical forms of life come into being. Cassirer’s designation of the mana-representation (Vorstellung) betrays an ambiguity of origins: Neither a form of thought nor a form of intuition, Cassirer nevertheless characterizes mana in terms of representational spirit (i.e. self-grasping knowing). Cassirer’s idealism bars him access to the original sense in which mythical forms of life are enacted temporally.

As Heidegger tells us, the “grounding” of the mana-representation springs out of the very way of being of mythical Dasein. But this immediately presents a problem for any philosophy of myth. The object-world ordered by space, time, and numbering must correspond in Cassirer’s account to phenomenal disclosure in subjective actuality. But this cannot mean that mana-representation itself is grounded in the inwardness of “soul.” Neither can it be resolved in the totemic opposition of any “I-Thou” communal relation. Heidegger observes that the problem that thinking faces here is to show “precisely how mythical Dasein, which in its ‘indeterminate life-feeling’ remains bound to all beings, enacts a ‘confrontation’ between world and I that is proper to it, rooted in its own specific way of being, i.e., in its ‘doing’” (KPM, 184/GA 3, 260-62). Heidegger asks, in the final analysis, whether Cassirer’s notion of spirit is not simply the return of idealism, the attempt to root the form of life of mythical Dasein in the spontaneity of thought (186-88/264-67).

Heidegger here repeats his reading of Kant from his 1929 Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, wherein he famously argues that ontology is the fundamental direction of transcendental philosophy, since the transcendental task of laying the ground of the knowledge of objects (the task of metaphysics) must aim to develop the very ground it describes (KPM, 62/GA 3, 87-8). Such development is inherently the task of being, since it regards the relational holding together of the elements of knowledge in productive consciousness. Such regarding can itself take place only in productive consciousness, as “the expression of the most original phenomenological knowledge of the innermost, unified structure of transgression” (84/119). Heidegger characterizes this ontological knowledge of transcendence as finitude coming to have
a grasp of itself in its very character as finite (88/124-25). In a brilliant movement of Destruktion and retrieval of Kant, Heidegger contends that the root of the receptivity and spontaneity that constitute the knowing activity of finite subjectivity is the productive imagination (97/138). If the task of a delimitation of knowing in its finite character as transcendence is simultaneously the task of a ground-laying that brings this finite knowing into conscious awareness, and if the receptive and spontaneous elements of knowing remain in tension, then the task of ground-laying is a productive one that roots and continually holds these elements together. But if this is the case then, as Heidegger contends, the root of this productive ground-laying cannot itself be inherently the power of subjectivity (KPM, 98/GA 3, 139-40). Heidegger argues Kant shrunk back from the radical implications of his notion of productive imagination and in the second edition of the first Critique brought the task of ground-laying of finite being back under the universal sway of logic (112-20/160-72). Heidegger argues that a more persistent carrying out of the task brings to light the inner temporal character of productive imagination as transcendence (137/195-97). The horizon in which the subject is able to bring something before itself, i.e. the horizon of self-hood, is not essentially the logical unity of bringing the manifold under the rule of the same, but the temporal unity of an originary repetition of the same in its manifold forms (136/194-95). The relation of I and things is now wholly temporal, an occurrence that holds open in productive tension the elements in the receptive spontaneity of finite knowing.

Heidegger’s Destruktion and retrieval of Kant’s productive imagination as temporal unity is clearly at work in his reading of Cassirer. Heidegger contends in his major work on Kant from this period that while Kant’s critical project for laying out the ground of metaphysics brought the latter thinker close to an affirmation of the finitude of an interpretive or discursive understanding, the potential of this thought for a Destruktion of the conceptual framework of the whole transcendental philosophy, triggered in Kant recoil toward grounding knowledge in the transcendent reason of classical metaphysics, now framed as the quasi-transcendent locus of apperceiving subjectivity. Following his interpretative retrieval of the critical philosophy as the further dismantling of the rational subject, Heidegger argues that productive consciousness is wholly temporal, as expressive articulation of meanings whose universal ground cannot be brought to full articulation. Expressive finitude is simply thrown into this condition. Thus, as regards transcendental philosophy, Richard Polt notes that
Heidegger is radicalizing [it]... he is digging even deeper than Kant into the conditions of the possibility of experience. However, this project leads to the discovery that no project can establish an unshakable foundation: all our projects presuppose a thrownness that cannot be circumvented or explained. All our attempts to identify necessary transcendental structures must then fail—and it is by recognizing this inevitable failure that we can best pay homage to being.⁶⁶

Accordingly, argues Heidegger, Cassirer’s mana-representation is rooted, not in rational spirit, but in that understanding of being whose structure is thrownness (Geworfenheit). Thrownness is wholly temporal, an essential occurrence: “In thrownness there is a proper being driven here and there that is open from out of itself for what is always in each case the suddenly extraordinary” (KPM, 188/GA 3, 267-68). Thrownness is essentially an openness for the “suddenly extraordinary,” but it is precisely an opening toward world, the unveiling (enthüllen) of a relation of between world and I, which Heidegger terms “transcendence,” the movement out toward things characteristic of being-in-the-world (189/268). Once mana is understood in its temporal sense as this kind of fundamental rupture or opening to world, argues Heidegger, it follows that there is no longer any recourse to a transcendental standpoint from which to grasp its workings in a philosophy of symbolic forms (189/268).

To sum up, at stake in his Cassirer review is Heidegger’s growing critique of transcendental philosophy and his related opening of the question of the essential place of myth in a fundamental interpretation of being. Myth is thought here as the temporal opening of an understanding of being, as the very basis for a relation to the world and to beings, that which Heidegger referred to in his earlier lecture courses as the kairos event. But quite significantly, Heidegger drops the earlier language of actualization of factical life in the maturation (Zeitigung) of its self-understanding, speaking instead of the thrownness of Dasein in transcendence towards the world. The event is no longer the moment of transparency, where the self-disclosure of life is brought to fullness in philosophical self-articulation. The event is an opening to the “suddenly extraordinary,” the opening of myth. Heidegger sketches out the ontological structure of myth in terms of the opening of world. But is myth, then, the existentiell direction of an existential structure whose proper articulation comes from a de-mythologizing ontology? Heidegger problematizes this earlier distinction in his review by way of his suggestion that mythic opening of world may be the more essential “moment” from which the possibility of an ontological

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questioning emerges (KMP, 190/GA 3, 269-70). Indeed, in a lecture course from the early years of his second tenure at Freiburg, Heidegger continues to disrupt the transcendental project and to anticipate a more radical retrieval of language as the “occasion” for human disclosure of the universal. I will further explain the way in which Heidegger’s disrupts the transcendental standpoint in philosophy with his notion of the “throw” of being, before showing how this helped him articulate his famous critique of onto-theology.

2.3.2 Disrupting Ontology: Heidegger’s 1929/30 Lecture Course

In his 1929/30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger carries further the *Destruktion* of transcendental philosophy he begun in his seminal work on Kant. I am suggesting that this course takes the form of a disruption of the ontological, in preparation for the irruptive or in-breaking (*einbrechenden*) moment that takes the human form of transition (*Übergang*) from possibilities pressing toward their actual articulation as possibilities. The moment is wholly *temporal* in that the enactment of human possibilities takes place as the *having been* which continually holds itself open toward *future* instantiations (FCM, 365-66/GA 29/30, 531-32). So far, nothing has changed, from Heidegger’s earliest sketches of the enactment-sense of factical life through his formal analysis of the temporal horizon of the event in *Being and Time*. Even here, the actual arises in the framework of a *possibilizing* temporal horizon. But in this course Heidegger shatters any lingering criticism that this horizon might form the basis of a transcendental subjectivity through his notion of the throw (*Entwurf*).

With this notion, Heidegger clears up his earlier ambiguities concerning factical self-interpretation. The human being as factical – i.e. the enactment of possibilities for itself – is now opened up in the more fundamental occurrence of the opening up of world, the very emergence of possibility itself and our being thrown into it (FCM, 349/GA 29/30, 507-8). According to Heidegger, the earlier sketches of the enactment of factical life remained bound to an overriding concern with the *temporal* origin of our relations to beings. In other words, the analysis fixated on the “as-structure” of our being-in-the-world (i.e. the possibility conditions for how something comes to be regarded or taken up in experience). This approach did not question deeply and persistently enough *as to the origin of possibility itself* (359/522-23). The earlier analyses, as
important as they were in elucidating the temporal structure of being-in-the-world, never penetrated beyond the relational-sense of manifestation to the very occurrence of *manifestation* itself (342/496-97). In this course, Heidegger thus makes a crucial distinction between *transcendental-ontological* questioning which inquires after the possibility conditions of manifestation, i.e. *how* things come to be what they are, and his own thought on the very emergence or givenness of the possible.\(^{67}\) Thus, *ontological* questioning is here de-centered and disrupted in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the very opening up of possibilities or what Polt accurately terms the “gift” of being.\(^{68}\)

There is no straightforward English translation for Heidegger’s term *Entwurf.* In keeping with translators, I am calling it the “throw”\(^{69}\); although William McNeill renders it “projection.” We must keep in mind, however, that this phenomenon is not projection in any subjective sense, i.e. projected meaning or consciousness. Heidegger himself notes that the *Ent-* prefix designates the most proper sense of all such activity as being carried or pulled from and away (*fortträgen; wegträgen*) in the occurrence of the “throw” (*geworfen*) (FCM, 363/GA 29/30, 527). This throw, Heidegger notes, is a sort of turning-toward (*Zukehrung*) the possible which takes place in a removal, or literally a taking-from (*fortnehmen*) which is directed toward itself (*zu ihm selbst*) in the turning (363/527). The throw is a circling movement, but one which carries away in carrying toward. But how is this not just the “pull” of spontaneous reflection toward its objects? In a cryptic statement Heidegger answers, “[b]ecause this removal that pertains to projecting has the character of raising away into the possible, and indeed – as we must observe – into the possible in its possibly being made possible, namely into something possibly actual” (363/527).\(^{69}\) The removal is not the condition of the possibility of that which becomes actualized in experience, *but of the possible itself.*

Heidegger thus begins in this course to move beyond ontological questioning. Already in his Marburg course *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* Heidegger speaks of the task of a metontology, “to bring ontology to its latent overturning (*Umschlag*)” (MFL, 158/GA 26, 201).

\(^{67}\) See also Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being*, 57-9.


\(^{69}\) “*Weil dieses Fortnehmen des Entwerfens den Charakter des Enthebens in das Möglichte hat, und zwar – wohl zu beachten – in das Mögliche in seinem möglichen Ermöglichen, nämlich: ein mögliches Wirkliches.*”
Heidegger contends that his earlier project of a fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*, which elucidated the structures of Dasein and the temporality of being, formed out part of a larger circling movement (*Kehre*) where the problem of philosophy itself would be transformed into a “particular concretion of the ontological difference” (158/201). Whereas in the earliest courses, Heidegger designated the radically concrete by way of the factual enactment of “life”, here the concrete is indicated by way of the turning that opens up the very “site” of designation (i.e. of the *logos*) in all of its forms. Such is the ontological difference between the manifestation of beings and the possibility of manifestation as such. In 1929/30 Heidegger pushes the thought further:

Perhaps the problem of the distinction between being and beings is prematurely stifled as a problematic by our entrusting it to ontology and naming it in this way. Conversely, we must ultimately unfold this problem still more radically, with the danger of arriving at a position where we must reject all ontology in its very idea as an inadequate metaphysical problematic. Yet what are we then to put in place of ontology? Kant’s transcendental philosophy, for instance? Here it is only the name and claims that have been changed, while the idea itself has been retained. Transcendental philosophy too must fall. What, then, is to take the place of ontology? This is a premature, and above all a superficial question. For in the end, through our unfolding of the problem, we altogether lose the place in which we could replace ontology by something else (FCM, 359/GA 29/30, 522-23).

The problem is no longer that of the distinction between the manifestness of beings (i.e. ontic truth) and that of their being (i.e. ontological truth), the question of the difference between these two aspects of manifestness. It is not the ontological question of the enactment of this difference.

What is needed is a questioning that arises out of a more basic attunement (*Grundstimmung*) which allows the taking-from and turning-toward of the throw, at the heart of human being, to be “gripped in its essence” (*einer wesenhaften Ergriffenheit*) (FCM, 132/GA 29/30, 199). Heidegger no longer speaks first in the scientific language of bringing something into conceptual understanding (*Begriff; Verstehen*), but of being moved to speak out of a being seized by the essential: “Above all [...] we shall never have comprehended these concepts [*Begriffe*] and their conceptual rigor unless we have first been gripped [*ergriffen*] by whatever they are supposed to comprehend” (7/9). The attunement awakens a primordial urge to be at home in the throw, to be “within the whole” (*im Ganzen*) in an essential way (5/6-8). As *Da-sein*, the momentous opening of the throw which brings the human being out into its possibilities, we ourselves are constituted by a kind of restlessness (*Getriebenheit*) that characterizes our very
finitude or eventual nature as continually arriving (Endlichkeit) (6/8). Each of us is driven to “being as a whole“(Sein im Ganzen), into the very opening up of possibility itself which Heidegger here names world. Philosophical questioning arises from an attunement to this opening of possibility itself, to grasp it in a genuine manner.

Philosophizing arises out of the desire to be at home in the essential possibilizing which characterizes the basic attunement in/of our Da-sein to world or to the “prevailing of beings as a whole” (das Walten des Seienden im Ganzen) (FCM, 5, 34/GA 29/30, 7, 51). But Heidegger argues that the Greeks were attuned to this dynamic emergence in a way that has more or less closed itself off to us. We no longer for the most part hear resonances in the Greek word physis of the very prevailing of that which prevails in coming forth or entering into actuality. Even with Aristotle, the Western reception of this notion of prevailing is now turned into an ontology that looks to the fundamental character of beings as a whole (i.e. concerning their actual being) and as such (concerning their proper being) (30-4/41-52). Metaphysics has not been able to hold the emergence of this relation itself in the light of questioning (55/84). It has been unable properly to enter into its own essence.

Heidegger’s contention here is that neither did the fundamental ontology of Being and Time fully allow for this sort of questioning return from the ground of the prevailing of beings in their being (substance, subject, spirit, etc) to the occurrence of the prevailing itself. Heidegger notes that required for this questioning is the awakening of an attunement which opens up the ability to let Da-sein be “as it is, or can be” (FCM, 67-8/GA 29/30, 102-3). “Attunements,” says Heidegger, “are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves disposed in such and such a way. Attunements are the ‘how’ [Wie] according to which one is in such and such a way” (FCM, 67/GA 29/30, 101). As human beings, we live in each case out of a particular attunement to beings in their possibility for being. Such attunements open up beings to us within the worldly, social contexts available to us; they present possibilities that can be stepped into and out of, thereby establishing a sense of unity or consistency throughout the Da-sein of each human being (67/100-1). The most powerful attunements, Heidegger contends, are those which we do not notice at all, since they have receded into the background of our relations to beings, binding us all the more on account of their inconspicuous nature.
On the basis of this definition, Heidegger would have to include faith as a particular way in which Da-sein can be attuned to beings and to the world. Indeed, as we saw in his earliest lecture courses, Heidegger wanted to preserve the faith attunement from encroachments against it by the scientific-positivist attitude. He aimed to release the inner possibility of faith or primordial religious life as a particular manner in which life is enacted out of its possibilities. Religious life represented for Heidegger comportment to something quite essential in our Da-sein which has been passed over in the metaphysical tradition. Here, by further de-centering transcendental-ontological questioning, Heidegger opens the way for the continuance of this work.

Of significance here is that philosophy can no longer leave faith to itself, as Heidegger had thought in his earlier lecture. But at the same time, philosophizing arises from a more primordial attunement to the Da-sein of human beings, the eventual or momentous opening of possibility in the turning-toward itself of the throw. Philosophy must prepare the way for a primordial grasp of this Da-sein. Such a grasping of Da-sein as the very opening of possibility itself is, Heidegger notes, always a transformative one (FCM, 352/GA 29/30, 511-12). The question we must ask and which Heidegger indeed does ask is whether there prevails a relation to God or the divine in his retrieval and where or how this relation itself is transformed. But I am getting ahead of myself. The throw opens a turning-toward itself, but the self individuated here is no grounding subjectivity. It is the turning of Da-sein that opens the horizon of possibility and actuality, what we would ordinarily consider to be human being or subjectivity. Philosophizing must remain open in an attunement to this very turning.

Such a turning, as I have already noted, has the character of an event, but one that holds the human being within the turning toward itself as a whole which characterizes its Da-sein. The fundamental attunement must therefore be such that it sharpens our awareness of something uncanny or un-homelike in our very situation, namely the very opening of possibilities upon which we depend but which itself cannot be rendered by us. The attunement and the questioning attitude it occasions together constitute preparation for the transforming moment of the glance (Augenblick), which amounts to being located within the whole. The Da-sein in human beings is opened, not in relation to something else over-against which it stands as lack, but in a fundamental openness to whatever addresses it in the throw, the very being of its being-open, the
en-possibilizing or making-possible itself, which Heidegger also names here the prevailing of beings in their being (FCM, 169/GA 29/30, 251). The most primordial attunement will thus prepare for “a genuine knowing concerning that wherein whatever properly makes Dasein itself possible consists” (165/247). Heidegger gives a lengthy analysis of the attunement of profound boredom, the experience of the utter contingency of life as a whole and subsequent release toward new possibilities for being.

In confronting the utter contingency of the possibilities that now stand before me, unexploited, I am drawn by a kind of call (Anrufen) toward “whatever it is that makes possible, sustains, and guides all essential possibilities of Dasein” (FCM, 143/GA 29/30, 216). In such an experience I am thus brought to myself as a self, i.e. as this particular taking over (übernommen) of possibilities for being there or being open (Da-sein) to beings (FCM, 143/GA 29/30, 215). However, this transition is not a settling one; I find myself in the condition of being held out (Hingehaltenheit), removed from myself and cast into the extremity (Spitze) of originary en-possibilizing (dieses ursprünglichen Ermöglichende) (144/216). When the possibilities that remain before me are disclosed in their utter contingency, I am opened to the wonder that there are possibilities at all, wonder at how they arise in the first place and how beings are able to arise in such an expanse (Weite). But this wonder is also a kind of vertigo, an unsettling loss of bearings. Where nothing presses in against me, I am most strikingly attuned to the freedom by which I am characterized, as pressing toward possibilities (149/223).

The fundamental attunement of our own situation as Da-sein can be found, argues Heidegger, in the profound boredom that arises out of our modern sense of emptiness, a sense of the remaining absent or staying away (Ausbleiben) of any kind of essential distress (wesenhaften Bedrängnis): “For all the organizing and program-making and trial and error there is ultimately a universal smug contentment in not being endangered [Gefahrlosigkeit]” (FCM, 164/GA 29/30, 245). Heidegger argues that modern humanity has obfuscated the core or essential mystery (Geheimnis) of being, precisely through its ceaseless activities of ordering and arranging, bringing everything under the universal sway of its rationality. Human beings have placed themselves in a “world picture,” a “world system” (Weltbildes), as Heidegger says in 1938 (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 67/GA 5, 89). But in the midst of this “storm” of busyness we can be brought into the “eye” of a profound boredom that attunes us to the mystery of the
opening of presence and possibility in *logos*. It is precisely here where the possibility for a profound transformation in our *Da-sein* opens up, if we remain vigilant to it. The human being, Heidegger contends, is world-forming, or remains in the en-possibilizing throw of world-formation (*Weltbildu*ng) (FCM, 349/GA 29/30, 507). Heidegger stresses here the otherness of language to human beings who nevertheless remain in its sway as in the very opening of possibility itself. Language as *logos*, Heidegger’s transformed reception of the relational-sense of being, belongs to this event of possibilizing and first realizes it, enacts world.

What are we then to make of the content of faith? Heidegger seems to overturn his earlier position that a fundamental ontology can leave faith to itself while correcting the basic concepts by which faith articulates itself scientifically. It is now clear that the philosophizing which springs out of a fundamental attunement to *Da-sein*, the “being open for beings” in which all relation takes place, can no longer leave faith to itself. It is compelled to find what is essentially occurring in faith. If mythic response to the overpowering source begins at the opening of language itself, then religious faith and philosophy share a common root. It is arguable that Heidegger’s later philosophizing is the attempt to release *both* religious response to its divine object *and* philosophical thinking of the “coming to be” of the gift of being from the self-determining rationality he calls onto-theo-logy.

### 2.4 The step back from onto-theo-logy

With his disruption of the ontological Heidegger achieves a deeper opening of philosophical questioning to our attunement to the event of language. The question that oriented this chapter had to do with Heidegger’s circling back retrieval of the event of faith or that which founds *religious* life. I argued in the previous section that Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of the transcendental standpoint means that the philosophical retrieval can no longer refuse the attunement of faith but must through a fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) to the event of language itself release faith into what it is most properly in a way that hermeneutic theology is incapable of doing. This sort of retrieval entails the directing of faith back into its source in the event by which being is given. Only the questioning ascent to wisdom, and not a “science” of the relation of human beings to the divine, can first hold open faith and release it into its ownmost
nature as an event, even if as we will see in subsequent chapters, theological utterance – in the form of the poetic – completes such an ascent.

Thus, in his later work, Heidegger completes his disruption of the ontological “circle” of questioning beings in accordance with their unifying ground by way of a corresponding disruption of the theological identification of this principle of unification with a spontaneous origin. Heidegger thereby identifies the secret logic of a quite sinister order of technological-utilitarian domination of the *logos* and the setting the human relation to things in an opposition that betrays the inner will to their mastery. The “onto-theo-logic” at work in this will to mastery of the *logos* is at the same time the deepest “transcendental” reduction of any human aspiration to the divine finally to the indifference of self-determining will. Conversely, the entrance of God into this philosophy can only mean its conversion to the technological struggle for self-mastery. Yet, Heidegger also glimpses in the anti-religious attunement of technological modernity the readiness for a “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) into the sort of thinking that is “perhaps closer to the divine God” (*dem göttlichen Gott vielleicht näher*) than onto-theo-logy would have it (ID, 72/141). The questioning which is at first without God (*gott-lose*) opens itself to the same event of language in which a God might speak.

Yet this God would have to *belong* to the opening of language in the event. It would be a *temporal* God who meets us in our Da-sein. How could the divine God be one who encounters human beings? Heidegger here draws inspiration from Schelling’s notion of distinction within the godhead of the disclosure and lighting up of the *logos* from the ground that it must simultaneously disclose and conceal. He thereby begins his deepened retrieval of religious aspiration to the divine, i.e. the sense of human doings, mythic openings of language, as “divining” or interpretively unfolding something overwhelmingly given. More so than any positive science, which remains in the sphere of essential possibilities of being, phenomenology thus brings faith into its own as historical happening of language.

### 2.4.1 The onto-theo-logical Verfassung of metaphysics

In the event, we are ripped away from any confidence in an enduring rational, moral or practical ego which would stand as the unifying ground (*Grund*) of our experiences and thrust
toward the abyss (Abgrund). Human be-ing is the opening of self-identity, an “I” in relation to a world which takes place in a deeper “turn of events” as we say in colloquial language. The turn of the event is the turn of being itself in opening the possibilities of language, of our being able to relate to the world. The essence of language is thus an event. It remains the un-thought opening of the irreducible rift and transition between the actual and the possible. The human being dwells in this “between.”

Such is the meaning of Heidegger’s famous “turn” (Kehre). Recent research on Heidegger’s thought has shown the large extent to which Heidegger’s notion of the turn in his thinking is misunderstood. Heidegger uses the language of turning to point to the emergence of language that is in some sense older than being as such. As Polt puts it, the event is the “deeper mystery” of the “turn” of being into its inception as Da-sein, the opening of human possibilities for grasping and relating, while it is also always the transforming re-turn of this Da-sein to itself.\(^{70}\) I do not wish to rehash all of the research here.\(^{71}\) But we see that in his mature work Heidegger locates the ground-up and circling-back movements of phenomenological retrieval in the circling turn of the event. The point is not to bring this event into the temporal maturity or ripeness (Zeitigkung) of understanding (Verstehen), but now to enter “the step back out of metaphysics into its essential nature” (Der Schritt zurück aus der Metaphysik in ihr Wesen) (ID, 51/117). Philosophy must point the way back into the dimension out of which all metaphysical interpretation of being as such arises.

Such a project is profoundly in keeping with Heidegger’s earliest aspirations to allow philosophy to be encountered by its other, that of which it cannot speak from its own resources but towards which it must nevertheless indicate. Religious life – the ritualized unfolding of the profound sense that one enters into relation to something infinitely beyond human comprehension, which nevertheless “gives” itself to be understood – was for the early Heidegger a paradigm case of such pre-philosophical otherness whose sense as an occurrence of manifestly human possibility must be expounded without reduction. My question is whether and to what extent the object of religious life can enter philosophy.

\(^{70}\) Polt, The Emergency of Being, 159-61.
\(^{71}\) For further reading, see Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research”; Richard Polt, The Emergency of Being, esp. 156-61; Iain D. Thomson, Heidegger on Ontotheology, esp. 114-29; Robert Mugerauer, Heidegger and Homecoming.
We have seen in the first section of this chapter that phenomenology cannot simply bracket the question of the divine, leaving it to be worked out in faith, since it must *transform* our *Da-sein* in its circling back retrieval of what is fundamentally at play in faith. But then, does phenomenology retrieve the event of divine revelation? Does it after all still end up telling religious practitioners what their experiences *really* mean? If so, then religion is not, after all, really other to the concept, but is only a moment in its retrieval of itself, whose highest point is found in philosophy. If not, and if phenomenology of religion must constitute *some* interpretation, some retrieval of the event whereby this sense of the divine emerges into human experience, then *how does God enter into philosophy?* (ID, 71/140). Can philosophy speak out of the dimension of the *belonging together* of human being and divine in a way that retrieves it authentically?

Heidegger indicates a middle way, that between leaving religious life to itself (i.e. the thought that revelation has no philosophical sense beyond bare categories of possibility or empty intuition) and neutralizing it in philosophical reflection (i.e. the thought that revelation is the self-disclosure of being in thinking). Heidegger opens the way for an understanding of the divine that is neither bound to abandon all hope of its representation in philosophy nor yet to seek its fulfillment in *philosophical* representation. But to grasp this possibility Heidegger opens up, we must come to grips with his proposed step back from onto-theology.

Heidegger speaks in a famous post-War seminar of the onto-theo-logical constitution (*Verfassung*) of metaphysics. We recall that, according to Heidegger, Kant wished to lay the groundwork for metaphysics from the basis of a critical investigation of the a priori unity of experience and a delimitation of the structures of its form as reason (*Vernunft*). Metaphysics proceeds from the self-critique of reason grounded in apperceiving subjectivity. It is transcendental articulation of the conditions of the possibility of this reason as originary unity. In a later essay, Heidegger contends that Kant’s metaphysical thesis is that being is the originary *positing* of objectivity and that subjectivity is the *position* of a categorizing rationality centered in cognizing self-perceiving (PM, 357). According to Heidegger, Hegel retains “Kant’s viewpoint” of the “essence of the transcendental” but attempts to think this transcendental absolutely as the self-determination or self-positing of thinking (ID, 42/107-8). Thinking posits

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72 I explore this kind of reduction in Chapters 4 and 5.
an object, or rather, posits the *relation* of thinking to its object, but therefore speculatively determines *itself* as the mediating unity of this relation. Being is thus positing as “determining mediation” (ID 43/108-9). According to Heidegger, Hegel does not abandon Kant’s transcendental standpoint, but deepens it (cf. HPS, 39-40/GA, 32, 56-8). The *Verfassung* is the laying out of the ground of metaphysics, i.e. of a determination of being, in “the absolute self-thinking of thinking” (ID, 43/109). The question concerns how the deity enters into the *critical* standing of reason.

Here I am resisting two common interpretations of Heidegger’s view of onto-theology. On the one hand, there are those thinkers, such as Merold Westphal, who draw a sharp distinction of onto-theology as something like the constellation of classical metaphysical views of God from a critical philosophizing which rejects the reduction of God to the god of the philosophers. On the other hand, there are those philosophers such as Iain D. Thomson who construe onto-theology as simply any prevailing interpretation of being in any age which stands in need of a kind of persistent critical questioning in order to be transformed in the emergence of new possibilities. Such views, in my estimate, fail to acknowledge that Heidegger identifies radical critique as the very *heart* of the onto-theological *Verfassung* or standing of metaphysics.

As such, I argue, he proposes a “step back” from metaphysics in the vein of what John Milbank, following J.G. Hamann, calls a “meta-critique” of the possibility of the critical standpoint. Such thinking attempts, not to secure an absolute position in discourse, but to point back towards “the realm which until now has been skipped over, and from which the essence of truth becomes first of all worthy of thought” (ID, 49/115). It points into language as that “place” (*Bereich*) of the opening of possibilities leaped over (*übersprungenen*) by critical rationality. Heidegger thereby indicates the region out of which both theology and ontology belong together (*zusammengehören*), intimating an “other” God toward which thinking aspires in the wake of the *Destruktion* of the “god” of philosophy.

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73 See Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-theology*.
74 See Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*. Thomson develops an account of Heidegger’s emergent notion of an historical ontology, one which has influenced much in recent Continental philosophy, from Foucault to Derrida and Badiou.
75 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, second edition, 151.
Here again, Heidegger’s *Destruktion* takes the form of a sketch of three senses of the matter at stake. From the ground up, Heidegger sketches the content of and manner in which metaphysics unfolds, with respect to the most original sense of its emergence. Instead of content/relation/enactment senses, here Heidegger speaks of the matter (*Sache*) of thinking, its measure (*Maßgabe*), and its character (*Charakter*) (ID, 46/112).

I have already suggested that metaphysics unfolds as critical philosophy in the modern age. According to Heidegger, Hegel’s philosophy points to – embodying in a certain respect – the *logos* as self-mediating whole. The claim of religion to somehow mediate or embody the absolute is thus also affirmed in the philosophical *logos* as the elevation of the human being to God by way of this holistic logic, in the concrete form of self-conscious spirit.77 Likewise, as Heidegger points out, the content or matter of philosophy is the absolute concept brought to its concrete form; the measure is the speculative process of self-mediation; and the character of this self-mediation has to do with the overcoming (*Aufhebung*) and gathering of “truth posited as absolute” into the “certainty of self-knowing knowledge” (ID, 47-9/113-15). Such thinking according to Heidegger remains *critical* precisely in the sense that it grasps itself finally in the *identity* of the subject, now no longer confined to finite horizons but infinitely knowing itself through its object. Elsewhere, Heidegger indicates that critical grasping is *skepsis*, “the seeing [Sehen], watching [Zusehen], inspecting [Besehen], that oversees [nachsieht] what and how beings are as beings” (“Hegel’s Concept of Experience,” OBT, 114/GA 5, 152). Consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) is for itself its own content as concept (*Begriff*), gives itself its own self-relation or measure (*gibt seinen Maßstab an ihm selbst*), and investigates (*prüfen*) itself (136/181). In the *Phenomenology*, consciousness runs through all of its finite shapes to gather itself into its essence as the self-mediating dialogue of consciousness with itself (138/183-4).

A radically *critical* philosophy is an absolutely self-mediating one, as William Desmond has also noted: “The tradition of speculative philosophy has always had a predilection to privilege absolutely self-mediating thought, with the philosopher trying to become identical with this ideal.”78 How does the deity enter into this philosophy? Once again, Heidegger finds his clue

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in the phenomenon of *logos*, but also warns that the step back from critical thought requires a different sort of attunement, “a duration and an endurance whose dimensions we do not know” (*eine Dauer und Ausdauer, deren Maße wir nicht kennen*) (ID, 51/117). Such a step is brought about in the profound boredom of the age of technological instrumentalism, which is, Heidegger intimates, consistent with the elaboration of a self-critical rationality (ID, 52/118).

The question of the deity’s entrance into philosophy must be pursued, not in the dimension of self-determining thinking, but in attentiveness to the “gift” of being, the opening of an interval of “difference” between the actualizing thing and its essential possibilities (50-1/116-17). This difference has remained concealed because of the forgetfulness (*Vergessenheit*) which attends our finitude (50/116). In no way can thinking mediate the thing in all of its essential possibilities because thinking itself is opened up in this ratio and thus cannot bend back upon it. Radically selfmediating thinking is the forgetting of this essential forgetfulness that belongs to our finitude, in *posing* itself as infinite in the holistic logic of self-mediating closure.

In its onto-theo-logical form, Western thought has thus secretly been a kind of theology, not the hermeneutic theology that interprets Christian faith, but the theology of a discourse that positions itself as the *unifying ground* of things in their possibility. For this reason, thought has also been a kind of ontology that delineates what can be disclosed, the possibilities for a thing’s being (ID, 60, 70-1/135, 139). As Merold Westphal notes, the aim of “total intelligibility” is at the heart of the onto-theo-logical direction taken by metaphysics. “God” does the work of “gathering the whole of being into an intelligible totality.”

Or in Heidegger’s words, “assuming that philosophy, as thinking, is the free and spontaneous self-involvement with beings as such, then the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it” (ID, 56/122-23). The deity thus enters thinking in the form of every self-legitimating discourse that regulates our possible relations to things. As I argue in Chapter 4, onto-theology is the modern guise of a secret will to power which releases itself in its purest form as technological nihilism in late modern culture.

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79 I say more about this in Chapter 4. For further reading, see William Desmond, “Gothic Hegel” (1999); and Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*.
82 Westphal, *Overcoming Ontotheology*, 286.
Heidegger’s identification of onto-theo-logy must be thought in accord with his indication of what remains un-thought in the tradition. The god that grounds philosophical access to the real must be relinquished. For, “man can neither pray nor sacrifice,” cannot “fall to his knees in awe,” or “play music and dance before this god” (ID, 72/140). Any divine God would emerge only in an event whose essential possibilities can be neither secured in advance nor determined once and for all. But it is not God which first of all remains un-thought: If the essence of the coming to be or happening of being cannot be rooted in a metaphysical concept of the highest being beyond or outside of time, then even God emerges essentially temporally, “within” the event of being’s sending. What remains unthought is the *coming to be* of any possibilities for relation to things at all. In this seminar, Heidegger calls such coming to be “the difference as difference” (47/113). It is the opening of the “between” of possibilizing (*Ermöglichkeit*), the “gift” of being, which cannot be thought as a relation *because it is the very opening of all possibility for relating*.

It follows that the open – this “event” of possibilizing in being – cannot be thought identical with God, if all of our thought of God emerges from a mode of being in which we find ourselves *related* to the world. This is why Heidegger claims in his *Contributions to Philosophy* that the “last God” (*der letzte Gott*) – last in the sense of bringing the religious and philosophical traditions of the West into their last great possibilities – that this God is not the opening of possibilizing itself (*Der letzte Gott ist nicht das Ereignis selbst*), but needs this event and the grounding or establishing of an opening (*Dagründer*) for relationality which takes place in it (CP, 288/GA, 65, 409). Heidegger takes pains, at least in 1938, to distinguish his figure of the last God from the gods of the great “theisms” of the West (289/410).

Yet there is something profoundly *orthodox* about Heidegger’s deity as one who *passes* and by its hints (*Winken*) brings an historical people into their *ethos* or proper dwelling along with it (290/410-11). How does this God encounter human beings? It does so in the opening of

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83 Although, admittedly at this stage of his career, Heidegger can barely conceal his contempt for the Judeo-Christian tradition(s) which he simultaneously borrows from and suppresses, often serving sinister political purposes. It seems as though sanguine commentators on Heidegger’s philosophy of religion, themselves often belonging to a religious tradition, have not paid enough attention to this darker side of Heidegger’s philosophy. However, I do still think that Heidegger has much to contribute to contemporary discussions in the philosophy of religion, something I will discuss in Chapter 5. I discuss the dwelling of human beings with the god in Chapter 3.
possibilities, grounded as possibilities in language. The opening of possibilities through their grounding takes place in the Da-sein of human beings.

Thus, on Heidegger’s account, God needs human beings in order to “pass” into the world mythically opened up and expressed in language. Historical human beings inhabit the “between” of finite existence, the symbolic opening up of the “gift” of being into the difference between particular things in their “thisness” or haecceity and their “whatness” or essential possibilities for being. If particular relations to things are to bear in themselves symbolic reference to the divine, then the divine requires the opening of the space and time of this possibility, for it to be a finite possibility. Things are of course always more than what they are in their sheer presence as this or that; but Heidegger here suggests that, in the sacred rite and in mytho-poetic utterance, the human unfolding of potencies toward which they are expressively turned in the “throw” of being is simultaneously the disclosure of the divine agency to which human beings belong (CP, 291/GA 65, 413-14).

But why do human beings belong to this divine agency? Why does the “death of God” signalled by the end of onto-theo-logy (of which I will say more in Chapter 4) not end in the death of all gods, in the human overcoming of its need for the divine? Heidegger never gives a straightforward answer to this question. Commentators have been puzzled at the sudden appearance of talk of God and the gods in Heidegger’s work in the 1930s. I will have more to say about Heidegger’s notion of God and of the gods in subsequent chapters, but my preliminary response has to do with the phenomenological aim to allow that which is essential to religion to speak in philosophy and with Heidegger’s retrieval of human being. First, Heidegger finds in the Western religions the notion of the inceptual (anfängliche) moment which brings with it an overpowering (übermächtigt) force that binds human beings to the unconditional (CP, 290/GA 65, 412-13). Such binding force cannot be sought in the immanence of an abstract rationality but only in the “expressive” or “productive” dimension of language, which bears in itself reference to a meaningfulness that outstrips the merely human.84 This is why, for Heidegger, the seeming absence of God in modernity is in fact an attunement to the refusal (Verweigerung) of God to grant itself to human beings. God is passing before us (Vorbeigangs) in a sort of conspicuous absence marked by the profound boredom borne of our sheer mechanistic relation to things and

84 See also John Milbank, Theology and Social Theory, second edition, 150-53.
the impotency of any supposedly higher forms of critical rationality to free us from the universal sway of the instrumental (290-93/413-17). This is also why Heidegger refers to his own thinking as at best a preparation only for what is to come, as the questioning that holds open philosophical wonder at what is truly other to thinking, so as possibly to steer thinking toward what might be profoundly theological utterances, radical openings of new ways for human beings to understand their own existence in relation to something transcendent.

The second reason is even more essential than the first. Heidegger seems to suggest that human being is an ecstatic movement of transition out from itself toward itself. Heidegger of course argued that this erotic ecstatic has the temporal structure of the genuine retrieval of what one has been always from the future-directed retrieval of possibilities. Human being is this temporal transition that remains within the event of the opening of all possibilizing. Human being is thus always the hypostatic “grounding” of this event which brings possibilities for being into their temporal determinacy. But as such, the human being also belongs to this event of the being given of possibilities. We paradoxically continually receive ourselves through that which is completely other to us as finite being – the infinite turning beyond all measure (kehren Übermaß) (CP, 291/GA 65, 413; see also EHP, 188). God is not this turning and destining of the infinite in which we receive our possibilities as finite beings (in-finite). But some kind of active potency directs human beings into their possibilities. The role of God or the god is to de-range (ver-rücken) the human being out of the profound boredom of the modern age; thus “God” belongs to this originary turning of the event in an ultimately inexplicable way (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 199/GA, 266-67). As Mark Wrathall aptly puts it, “The God, Heidegger says, ‘deranges us’ – in the sense that he calls us beyond the existing configuration of objects to see things that shine forth with a kind of holiness (i.e., a dignity and worth that exceeds our will).” Further, “Heidegger understands receptivity to the sacred as the experience of being beheld – of recognizing that there is a kind of intelligibility to the world that we do not ourselves produce.” It is the step back from a critical rationality as will which paradoxically moves us into a deeper sense of the intelligibility of the world. Logically, nothing that human beings will of their own accord can bring about this transformation. But if the orientation to meaning requires the view to any such intelligibility, human beings must find in their situation something that necessitates this

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85 Mark Wrathall, “Between the earth and the sky,” 83.
attitude. The problem is how our orientation towards the intelligible gets off the ground. This orientation is bound up in the “mythic” notion of meaning as expression of something simultaneously human and divine.

The step back into finitude and out of onto-theo-logy requires this return to the mythic. As I have been arguing, Heidegger seems to be motivated in this return by the radicalization of his own critique of the critical project whose aim was to delimit the proper boundaries of reason, especially in relation to the intuitions “carried” by religious traditions. Heidegger is suspicious that the critical project reduces being under the categories of instrumental manipulation and in fact opens the way for the absolutization of finite thought. In the next section I will briefly discuss Heidegger’s retrieval of Schelling as a philosopher who attempted to sketch out an understanding of the divine and human relation from the central notion of the temporal unfolding of the absolute, in resistance to what I have been calling the transcendental standpoint.

2.4.2 Heidegger on Schelling’s retrieval of myth

Heidegger held a lecture course in the summer semester of 1936 entitled, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, in which he addressed Schelling’s famous treatise first published in 1809. The guiding question of Schelling’s study, as Heidegger recounts, is that of the belonging together of freedom and system, or the question of the possibility of a system of freedom (ST, 22-3/GA 42, 23). According to Heidegger, system is being, thought in terms of the totality of beings as a whole. The totality is thought as the unity of a whole. Heidegger calls this unity the “jointure” of being, the ordering principle that gathers and holds together beings in a constellation of meaningful arrangements.

Heidegger identified in Schelling’s thought the impulse toward irreducible difference or alterity, thought of the transcendent beyond the whole. He is thus also a point of departure for the Destruktion of the onto-theo-logical tradition and of a kind of meta-critical questioning which acknowledges the irreducible contingency of will as desire rooted in the expressive unfolding of that which is fundamentally unthinkable. Schelling thus opens the way for the development of the thought of truth as poetics and of the understanding as at bottom the mythic expression of meaning – or as Paul Ricoeur puts it, the overcoming of the aporias of experience, not in the
necessarily willed system of subjective freedom, but in the thought of being as a sort of narrative repetition of a “primordial space and time” which takes the form of a rupture, or irruption of the groundless origin. There is no longer, therefore, the closed circle of an ultimately a-temporal freedom, but the eternal or timeless mode of an in-breaking that continually opens up the “place” of humanity’s transcending appropriation of the condition of its finitude, as embodied mortality. Because the condition for being human must be “given” as appropriated, and not in self-determining rationality, Heidegger thus also points to the opening as that of a place for gods, intimations of an unthinkable transcendence.

Following the path of his first beginnings – the ground-up/transformative retrieval of religious life and the Destruktion of philosophical logos – Heidegger circles back to retrieve a renewed sense of both of these. The full sense of such retrieval can be articulated, as Heidegger would say, only in the “leap” of thinking itself, since articulation of the sense or meaning is itself transformative – now no longer as the further enactment of an interpretation of ontological difference in light of its own being as temporality, but as the event (Ereignis) of language, which brings human beings together with the emergence of things into their present possibilities. The circling back repetition is itself the formation of world, something that cannot be willed, but only anticipated.

Yet the Schelling course intimates the sort of transformation Heidegger anticipates as the way to overcome onto-theo-logy, where “the world itself arises anew in its actual origins and rules as world” (ST, 58/GA 42, 100). To wit, Heidegger notes, “[t]he meaning of a philosophical work lies precisely in opening a new realm, setting new beginnings and impulses by means of which the work’s own means and paths are shown to be overcome and insufficient” (ST, 11/GA 42, 18). Anticipated here is a way of reading and thinking that pays attention to the ultimate indeterminacies of the work, precisely in order to participate in the endless opening of further possibilities for meaning. Moreover, the fact that this thinking anticipates the formation of a world that is ultimately meaningful as the opening of ever new possibilities for flourishing means that for Heidegger, thinking must also embody a kind of trust that human activity is ultimately meaningful, that it is directed to some end, though not its own – a meaningful world beyond technological boredom. Conversely, human activity must itself be a kind of “poetics” which

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86 Paul Ricoeur, “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative,” 112.
unfolds and articulates this end as its own condition, and not just the technology of desiring subjects “rationally” directed toward their interiorized notion of good. I address these themes in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Heidegger thus takes an interest in Schelling’s notion of the sublime or groundless ground (Abgrund). Schelling’s thinking is typically associated with German Idealism, the tradition that begins with Fichte’s determination of the ego as the inner order and ground of intellectual content (ST, 42/GA 42, 73). Schelling further interprets the immediate representation (Vorstellung) found in intuition as intellectual determination. If reason is the will to know itself as totality, and if it can know itself in grasping the conditions of its possibility, then it must also know the ground of these conditions. It must grasp itself, not as an object, but in its immediacy as totality without relation (absolute) (47/81-2). This absolute is precisely in its intuition of itself as totality, which means that the latter intuition is only in the absolute (47/81-2). The absolute cannot be a thing perceived in the understanding; but if its mode of knowing is intuition (i.e. immediate representation), then intuition cannot be strictly sensuous: Schelling introduces the mode of intellectual intuition, an immediate grasping of the totality that is already a determination of itself as totality (ST, 47/GA 42, 81-2). Philosophy is essentially this intellectual intuition of the absolute: “The philosopher as the knower is neither related to things, objects, nor to ‘himself,’ the ‘subject,’ but, in knowing, he knows what plays around and plays through existing things and existing man and what prevails through all this as a whole in existing (47/81-2; author’s italics). Philosophy continually conceives beings in their possibility as beings; it must therefore continually move beyond conceiving of mere beings and look towards their condition for being as such (58/100). As the “highest willing of Spirit” philosophy continually transcends its own confrontation of beings as a whole (i.e. “nature”) by looking toward the condition of possibility of beings. Schelling thus rejects any formulation of the opposition of nature and freedom as fundamental. Yet, at the same time, Schelling also rejects any final annulment of the opposition of finite being to the ground of being. There thus remains the question of an entirely positive ground that remains unconditioned by self-determination and yet necessary for any such movement (60-1/104-6).

Heidegger arguably finds in Schelling’s fundamental questioning toward this wholly positive though indeterminate ground of all determination the impetus toward his own
questioning of the unconditioned character of being as the “gift” of possibilities as such. Moreover, Heidegger sees in Schelling the key to an understanding of language as the unique site for the disclosure both of an unconditioned, *though wholly natural*, human creativity and simultaneously, of the divine God (ST, 85/GA 42, 146-47). First, the question of the groundless ground of being: Heidegger affirms Schelling’s interpretation of nature, not as an entirely mechanistic order of causation, but as the entirely indeterminate ground and source of “creative life” which discloses itself in the “natural” phenomenon of things coming into the freedom of their unfolding presence as what they are. The creative life discloses itself as their hidden or self-concealing condition (ST, 87/GA 42, 150). There is an irreducible contingency to the nature of things which cannot be brought into the full presence of conceptual determination. But this is not just a brute contingency: Schelling thinks ground and existence together as divine self-disclosure. For Heidegger, disclosure is the sheer contingency of the event of being – the arising of things into their possibilities for being and the simultaneous closure of other possibilities. From the standpoint of human thinking, God and being cannot be rendered identical. In my view, Heidegger is radicalizing Schelling’s insistence that the essence of ground can be known only through the very existence which it grounds, and therefore never directly but only in that which remains “other” to it. To respect the utter transcendence of ground to human understanding, Heidegger will not even name it “God.” To “be” what it is, God or a god must present itself to human beings, however that might take place (I discuss the possibility of emergence in Chapters 3 and 5). When Heidegger contends that God is not the same as the emergence of being, and that the former needs the latter, he is effectively saying that “God” names a particular manner in which human beings relate to the world which arises of its own accord without antecedent cause.

“God” thus also arises into the creative life of human beings as its own self-disclosure. Human productions literally take on a life of their own, whose aim or *telos* as self-revealing divine manifests in pointing human beings back into the unthinkable abyss of nature from which their possibilities ultimately emerge. The divine life is thus disclosed in the human “repetition” of infinite possibility as finite, determinate meaning. The fact that divine life always remains open to further articulation in/as human freedom *necessitates* its infinite character as divine (ST, 85-6/GA 42, 146-48). There is here the appeal to a radically irreducible finitude which is yet the “site” for the free disclosure of the infinite (I return to this theme in Chapter 5).
Secondly, Schelling makes no appeal to some safeguarded sphere of “freedom” which transcends the boundaries of a strictly factual or material realm. Discarded here are both the neo-Kantian fact/value distinction and the older, Platonic appeal to world-transcending essences. At the same time, Schelling also rejects the ultimate collapse of nature into pure “spirit,” thought as the rational or intellectual content of its essence. Nature is neither brute materiality nor finally contingent upon rational spirit. It belongs to the “primal longing” of the ground to find itself in existing (ST, 124, GA 42, 216). As such, this nature is always a kind of uprising or expansion, the emergence from itself in an “orientation” toward its own existence, as bringing itself before itself in the light of representation (125/217-18). By illuminating itself in representation, nature is divine life. This is the gathering together and unfolding of a primordial unity. Such gathering is the emergence into finite becoming of the infinite, which in its “fullness” remains concealed (126/219). Heidegger notes that for Schelling the “jointure” of the unity of this totality is the word. The word bears in itself double reference to the separation of (finite) existence from its ground and, at the same time, to the expression of a higher unity. The word is the unique “site” where creative life expresses itself as the unifying ground or nature of being.

Human expression in the “word” is precisely the gathering together of this double reference to separation and ultimate unity into one. In fact, “soul” is for Schelling just this tension between elevation to definite expression and the inexpressible ground in which finite human being remains bound (ST, 133/GA 42, 230-31). Human soul (Seele) is no “spiritual” reality beyond the physical, embodied character of finite existence; it is just the highest expression of “creation” as the embodiment of this eternal longing found in nature. Human beings embody the creative life in their finite expressions which bring nature to completion as nature. For example, the human cultivation of wheat crops helps brings said crops into “natural” flourishing by opening up possibilities for them to become what they are most essentially. Yet, in another sense, there remains in all activities of creative production the longing for the “form” which cannot be articulated in its infinite potentiality for being. Agriculture is intrinsically also the expression of a longing to find in itself, not something completely other to the natural “ground” of all of its possibilities, but the greatest fulfillment of this ground. Heidegger affirms Schelling’s construal of human creative expression as inherently a kind of poetics which emerges

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and remains in a more fundamental “harmony of what is in tune with itself, in the order of being” (ST, 144/GA 42, 247-48). In other words, human being is opened up in a primordial affirmation or “yes”, so to speak, prior to all possibility for affirmation and negation (144/248). The word is the self-affirmation of the divine which comes to expression in the “poetic” disclosure of human doing and making.

Heidegger thus affirms with Schelling that human existence unfolds as an affirmation which is attuned to a particular intelligibility and harmony in being. The malaise of the modern age and its technological boredom is not the result of some moral failure. Instead, it is the result of the fact that human beings have been thrown into “evil”: “Self-will can elevate itself above everything and only will to determine the unity of the principles in terms of itself (ST, 142/GA 42, 246). In other words, onto-theo-logy is the false projection of finite self-willing onto the absolute. It is the creation of God in the image of human beings for the sake of the universal domination of self-will (151/261-62). The way out of such evil is to find a manner of being attuned the harmony of being which first makes possible any kind of discord (150/260-61). In the transition period of being attuned to the terror of evil, the emptiness of craven self-willing, one finds that one mirrors the ultimately groundless nature of the universal will. One thus remains open to the “highest forms of decision” in “enthusiasm, heroism, and faith” (ST, 157/GA 42, 272). The possibility of this sort of “leap” towards an affirmation of the universal form of being beyond self-will thus remains open in the midst of evil.

Yet Heidegger still finds in Schelling the problematic tendency of critical philosophy to reduce this harmony under self-posting will. One could question whether the “universal will” against which evil elevates itself is not also secretly an arbitrary projection of an absolute unity. Heidegger contends: “If Being in truth cannot be predicated of the Absolute, that means that the essence of all Being is finitude and only what exists finitely has the privilege and the pain of standing in Being as such and experiencing what is true as beings” (ST, 161-62/GA 42, 277-79). Heidegger thus rejects the notion of an eternally willed separation and annulment of separation in being between existence and its ground. For the metaphysical options Schelling leaves are equally unappealing from the standpoint of his philosophy. Since there is, finally, no transcendence beyond the immanent whole of universal will, then what is the guarantee that this will is not finally just the rule of arbitrary power? Perhaps there is room also for a “step back”
from the metaphysical concept of *universal* will to make room for something other (as we will see in Chapter 4).

At the end of the 1936 lecture course Heidegger thus invokes one of Schelling’s companions and fellow thinkers, the German romantic poet Hölderlin, as the way forward beyond the metaphysics of will. Heidegger finds in Hölderlin’s poetry a way beyond or between the problematic metaphysical extremes of a distinct world of values or essences, on the one hand, and the complete loss of any sense of meaning and intelligibility in being beyond sheer instrumentalist or pragmatic expediency. As we will see in Chapter 3, both extremes suppress the “eventual” character of finite being and thus also inherently deny any sense of divine order or harmony. They are therefore reductive of what I have been calling “religious life” and are inherently questionable. Hölderlin is important to Heidegger because his poetry attunes thinking to those aspects of human being that philosophy has overlooked and suppressed. But it is also world-formative in that it opens up the possibility for repetition of something like religious life in modern times.

### 2.5 Conclusion: From philosophy of religion to religious philosophizing

The guiding question for this chapter was how Heidegger’s threefold questioning of the senses of being translates the transcendent object or reference of religion into philosophical discourse. We saw that Heidegger comes to reject his earlier *transcendental* position that attempts to carve out a privileged *critical* standpoint within philosophical discourse which would discern universally valid ontological structures of being without saying anything as to their particular ontic shape. To speak of the “being” of religious life as the event is already positively to re-articulate the mythic structure of *religious* events as irruptions of divine presence. Of course this means that religion can no more carve out for itself an autonomous sphere of meaning than philosophy can articulate the mode of religious being from the standpoint of pure reason. Philosophy must take over and articulate the transcendent object of religion in a way that respects its irreducible transcendence. Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of the transcendental standpoint thus moves into his step back from the God of metaphysics – being eternally realized through its fall into the pure immanence of thinking. Heidegger questions the privilege of a radically critical
or sceptical position in being, an ultimately self-positing absolute. Thinking here relinquishes the attitude of self-positing and moves into the space of a fundamental decision or leap. It brings itself into the vicinity of a momentous decision concerning the ultimate intelligibility or non-intelligibility of reality, and of its possible rootedness in an irreducible transcendance.

I thus turn in the next two chapters to investigate the religious vision implicit in Heidegger’s own thinking retrieval of the religious traditions and of Hölderlin’s poetry. I will at times read Heidegger’s text against some of Heidegger’s own claims, but only in my own attempt to keep with the matter of Heidegger’s thinking.
Chapter 3: Dwelling Religiously: Anticipating the Holy with the Poet

3.1 Introduction: Dwelling on/in Language

Chapters 1 and 2 investigated Heidegger’s attempts to bring the implicit structures and referent of religious life into philosophical discourse through what I have called a “ground-up” phenomenological retrieval of the temporal root of religion. This root is variously indicated in the figures of the enactment-sense (Vollzugssinn), kairos, turn (Kehre), throw (geworfen), and event (Ereignis). In each case Heidegger must dismantle aspects of the philosophical tradition (i.e. “positivism”, “transcendentalism”) which impede the retrieval of the phenomenon sketched out and indicated by these terms. But because, as we saw, philosophical retrieval belongs to the very event that it discloses, we saw that it cannot simply leave religious life to itself in a purely descriptive venture. Thus, at the close of Chapter 2 we saw that philosophy occupies the place of a kind of “decision” in the emergence of possibilities for being. It must respond to this emergence, i.e. the “gift” of possibilities for being. The necessity the role of philosophical response allows us to raise the question of the role in human existence of God or the gods, since following Heidegger’s work of Destruktion we can no longer plausibly think that human beings mediate their existence to themselves in virtue of an objective or critical rationality.

But since, as we saw, the “gift” of emerging presence is irreducibly bound up with language (i.e. with an expressive dimension belonging to human beings), and cannot therefore be attributed to something outside or beyond this expression which opens up as the temporality of the event, philosophy cannot look for a God outside or beyond time. Thus, following Cassirer and Schelling, Heidegger begins to ask the question of what else, if anything, speaks in and through the language that we human beings speak. Here Heidegger’s philosophy verges on another decision, not as to whether religion can be taken up into philosophy – to become philosophical – but as to whether and to what extent philosophy can proceed from a decision in
favour of God or the gods. Can philosophy speak in religious tongues? Has philosophical talk of God and the gods become unbelievable? Can philosophy speak from the deep pre-philosophical wellsprings of mythic vision? Is there room for a religious philosophizing?

The present chapter is something of a point of transition from an explication of Heidegger’s implicit philosophy of religion to an attempt to expound the ways in which I think that Heidegger quite radically anticipates a religious philosophizing. One could say that the first two chapters examined Heidegger’s attempt to reflect “back” on the implicit structures of religious life for the sake of a transformative retrieval. The next two chapters trace Heidegger’s attempt to reflect “forward” or to repeat these structures in his own transformative way. I referred to such repetition as the “circling back” retrieval. This chapter is in some respect partial fulfillment of this circling back retrieval anticipated in the first two chapters: What I am calling a religious philosophizing is just thinking oriented by the “mythic” anticipation that our expressions are the outworking of potencies that are more than merely human and which fulfill an aim implicit in them.

My use of the term “religious philosophizing” recovers Heidegger’s sense that our historical juncture in the West is burdened by the “loss of the gods” (Entgötterung) (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 58/GA 5, 76). The gods have not been proved fictions but have somehow disappeared, leaving a profound longing in their wake. With the loss of the role of an agency that is more than merely human partaking in the human completion of nature, modern rationality itself feigns the role of this agency, but degenerates into mere projection of truth against power or else is finally itself objectively identified with this power. In either case, argues Heidegger in his “Letter on Humanism,” the inheritance of the human being and things in the ecstatic truth of being – the deeper opening of their possibility – is obscured (PM, 150-51/WM, 160-61). Heidegger’s thinking attunement to Hölderlin constitutes his attempt to awaken the West’s oldest impulse to bring human beings back into the ecstatic opening of possibility, the gift of being itself. Such dwelling requires that being be received and responded to as a gift, as the greeting of the holy borne by the gods. The loss of the gods thus also constitutes the possibility for an occasion by which Western humanity can once again be seized upon and transformed with a view to something ultimate. Philosophy must therefore anticipate this
possibility by thinking out of a basic attunement to language and to what “speaks” in it, especially in the poem.

As I shall thus argue, Heidegger is not “secularizing” religious themes in Hölderlin. Instead, he is attempting to bring thinking into the orbit of these themes in order that we might learn what it means to dwell with language and what is disclosed in it. As such, he anticipates with the poet an awakened possibility for decision concerning God or the gods in this renewed dwelling. The first section of this chapter will thus fill out Heidegger’s notions of language and poetry through a reading of some of his thinking mediations on these themes. The purpose of this is to set the stage for an interpretation of the phenomenon of being-in-the-world (*Being and Time*) in light of Heidegger’s later notion of the poetic dwelling of humanity. I hope to show that it follows from Heidegger’s thought that our being-in-the-world or dwelling is already characterized by decision concerning the divine opened up by the loss of the gods. But since even this loss must be named as such, philosophical retrieval of the phenomenon of world participates in this decision and cannot, therefore, remain religiously neutral in its orientation.

It of course follows that Heidegger’s own attempt to retrieve this phenomenon will in part constitute a religious decision. The second part of this chapter will outline Heidegger’s own decision concerning the divine and the way in which it enables a more robust thought of human freedom beyond “humanist” self-positing will. As we began to see in the previous chapter, the

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88 Hence, I agree with Benjamin Crowe, and contend against Robert Mugerauer, that Heidegger’s notion of the event is not a secularization of that which the poet names in the figure of the holy. See Mugerauer, *Heidegger and Homecoming* (2008), 78. I do not wish, however, to downplay the excellence and importance of Mugerauer’s magisterial study of Heidegger’s later works, which study – along with John van Buren’s *The Young Heidegger* – proved quite formative in helping me shape my own interpretation of these difficult texts of Heidegger’s later period.

89 I will bracket questions surrounding Heidegger’s commitment to National Socialism lurking behind his romantic affirmation of gods. I think that this bracketing is warranted for an important reason. First, Heidegger’s admittedly sinister political engagements during the 1930s can easily be cited in the cheap rhetorical attempt to discredit the critical power and insight afforded by his recovery of the epistemic priority of myth to rationality (i.e. collective myth is a *condition* for the disclosure and reception of a sense of what is true). The very fact that the political imagination of a people *can be* fascist in character does not demonstrate that political imagination *must be* suspended in some transcendent or “objective” standard of truth or rationality. I am therefore more sympathetic to Richard Rorty than to John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas on this score, though *contra Rorty* I think that Heidegger is right to insist on the necessity of a *decision* concerning the divine at our historical juncture, as I hope to make clear in Chapters 4 and 5.
“last” or “final” sense Heidegger gives to the Western name “God” is that of a sort of “hint” (Wink) or trigger that directs human beings toward the opening of possibilities to which they belong (CP, 288/GA 65, 409-10). Here I will attempt to give a more systematic reading of this notion of God and gods in relation to Heidegger’s notion of gift. Heidegger follows Hölderlin in naming this gift the holy. Pushing us beyond the impasse of positivism and transcendentalism (outlined in the first two chapters), is the already religious thought of the sending of being which leaves its hints in the beckoning of divinities.

These terms – the holy, God, gods and divinities – are names for different modes of the singular phenomenon of the gift of being. We recall Heidegger’s attempt in his earliest work to parse the various senses in which concrete factual life can be called into question, i.e. with respect to its content, relational, and enactment senses. In his later work, I argue, Heidegger articulates his view that these ostensibly religious elements should form part of phenomenological description of the unfolding of experience. Heidegger sketches an understanding of experience which calls attention to the dynamic of meaning. Religious terms describe the most rudimentary form of human responsiveness to the absence or non-disclosure that remains an essential aspect of every positive appearance. Always concealed from full conceptual grasp is the emergence of appearance itself: There remains an essential element of mystery (Geheimnis) in this disclosure which keeps human beings suspended in anticipatory expectation of further “events” by which meaningful relations to things unfold. The religious terms, I argue, form part of Heidegger’s own anticipatory reception of the unfolding of being as superabundant gift, as inexhaustible source that unfolds only in that which appears. Human beings “poetically” name and receive this unfolding gift in the notion of God, an agency that alone conveys to human beings the aim of their freedom as belonging to the free play of ultimate reality. Heidegger adapts these religious terms to phenomenology, perhaps in the hope that they will initiate us into the unfolding of reality in a way that could not be grasped otherwise.

Yet, Heidegger also philosophically alters the sense by which these religious terms are ordinarily understood. In his philosophy, they refer ultimately to nothing substantial beyond the dynamic unfolding of reality itself. Divinities and gods, as we shall see, are attunements that somehow bring human beings to acknowledge the dimension of height or divinity – the “goding” of God – central to their experience of the world. The holy is that unknowable and
unameable centre that breaks forth as the emergence of all that is into being. Heidegger does, however, leave open the suggestion that this centre of being is an overabundant, overflowing source, rather than merely indeterminate emptiness. I thus argue that Heidegger leaves open the possibility for development of creative analogue of his thinking with religious traditions of the West.

3.2 Of Human Dwelling

I aim to do two things in this section. First, I will show just how Heidegger’s notion of poetic dwelling deepens his earlier concept of being-in-the-world through a meditation on the mythic dimension of language. Second, I argue that poetic dwelling is the disclosure of an excess of being through the opening of relation to beings. It is thus the very opening of possibility for the continual reception of things anew; and only because of the possibility of transformative retrieval is poetic dwelling also a religious orientation to the divine: Our retrieval of the real is always bound up in a “poetic” naming which must anticipate its figure or shape. The work of art is for Heidegger just this task of anticipation. As poetic it is cultivation of an image for the historical ethos of humanity, a way for authentic response to the gift or event of being. Heidegger effectively contends in his post-War lectures that poetic dwelling is the anticipation and remembering (Andenken) of the eternal event noted in his reading of Schelling. Poetic dwelling is thus marked by religious orientation because this event is performed by humanity only through its decision concerning the gods which mediates the event.90

I thus begin by explicating Heidegger’s mature notion of language and poetry before further unpacking his understanding of poetic dwelling (in light of a discussion of the care-

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90 Contra Lacoue-Labarthe, however, this move does not necessarily entail a totalizing (and fascist) ontology of aesthetic vision. Rather, one could argue that Heidegger attempts to raise the mythic beyond purely aesthetic vision into the sphere of ethical decision. Against Lacoue-Labarthe, I would also contend that Heidegger (reminiscent of Kierkegaard) refuses to close off the ethical (and the poetic) from the excess of a religious imaginary that suspends these spheres, bringing them into their own. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry, translated by Jeff Fort, esp. 39-59.
structure of being-in-the-world). Finally, I will attempt to articulate the reasons for acknowledging the distinctively religious character of this dwelling.

3.2.1 The nature of language and of the poetic

As I mentioned in the last chapter, Heidegger’s emphasis on the priority of language to thought bears some resemblance to the meta-critical tradition rooted in the radical pietists, most notably J.G. Hamann. In a lecture from 1950 – “Language” – Heidegger cites from a letter Hamann wrote to Herder in 1784, noting Hamann’s insight that an investigation of reason can only position itself in the “abyss” of language (PLT, 189/GA 12, 10-11). The work of *logos* is just our passing through this abyss, sketching out the norms that will lead us into some understanding of what is true. Since we are already the passage of language, language itself bars us from arresting this passage and finding the vantage point for tracing any correspondence to the real. It follows that it is a kind of aesthetic expression rather than a disinterested reason which mediates our relation (i.e. as “true”) to the real. In his *Aesthetica in Nuce* (1762) Hamann claims, “Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race, as the garden is older than the field, painting than writing, song than declamation, parables than inferences, barter than commerce.” Poetry is the human anticipation and fulfillment of the fullest significance of reality, and thus a kind of aesthetic wager that hopes for the emergence of repeatable patterns which are nonetheless irreducible in their utter repeated singularity. (Here a model for linguistic experience – and not its unique exception – is found the unique performance of the musical piece.) Thus: “Speech is translation—from the language of angels into a language of men, that is, thoughts into words, things into names, images into signs, which can be poetical or kyriological, historical or symbolical or hieroglyphical, philosophical or characteristic.”

Language is always the paradoxical situation in which something universal is retrieved, but with no originary point of reference outside the decision to “repeat” it anew. Thought is rooted in this paradox of poetic repetition.

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As we saw in the first two chapters, Heidegger saw it as the work of philosophy to destroy metaphysical categories and lay bare philosophy’s secretly disengaged attitudinal stance toward its matter. Heidegger’s insights into language and poetry allow him to carry forward this project of dismantling toward the recovery of the right mood or manner of being attuned to the matter of thinking. As Heidegger argues in “Letter on ‘Humanism’” (1946) at stake in this decision is the very ethical project of the articulation of genuine or authentic human identity across the interval of difference of being from beings – language itself (PM, 271/GA 9, 356-57). Heidegger agrees with Sartre and existential thinkers that, in the absence of any stable rational self-identity and of a fixed ideal for securing objective truth, human beings are left with their own projects and decisions and the hope that these articulations in language will partially unfold and carry forward an implicit aim, the “care” for being (PM, 249-50/GA 9, 326-27). But here Heidegger’s turn to the poetic is decisive for his philosophizing: For otherwise thought remains in boredom – or what Heidegger here refers to as “homelessness” – failing to grasp any momentous decision that would constitute the positively historical nature of our dwelling as human beings (257-59/337-40). Only with a more sustained meditation on the decision or “saying” (Sage) of being can we open the way beyond boredom and ethical homelessness. But then we must learn to think alongside the poet, whose imaginative disclosure of this saying is most ontologically originary, a kind of pre-categorical, aesthetic indication of truth and beauty (271-72/358-59).

In place of philosophical categories divested of poetic resonance, Heidegger now brings the language of the poem into the discourse of thought, to put into effect a kind of quasi-ontological language – formally indicating repeatable patterns as the very condition of our being without allowing for any determinable or definitive grasp of some transcendental root or substructure. The transcendental root is language itself grasped only aesthetically through its exercise. In a meditation on Rilke’s poetry from 1946 – “Why Poets?” – Heidegger describes this closest relation to language in the Pascalian language (itself poetic) of the heart. The heart is the “widest compass,” the register of “that which is to be loved: ancestors, the dead, childhood, those who are coming” (OBT, 229/GA 5, 306). These things have a mode of presence that is neither merely historical fact nor pure mythological construct, but which is grasped only in mythic anticipation and completion of their factual return in a non-identically repeated fashion – recovery of the tradition’s “spirit”; glimpses of an enduring identity in one’s children and
grandchildren; etc. To grasp this mode of presence is already to desire and in some respect to repeat it anew. Said grasping is the exercise of a peculiar sort of “logic”, a kind of paradoxical rationality (simultaneously affirming and denying something as the only way to grasp it universally), which turns out to be the very condition for recovering any sense of identity at all beyond mere technological manipulation and rational calculation (OBT, 229/GA 5, 306).

Such is the later Heidegger’s strategy for anticipating and in some sense already recovering a sense of human relation to things – i.e. world – that remains an ethos is the original sense of the word as character and habit, i.e. a particular, non-interchangeable and so wholly singular mode or manner of being that is yet also ecstatically in relation to non-human things and to others. Heidegger’s poetic term, adopted from Hölderlin as a way of circling back, so to speak, on his earlier notion of ecstatic being-in-the-world, is dwelling. We will go on to glimpse the manner in which this dwelling, and so the very opening of ethos itself, is religious. But it might prove useful first to flesh out in part Heidegger’s meditation on the poetic nature of the formation of world - an ethos.

In his later lecture “The Thing,” Heidegger allows the poem to attune his reflective retrieval of the nature of things. Dominated by the scientific and market paradigms that basically posit reality in objectively calculable and controllable terms – summarized by Heidegger in the term “technology” – modernity has lost its grasp of distance and otherness. But this is because, argues Heidegger, we moderns have more or less become unable really to pay attention to the mystery of being’s presencing. We acknowledge this presencing, but only insofar as we can channel it for our projects and purposes. Out technological control of nature, our plethora of marketable gadgets, and even in one respect our scientific curiosity are symptoms of this blindness and deafness to the mystery and gift of presence that excited wonder and awe in our ancestors. One way in which this blindness plays itself out is through our relationship to things. Modern humanity can no longer respond to things in accordance with the essential mode in which they come to presence, can no longer fully co-respond (entsprechen) to the possibilities it opens up and which are disclosed in it (“The Thing,” PLT, 163-63/GA 7, 167-68).

One of Heidegger’s choice examples of this kind of correspondence issues from his discussion of the phenomenon of the jug. If one were to ask wherein the proper “being” of the jug resides, i.e. the origin of its possibility as thing, Heidegger’s thought would point one to the
ecstatic opening of a nexus of relations rooted in a peculiar sort of activity. The jug is the contingent, factual “site”, so to speak, of this opening. It therefore belongs to language. Its phenomenon is *pouring forth* of the drink in a celebration or solemn festival (“The Thing,” PLT 170/GA 7, 173-74). The jug participates in the gathering together of a context of meaningful relations which transcend the simple physical or material being of the jug (171-74/173-75). The *gathering*, for Heidegger, belongs to the essential meaning of the jug. It belongs to the being of the jug to point beyond itself to the context of meaning in which it participates in opening up. This context of meaning (i.e. the celebration or festival) in turn fulfills the being of the jug as jug. As Heidegger notes in another post-War lecture, “Language,” in conversation with a poem from Georg Trakl, “[t]he world grants to things their presence. Things bear world. World grants things” (PLT, 199/GA 12, 21). The essence of the thing thus has a referential structure, i.e. the thing is insofar as it refers to and helps articulate the context which “carries” its thinghood. This referential structure of the thing is in part what Heidegger means by language. The other “side” of the phenomenon of language consists in the unity of contexts of meaning that Heidegger calls “world.” Things point beyond themselves to the structure of meaning wherein they occur as things. For Heidegger, this unifying structure is the arising or “worlding” of the world. Language is the very enactment of the difference in the co-articulation of thing and world. “The carrying out of world and thing in the manner of stilling is the appropriative taking place of the difference [...] Language goes on as the taking place or occurring of the difference for world and things” (“Language,” PLT, 205/GA 12, 28). Language is the very structure of transcendence that brings things into their essence and unfolds world.

Neither scientific nor even philosophical description is adequate as a means to grasping the gift-character of the thing as the peculiar occasion for the ecstatic opening of possibilities. This opening is precisely *nothing*, but Heidegger would have us understand this in the truest sense, not as merely the negation of actual being, but as the essential unfolding of existence. The jug is made as a vessel to hold and pour out drink. It is not just nothing; but neither does its identity consist in something wholly determinate. Its usefulness for holding liquid is found in the void around it and inside it. And not merely the void of space but that of the “time” of an outpouring, an emptying which marks an occasion (“The Thing,” PLT, 169-70/GA 7, 172-73). This occasion is finally the gift of being, the gathering together of the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities in the opening of world. I will say more about this fourfold of being later.
Heidegger here performatively enacts his own sense that retrieval of the real in its fullest, i.e. most particular sense is bound up in the work of poetry. The terms by which Heidegger names the peculiar gathering together of relations thus also has ontological force, “poetically” disclosing the gift-character of natural and human existence beyond any objective categorization.

Poetic articulation is the furthest reaching characterization also of natural phenomena. On this score, Heidegger approvingly cites Trakl’s description of the golden blooms of the tree. The tree gathers the elements of world, earth, sky, mortals, and divinities, into its articulation as thing. It roots itself in the earth, gathering it up into a “blooming that opens itself to heaven’s blessing.” The majestic “tree of graces” provides mortals with the gift of “the fruit that falls to us unearned” (“Language,” PLT, 198-99/GA 12, 20-21). The tree’s bringing forth of the gift of nourishment for mortals is thus the possible occasion for human response to superhuman agencies (more on this later). In each respect, poetic articulation of the tree belongs in an essential way to its being brought into its essence as the “site” for a gathering of world.

But why then is modern humanity unable to correspond to the ecstatic dimension of the gift? Contrary to the verdict of thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Heidegger does not construct a totalizing ontology which excludes the infinite otherness bespoken by the finite. To the contrary, Heidegger pays heed to the more fundamentally ontological (though paradoxically so) role played by the poetic over the categorical as a kind of gift of language that brings human beings into infinitely repeatable possibilities for ecstatic relation to others, where a common sacramental “site” for the sharing of things is realized. This notion transcends the continued need for a violent rupture of every self-referential interiority by an “other” that can never really appear as such.

Of course, this view of the poetic demands that philosophy rethink language beyond the mere discursivity of concepts. Language as we saw in Chapter 2 belongs to the opening of the event. Language is itself the “saying” of being. Insofar as the existence of human beings brings this saying into articulation, it is therefore enacted as a kind of response to this transcendental call that works itself out only in/as language. Thus Heidegger’s claim that, “Man speaks in that he responds to language” (“Language”, PLT, 207/GA 12, 30). Human language is in essence a

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92 See Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, translated by Alphonso Lingis, 67-8.
sort of response to the call that “speaks” in/as the difference of thing and world. For Heidegger, the poem is the purest form of the listening that responds to the call of language. “What is purely bidden in mortal speech is what is spoken in the poem. Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (melos) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer” (205/28-9). Poetry is thus for Heidegger the originary manner in which human beings remain in language, since according to this romantic conception the poetic (poesis) is the most concentrated work of releasing (lassen) reality into its fullest potential for meaningful existence; it most fully corresponds in language to the gift of being. It is thus – along with bodied articulation which we will look at in chapters 4 and 5 – also the primary way in which human beings take place with things in the context of world.

What I have been contending up to this point is that the later Heidegger turns to the poem in part as the continuation of his project of dismantling the philosophical concept to make thinking more responsive to its matter. In one respect, we could interpret the language by which the later Heidegger articulates his thinking as yet further development of the formally indicative, non-objectifying concept, with the additional “poetic” quality of anticipation of what things might have to be. No longer merely the descriptive sketch which prepares for the decisive leap into existing, the language of this later thought comes full circle with the notion that the sketch itself has already enacted the performance, so to speak, of that which addresses itself to it. It follows that there is nothing but this particular performance – no mediating “subjective” or “objective” universal – which can constitute any sort of response to the reality that addresses itself to it.

Hence, along with the adoption of poetic language, Heidegger also affirms the role of a kind of aesthetic decision in directing the path for thinking. His preference for the pathway of Hölderlin’s poetry seems to result from Heidegger’s estimate of the latter as furthest ahead in his repetition of the Western experience of being as gift (See CP, 143/GA 65, 204-5). Hölderlin best allows the thinker to wonder at the mysterious origin of this experience, thus preparing the way for another beginning, the thinking repetition of this inception:

Only what is unique is retrievable and repeatable. Only it carries within itself the ground of the necessity of going back to it and taking over its inceptuality. Repetition here does
not mean the stupid superficiality and impossibility of what merely comes to pass as the
*same* for a second and a third time. For beginning can never be comprehended as the
*same*, because it reaches ahead and thus each time reaches beyond what is begun through
it and determines accordingly its own retrieval (CP, 39/GA 65, 55-6; author’s italics).

Hölderlin embodies this longing for the return of the universal beginning in endlessly new forms
of expression that somehow (only from a retrospective view) carry it forward differently. Every
form of expression is inherently incomplete in its anticipation and fulfillment of this inception –
akin to Schelling’s temporal eternity (Chapter 2).

In a 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin Heidegger calls this inceptive event the *foreign*
which is yet nearest to our *being* as human. What Heidegger once referred to as our being thrown
into possibilities he here emphasizes as the mystery toward which and into which we are pulled:
“The essence of one’s own is so mysterious [*geheimnisvoll*],” contends Heidegger, “that it
unfolds its ownmost essential wealth only from out of a supremely thoughtful acknowledgment
of the foreign” (HHTI, 55/GA 53,68-9). Hölderlin’s poetizing attempts to bring the Greek
experience of “becoming homely” in Pindar, Homer and Sophocles – i.e. their wrestling with the
uncanny essence of human *being* – into his own poetic acknowledgment of this mysterious
home (64/78-9). The thinking poet thus attempts in his own way to repeat the uncanny inception
of the tradition in conversation with that which is both most essential and most foreign. Hölderlin
thus attempts poetically to repeat this Greek wonder at the opening of presence. Heidegger
contends that only this sort of repetition can bring about the opening of “that time-space within
which a belonging to the hearth and a being homely is possible in general” (HHTI, 147/GA 53,
183-84). Poetic language is closest to the paradoxical logic of the heart which grasps things, not
in an abstraction that slips away from the finite and concrete, but in anticipation of the repeated
emergence of the finite in the “spaces” and “times” which in each case also mark its continual
transformation, its endless otherness to itself paradoxically in realizing its own possibilities. This
language is thus also best suited to leading thought back towards the experience of its uncanny,
abyssal home.  

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93 On this point, William James makes a strikingly similar case: “If what we care most about be
the synoptic treatment of phenomena, the vision of the far and the gathering of the scattered like,
we must follow the conceptual method. But if, as metaphysicians, we are more curious about the
inner nature of reality or about what really makes it go, we must turn our backs upon our winged
concepts altogether, and bury ourselves in the thickness of those passing moments over the
In the remainder of this section, I will briefly unpack Heidegger’s emergent understanding of human dwelling, the retrieval of a sense of ethos rooted not in a universal “subjective” reason but in the ecstatic mutuality of the gift. I will then go on to argue that Heidegger’s vision incorporates the mythic and religious elements of decision in regard to gods and to the eternal inception. The poet names this inception the holy. Indeed, Heidegger’s thinking already passes over into the decision of this naming, and enacts it in a kind of religious philosophizing that responds to being as though it were gift rather than as an indifferent void. Such is according to Heidegger the only possibility for genuine human dwelling.

3.2.2 Dwelling Poetically

I have been arguing that Heidegger adopts the language of the poem as a way of allowing his thought to remain close to that event of being’s emergence named there. As Robert Mugerauer has noted, Heidegger thus adopts a kind of quasi-conceptual mode of speaking in his attempt to think that which the poet names.\(^{94}\) As with the formal indication, “concepts” in this discourse are pointers which direct our attention to something that can be realized only experientially. The ontological content of these concepts is manifested only in their enacted response to that toward which they point. We saw in the early courses that the act of thinking is already in part the embodiment of such a response, insofar as it readies Dasein for a more authentic repetition of relation to the being of its own concrete being-there. But Heidegger deepens and radicalizes his insight into this phenomenon through his recognition that the poet best names it, that the poet is the one who prefigures the real to which life aspires.\(^{95}\) The poet remains in this sense ontologically closest to the inception of being, precisely because this phenomenon is inseparable from its repetition in language, and because the poet is best attuned to that which might be disclosed in language, including the event of disclosure itself. The poet

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95 John Milbank gives a parallel account of this phenomenon of poetic prefiguration in his reading of Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonym. See Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 315-16.
indicates an excess of meaning beyond any simple categorization of things and thus also holds human beings open to the highest aspect of their historical dwelling: not calculated response but reception of a gift. The poet discloses from the abyss of language a dimension of height, akin to Schleiermacher’s feeling of absolute dependence or Otto’s experience of the holy. To dwell \textit{poetically} is to remain suspended in the right mood that attunes us to this dimension of height that suspends our human longing for continuity.\footnote{Again, for a parallel account with respect to Kierkegaard, see John Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 311-12.} Heidegger comes full circle, so to speak, to retrieve the \textit{religious} inspiration at the heart of these texts in a peculiar manner of thinking that carries it forward into new transformations.

The term “dwelling” is adapted from a line in one of Hölderlin’s later poems, “In Lovely Blue.” Heidegger adopts the term to emphasize that human beings measure out their existence through a kind of \textit{habituation} or patterned repetition that holds open determinate place and time, much in the sense (as we saw) of Cassirer’s notion of myth. But human beings dwell only insofar as they \textit{belong to and in} that power that opens and gives them to measure out their existence (“...Poetically Man Dwells...”, PLT 216-19/GA 197-99). The very fact that my actions have, for example, habituated me to a home life which I have indeed helped cultivate, means that in some respect I myself have been \textit{given over} to this life and belong to it. In my very being I have been \textit{appropriated} to this life, though it is nothing in itself preceding me. For reasons we have already seen, Heidegger thinks that the most originary mode of human dwelling is the \textit{poetic}. We dwell most genuinely in a kind of anticipation of the emergence of the real – which in “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger terms the “clearing” (\textit{Lichtung}) that opens the space and time of existence (\textit{Da}) – to which we must be given over: “The clearing grants nearness to being. In this nearness, in the clearing of the \textit{Da}, the human being dwells as the ek-sisting one without yet being able properly to experience and take over this dwelling today” (PM, 257/GA 9, 338-39). If human beings as a whole are to remain near to that which makes them genuinely human, they must learn to respond appropriately to that which grants this existence.

Responding to that which grants is, Heidegger notes in another post-War lecture, a kind of \textit{building}. Again, Heidegger exploits the resonances of language to bring forth an often hidden aspect of our existence. In “Building Dwelling Thinking” Heidegger emphasizes that the words
Wohnen (“dwelling”) and Bauen (“building”) are etymologically rooted in the Old High German Buan, the root also of the verb bin (PLT, 145/GA 7, 148-49). If as we saw the existential emergence of human reflexivity is the phenomenon of language, that our dwelling as human beings is the habituation that opens up and unfolds only in language, Heidegger suggests here that this phenomenon works itself out originally in the practices of human building. Here he disrupts any view towards the separation of productive process from participation in the spirit of human life or cultivation of genuine ethos. To dwell is to stay or remain with this essence. But such remaining is essentially positive in that it releases and preserves things in their freedom to be what they are. The releasing is a sort of building, a productive process which nevertheless allows things to stand in their being (147/151). We human beings are essentially characterized by this sort of aesthetic articulation. Heidegger notes that we cultivate or care for things that grow from the earth of their own accord and construct works that do not (148/149). Both are modes of building by which we human beings somehow both emerge from the opening and clearing of being and also aid in the bringing of being to completion in its presence. In this respect we both articulate and are ourselves articulated in the emergence of being.

This process of articulation is poetic in the sense that human beings exist in the mode of a kind of imaginatively distancing from natural processes which nonetheless anticipates and brings these processes to completion. The cultivated field of grain is thus the work of human artifice, the articulation of a sort of aesthetic envisioning, and yet is also wholly natural. On this organic view, human beings indeed transform nature in cultivating it and constructing upon it, but in so doing paradoxically bring nature into its freedom to be what it is. In this respect, ships and temples are as much the work of nature as are fields and vineyards (“Building Dwelling Thinking,” PLT, 145/GA 7, 149). In this respect the finite is paradoxically always more than what it is: The gratuity of artistic imagination is able to release this difference of the thing from itself, the “more” of its being, by holding nature open to its continual transformations. As we saw also in Heidegger’s reading of Schelling, nature itself is the ambivalent opening and granting of being that simultaneously discloses itself in the emergence and coming-to-presence of beings and thus also essentially conceals itself in the very process. The human being stands in this opening of difference of the unconcealment/concealment of being, always in anticipation of this bringing-to-completion which yet exceeds every finite instantiation as further possibility for the releasing of its essence. The human being brings together the thing and world.
Through poetic envisioning and bringing to completion human beings thus belong to the *mythic* opening that gathers the aspects of emerging presence together into the particularity of the thing in its relational mode of *worldly* presencing. The mythic, as we saw in chapter 2, names the event (*Ereignis*) of being which grants human beings their emergence into existence along with other finite things. It is the opening of a *response* to this mysterious opening and granting of being in beings which releases into its full meaning the potentialities for being gathered together into the thing.

Thus, Heidegger’s illustrates, the bridge can be the unique occasion for a gathering together of aspects of being into their emergent expression through human activity. It is the occasion for river banks to emerge precisely as *banks*, i.e. in the context of human aims of crossing the river. Yet the bridge does not hinder the flow of the river: “The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants their way to mortals so that they may come and go from shore to shore” (“Building Dwelling Thinking,” PLT, 150/GA 7, 154). As such the bridge opens the place and the time of a *location* which allows human beings to dwell together and cultivate an ethos (151-52/155-56). The location is not mere geographical space but is a kind of delimitation or boundary – *horismos* – which provides the very condition for the granting of a common life, the opening of a particular place to be occupied and a particular organization of times (e.g. the condition for practices of commerce, etc.) (152/156). The norms guiding human life thus emerge out of the mysterious granting of things brought into completion through aesthetic cultivation.

It takes a peculiar sort of thinking to remain alert to the radically questionable, inherently open and indeterminate nature of the emergence or granting of being. Thinking is needed where human beings have forgotten how to dwell in a way that responds to things in their genuine particularity – without allowing them to sink into homogeneity and indifference – and that therefore also remains open in anticipation to the dimension of granting to which human beings also essentially belong (“Building Dwelling Thinking,” PLT, 158-59/GA 7, 162-64).

As we saw in the last chapter, Heidegger contends that the mood of critical rationality has secretly bequeathed to us the profound boredom and indifference of an increasingly globalized instrumentalization of the particular through the illusion of a self-grounding interiority summed up in the figure of onto-theo-logy. As pure willing, the absolutely free self-positing ground
undercuts all of its concrete instantiations and finally offers only nothing to be pursued as genuine possibility (Cf. “Nietzsche’s Word” OBT, 183-85/GA 5, 245-47). If the poem opens the way beyond this nihilistic option, this is because according to Heidegger the poet is most centrally attuned to the potentialities gathered in the granting of being through the thing.

As we saw, the central role of the poem in Heidegger’s later philosophizing emerges from his view of the role of language in our thinking and now also of the role of a kind of aesthetic articulation (i.e. building) in releasing the nature of things and opening human beings to their world. Not surprisingly, as we see in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the written poem is rooted in the deeper ontological structure of poetry or poesis and in fact specially characterizes the ontic aspects of this essence. The articulation that orients human beings to world and releases things is embodied in particularity of the emerging work of art. The artwork thus forms a seamless unity with other aspects of human building which nonetheless are opened up as possibilities first in that ontic mode of response to being that brings its least anticipated and most transformative instance, in keeping with the utter priority of the eventual emergence of relational difference to any regulative unity. Thus, the practices of building that release difference into an ordered presence are ontologically more originary than those that regulate already emergent presences; though as Heidegger suggests, the originarity of any particular form of artwork is shifting, depending on the strength by which the event opens up in it: “The more solitary the work, fixed in the figure, stands within itself, the more purely it seems to sever all ties to human beings, then the more simple does the thrust that such a work is step into the open, and the more essentially the extraordinary is thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down (“The Origin of the Work of Art,” OBT, 40/GA 5, 54). But despite the world-forming character of the poetic more originally conceived, Heidegger still reserves a special place for the linguistic poem on account of its close relation to the poetic essence of naming or that articulation which is the opening of language itself (45-6/60-2).

The artwork is neither merely one ontic mode of interpretation of something pre-aesthetic nor merely the opening toward a more total ontological vision. In either case the artwork is superfluous to the truth of being and so also to the emergence of genuine human dwelling. Conversely, though not of sheer instrumental value, as instantiation of the event of being the artwork also cannot be an end in itself but must in sense be the occasion for a transformative
moment that gathers human beings together into world. The poetic thus turns on the difference at play in human relations to things articulated against the contextual whole that forms the background of world; the continued articulations are endlessly different and transformative of the context but in some respect also allow the beautiful (Schönheit) to emerge as presencing that conceals its essence, i.e. remains open to always further articulations that repeat it endlessly anew (“Origin,” OBT, 32/GA 5, 42-3). The poetic is thus always also the event by which our relation to being is enacted, by which we as dwellers who cultivate an ethos make being our own, appropriating it to an emergent mythic vision of the beautiful which yet anticipates continual transformative instances.

One might worry with Lacoue-Labarthe that Heidegger merely subordinates the ethical to the aesthetic, or circumvents the ethical entirely, inconsistently allowing only that our norms for mutual response emerge from totalizing myth. There is indeed in Heidegger no express will to resist the supposedly inevitable collapse of the mythic figure into its self-negation, the supposedly inevitable de-mythologizing literalization of the mythic insisted upon by Lacoue-Labarthe. Indeed, according to Heidegger the poetic work of art is already the opening of the work of responding to things which lets them be in their particular nature as things, and is therefore also the speculative opening of world, as Lacoue-Labarthe points out. But there is no final reason to suppose beyond Heidegger that poetry is most genuinely the movement of a turning away from every mythic figure of the overpowering, of the gift of an emerging order or harmony, necessitated by “a tragic acceptance of the law of finitude.”

There is of course nothing preventing the construal of the modern situation, not as the loss of the gods, but as their sheer absence, the empty impossibility (i.e. of wholeness of meaning) which allows no figure of the divine to remain. But there is nothing in the emergence of human finitude that necessitates this conclusion, and one might argue that Heidegger’s position is the less dogmatic one with respect to the sending of being, since Heidegger seeks no security of critical-transcendental knowledge of this sending even in a supposedly necessary tragic situation which calls for endless demythologization. If there is no privileged “critical” stance within the mythic, then one is free simply to mythologize differently and in respect of no supposedly ontologically neutral insight.

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Yet, might one argue that following the 20th century poetry has finally liberated itself from religion? Heidegger draws inspiration from Hölderlin, Rilke, and Trakl, but what of poets and writers such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Paul Célan? Just what is it about poetry in the sense in which Heidegger defines it that makes it religious?

Heidegger gives a powerful phenomenological account of the poetic character of language and expression, the notion that the form in which meaning takes belongs inseparably to its content and helps determine that content. I have argued that Heidegger’s notion of the poetic develops his sense of the unfolding of being as gift, as the arrival of truth and meaning to which we respond out of the forms of our expression. Poetic expression, as we saw, is a kind of mimetic “fictioning” of the real. But it belongs not merely to some ethereal realm of imagination: Human beings themselves embody the gulf between imagined possibilities for being, on the one hand, and the concrete actualization of these possibilities. Human beings are the poetic unfolding of the real as gift or the arrival of being. It thus seems unavoidable that phenomenology must acknowledge an originary givenness of meaning (a theme I return to in Chapter 5). If as Heidegger contends this givenness is the very emergence of an utterly unique event, the moment by which meanings are newly “repeated” in the closure of the rift between the actual and possible.

Religion plays a role in the poetic and mimetic function of human existence to the extent to which a ritual community views itself to be constituted out of response to a gift. Its being-in-the-world is patterned by practices that acknowledge an abundant origin that opens and sustains the possibility of relational contexts of human being, including the possibility of reciprocity in human relationships. To the extent to which contemporary poetry also searches for the possibility of such an abundant, sustaining origin in the emergence of the real, it is also religious. Alternatively, human expression can deny religion in the sense, as John Milbank argues, of denying the gift: “Then the gift is seen as only a fantasy in order to escape the givenness of an endless drift, rising up without generosity from a fundamental void.”100 It might well be the case that the latter, rather than the former, stands true. Such is to suggest that rupture and indeterminacy are most real. But human beings could not ever completely grasp this circumstance any more than that of the primacy of gift. And it is arguable that the religious

response more profoundly accepts the irreducible rift of possibility from actuality by refusing to accept as inevitable any particular givenness, even finally the givenness of absolute rupture, and by finally privileging a poetic excess over the actual without falsely assuming the inevitability within the mythic ironically to engage in reactive self-dismantling.101

Conversely, Heidegger refuses even the hints of reactionary violence in the posited need to decontaminate the event of truth from the historically particular and concrete (“Origin,” OBT, 44/GA 5, 59). Since this event just is the very opening of the possibility of relation, and is named as such poetically in the practices of human building, it is arguable that concrete artful practices themselves are the necessary condition for our being able to receive the event of truth. It may in fact be the case that ironic self-dismantling distorts the open-ended anticipations of further repetitions of historical and communal identity, as we in fact see happening in late modern liberal societies, which find it increasingly difficult to locate any concrete source of binding values and norms. The mythic thus remains in continual transformation as “the historical existence of a people,” in light of the only enduring universal, the open site of language (49/66). But in order truly to repeat its historical existence anew, the community must anticipate its repetition as the reception of a gift which thus already holds it open to its “other.”

Heidegger names this gift in the figure of the holy. The holy is the essential concealment in the granting of being. The holy is not mere absence but is the mysterious ground of the open region (Da-sein) and the enactment of this region. Human dwelling is the continued cultivation of a response to this mystery which takes the religious shape of anticipation of “gods” or agencies that bind human beings over in desire to a source of meaning beyond empty freedom.102 As in Schelling, the poet’s gods belong to the destiny of infinite relation (ST, 164/GA 42, 284-85; EHP, 200-2/GA 4, 175-78). I thus turn to unpack what I perceive to be the centrally religious character of Heidegger’s construal of human dwelling and finally to argue that any genuine thinking retrieval of the essence of the human will attempt poetically to indicate to us, beyond any supposedly universalizable subjective norms, the strange and uncanny character of its being as gift, i.e. as something belonging to us which we yet receive and appropriate as if from elsewhere.

102 See also Mark A. Wrathall, “Between the earth and the sky,” 83-4.
3.3 Religiously We Dwell

I began this chapter by outlining Heidegger’s contention that modernity bears witness to the phenomenon of the loss of the gods. The question I began with has to do with the possibility that the spontaneity of the event – which is already simultaneously the opening of a site for human response to the “gift” of being – might be the occasion for the emergence of a harmonious ordering of human being with all that is. This order would be “mythic” in the sense that the articulations of human language and building would bear out an aim that is not merely human but that in some sense brings human aspiration to its fulfillment. Language would then be the medium of human response and human naming of the gift, and thus also for a kind of “divine” speech that aspires to the agencies that disclose it and which are in some respect identical to it. One might recall here Plato’s suggestion in *Symposium* that a “heavenly” kind of love belongs to the beautiful harmony of opposites in music, medicine, poetry, and agriculture, in that these are constituted by the sort of repetition that continually receives anew the conveyance of the whole though each addition which brings previous instances into harmony and anticipates further possibilities for completion.103 The music is itself both the unfolding “material” event and the repeated moment of its reflexive conjoining in language. It is the god that holds these moments together in human articulation. These by their strangeness precisely in mirroring human willing direct our desire back towards this unfolding gift (See “The Thing,” PLT, 176-77; GA, 180-81).104 We are unable directly to observe these powers, yet we name them through the imaginative process by which we bring the harmony of the real to expression. And if this is the case, then modernity can but eclipse the gods without ever completely annihilating their role in the human phenomenon.

Ironically, Christianity is largely responsible for this eclipse of the role of the divine, Heidegger contends, by wholly interiorizing the object of religion as an experience and subsequently by reducing relation to the gods to the psychological-historical category of religious experience (Erleben) (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 58/GA 5, 76). Attunement to the overpowering is then no longer brought to expression except through the pure spontaneity of a “reason” that amounts finally to the formation of “world picture” (Weltbildung).

104 See also Crowe, *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Religion*, 130-31.
a law that places subjects together in relation to the objects under their control (67/89). The essence of this “humanism” is thus finally “that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates beings as a whole from the standpoint of, and in relation to, man” (70/93). Yet there remains even in this dispensation the “shadow” of that which cannot be calculated and represented, but which calls for mindful thought (*Besinnung*) that is attuned differently, beyond the charade of disinterested formal reason (72/95-6). This reason finally runs against the phenomenon of the “nothing,” which can constitute for it only naked contradiction. But out of this there emerges the possibility for a different sort of attunement to the event of disclosure (85/112-13). With this transformation comes also the possibility that we might once again become mindful also of the role of divine agencies in conveying the event of truth and in mediating our response to it, bringing the human outside or beyond itself, but (paradoxically) only for the sake of a higher retrieval of its own essence.

This recovery of the role of the divine in opening human beings to the event of being is what I am calling the religiosity of our dwelling. Heidegger does not generally approve of the term “religion” because to his mind it connotes too much of the modern sense of subjective decision and that which serves merely human purposes, stemming from the Roman conception of the *cultus*, the gathering around an identity which is continually re-activated essentially by acts of preservation (CP, 288-89, 357-58/GA 65, 410-12, 508-10). Religion in this fundamentalist sense attempts to return to an eternal past, to bring it into present expression, indeed to nullify time itself by the impossible ritual re-enactment of this past. Heidegger contrasts religion in this sense to genuine return, i.e. to that *future* moment of forward recollection or originary repetition, where the beginning arrives from ahead of us (288-89/410-12). In the latter sense, the god in its “passing” bears the hint of this beginning and of the possibility of human dwelling (290/412-13). Insofar as the “binding back” of religiosity could in principle refer to the passing god that brings human beings forward into their proper dwelling, Heidegger leaves open here the possibility for a distinction of authentic from inauthentic religion. The latter sacrifices the singular instance to the synchronic whole (a logic perfected by the cult of technology), thereby losing the significance (if also the instability and internal rupture) of time, whereas the former anticipates the diachronic repetition of an utterly singular “leap” that yet opens the possibility of shared historical identity (293/416-17).
It is in the spirit of the singular leap that I contend here that Heidegger’s notion of dwelling is thoroughly a religious one. For Heidegger, it is learning to dwell in the truth of being as the *holy* that sends forth gods that transport human beings into their own. To be human is precisely poetically to constitute the very “site” for the meeting of mortals and gods in the sending of the holy. To be such is thus fundamentally to play a role in the “speaking” and bringing forth of something that is not merely human but which binds us to that gift or sending of being. Thought in this way, religion is not a subjective decision but a gift that bears itself out as the possibility of an historical existence rooted in the mutual sharing of desire for the harmonious and beautiful. This mutual desire is both made possible and suspended, as it were, in the excesses permitted by language and human articulation that open us onto the transcendental mystery of our existence. Drawing from the language of the poem, and thus already philosophizing out of the religious decision as I have been suggesting, Heidegger anticipates (in a way not unlike that of Kierkegaard, Schelling and Hamann) that the event of being might emerge from the “abyss” of a natural reality that arises to beautiful and harmonious expression partially in the reflective domain of human language. Moreover, language (*logos*) may indeed be the outworking of human desire for the infinite embodied in the modes of articulation and building. This would mean that these modes are partially responsive to noumenal agencies that disclose to us the infinitely relational character of being – where the earthly and heavenly, the mortal and immortal are held together by an invisible infinite which shines forth in this harmony (See EHP, 200/175).

It is in virtue of the aesthetic root of these relations that if there is a religious dimension in Heidegger’s thinking, as I have been arguing there is, it is also thoroughly “natural” in the sense that human naming of the divine belongs to the wider expressive outworking of these relational potencies. Human beings are somehow attuned to the inexpressible event of being which works itself out in the poetic articulation of culture. If Heidegger thoroughly naturalizes religion, rejecting the (on a certain construal) Christian and modern notions of free subjectivity standing somehow outside or beyond the free emergence of being, he does so in the name of the recovery of the much older sense that beings in general paradoxically anticipate their natural completion in the further arrival of the gift, which is outside of their own power to produce. This

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characterization is expressed in Hölderlin’s notion of finite being as mediated to itself in the immediacy of an in-finite relation (EHP, 186/GA 4, 161). This is the “primordially rising nature” whose glance (Blick) flashes like lighting (Blitz) in the poet, who in turn remains in the ecstatic open (Dasein) and brings forth the glance into the beautiful form (186, 188-89/161-164). The gods are the bearers of this glance, and are thus “concealed within the holy” (186/161).

We recall from Chapter 1 that Heidegger poses the question of the radically concrete, the “other” to conceptual thought through the paradoxical pursuit of a thought of the coming to be of being itself. How can one think upon that event for which thinking has always arrived on the scene too late? One must reflect back only for the sake of further repetition of this elusive beginning. Heidegger’s formal sketch of the modes of this beginning took the tripartite form of reflection on the content, relational, and enactment senses of being. If, as we saw, our anticipation of the transformative event central to religious life can be sketched out from the ground up, so to speak, in this threefold form, so too our retrieval of the transcendent object of religion can fruitfully be sketched out in these terms.

The thinker must begin his reflections from the truth of being. This is the “place” in being where it is simultaneously disclosed and hidden in human relation to beings. Disclosed: because the coming to presence of beings shines forth in a beauty that bespeaks the final irreducibility of being to beings. Hidden: because the essential nature of being is always concealed in the unconcealing of beings. We saw that Heidegger’s reflections on Hölderlin constitute in part thought on the role of gods or the divine in the emergence of being. Onto-theo-logy answers the question of the emergence of being in terms of the absolute ground of all finite relations. It thereby remains oblivious to the ungrounded and utterly contingent nature of this emergence, precisely as emergence into possibility. No ground can make possible the possibility of being itself, since ground is precisely this possibility. No god can therefore take the position of ground in relation to being because any god must belong to a mode or manner of coming to presence. If this is the case, and if as the ultimate measure of existence, the divine must somehow remain at the heart of the emergence of being, then it seems that we confront a paradox. Hölderlin acknowledges this paradox, according to Heidegger, in his poem, “In lovely blue.” Heidegger ponders the poet’s question, “Is God unknown?” “For something that man measures himself by must after all impart itself, must appear. But if it appears, it is known. The god, however, is
unknown, and he is the measure nonetheless” (“....Poetically Man Dwells.....,” PLT 220/GA 7, 201). Heidegger does not attempt to resolve the paradox; instead he remains with it as that which in fact sharpens the question of human existence. That which is traditionally named God signifies the bounds of our finitude, the “measure” that human beings simultaneously receive and disclose (220/201).

The thinker must therefore reflect even on the divine out of the interval of difference between the possible and actual that constitutes his finitude. If the divine must still be anticipated in the open “site” of this interval, and if God cannot name the ground, it follows that the latter names a manifestness (Offenbarkeit) which points us into a deeper mystery, the mystery of disclosure (Offenbarung) itself (“....Poetically Man Dwells.....,” PLT 220/GA 7, 201). Heidegger thus contends, “Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word ‘God’ is to signify” (“Letter on Humanism,” PM, 267/GA 9, 350-51). If the earlier Heidegger was interested in retrieving religious life in a formal-ontological manner for the sake of a further transformation, it seems as though the later Heidegger is completing the “circle” of this interpretation by transformatively pointing us back into a fundamental sense of our dwelling as human beings within the “holy” in relation to “God” or the sending of being. My gloss on this passage is as follows: The essence of the holy is the event of truth in which being shows itself in beings and is simultaneously concealed in its difference from every finite determination. The essence of divinity or “godding” (Gottheit) is the lightning flash of the holy, i.e. opening the place of relation between the human being and the absolute (as Heidegger contends in his course on Schelling) (ST, 164/GA 42, 284-85).

Paradoxically, then, “God” signifies the dimension of height in our experience of the world, akin to Kant’s famous experience of the starry host above and the moral law within. The holy, the divine, and the God are names for different aspects of the mysterious gift of “presencing,” the upsurge of the sacred, named by these names, into the time of presence. “God” is, then, the name for the dimension of height by which human beings are addressed and to which they address themselves. This “divine” dimension takes shape in the institutional norms (which always incorporate the sense of the beyond) fleshed out in human life. Echoing Augustine, Heidegger here suggests that we human beings experience this upsurge only through the event by which we
ourselves both anticipate it in our habitual mode of being and are repeatedly interrupted and transformed by it.

But how does this gift disclose itself to human beings, and what is the relation of Heidegger’s philosophizing to this disclosure? Heidegger struggles to find a way to pose the question of the divine without obscuring the existential import of the matter, and here his thought brings him into the territory of speculative venture:

How can the human being at the present stage of world history ask at all seriously and rigorously whether the god nears or withdraws, when he has above all neglected to think into the dimension in which alone that question can be asked? But this is the dimension of the holy, which indeed remains closed as a dimension if the open region of being is not cleared and in its clearing is near to humans. Perhaps what is distinctive about this world-epoch consists in the closure of the dimension of the hale [des Heilen]. Perhaps that is the sole malignancy [Unheil] (PM, 267/GA 9, 351-52).

We saw that the root of what I am calling religion is the linguistic/poetic mediation (i.e. in human making) of the “coming to be” or event of the emergence of being, implicitly carried out with the sense that something in excess of the human discloses itself. Religion thus begins with the poet, who in a profound manner affirms the sense of being as gift all the while effecting a transformation in the way in which the tradition carrying this sense is handed down to us. Heidegger’s thinking is an attempt to remain with the gift of being as it is named by the poet, to clear the path for human beings to escape the “malignancy” of this age, the loss of any sense of purpose and meaning transcending finite human goals. Thinking now has the speculative task of pointing out possibilities for our cultivation of an ethos, and within that a renewed relation to things, opened up in the poetic utterance (IM, 26/GA 40, 28-9).

It is only in the context of this sort of thinking, one that helps us cultivate an ethos through our repeated response to being as gift, that we human beings can once again think and anticipate the meaning of the divine. Heidegger is of course attempting to re-awaken this traditional question with an emphasis on its eschatological horizon as a coming event. Here the emphasis is not on what our language of God and gods might amount to, but on the transformation that these names direct us toward and into. But Heidegger is clear that before such questions can be asked, we must attempt to think out of the truth of being. This truth, as Heidegger contends in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” opens up in the unconcealed relational
structures that gather together a way of life. He uses the example of the Greek temple. The god of the temple in fact belongs to the truth of being, insofar as he is the collective sense of meaning binding together temple life into a unified whole and directing that whole toward an aim. The god is very much “present” in this holding together of the sacred and profane rituals surrounding the Greek temple. The temple is the god in the way that the field is the earth. Temple life, including the god implicit in it, constitutes the “site” or locale for the holding together of thing and world (“The Origin of the Work of Art,” OBT, 21-2/GA 5, 29-30). The cultic rituals and mythic vision together develop into habituated forms of being in the world, such that the god is present in the meanings that arise from and continue to direct the practices.

Yet the cultic god also plays a role directing human beings in their continued repetition of this whole, with improvisations that carry forward its “spirit” or daimon. As Heidegger notes in “Letter on Humanism,” Heraclitus’s Fragment 119 states that the ethos of man is his daimon (PM, 269/GA 9, 354-55). The human being dwells in the nearness of this daimon, the mysterious life that comes to presence in and through the habitus that opens human relations (270/186). The ethos is originally an understanding of the truth of our being as humans as belonging to a greater “destinal unfolding” of being as a whole, as the upsurge of an originary binding or healing (Heilen) (272/359). If the god that presences in this abode is unfamiliar, even hideous (Ungeheuren) in its shocking otherness to everything commonplace, this is so as to transport human beings into the transformative open that grounds their dwelling (270-71/355-59). In 1950 Heidegger contended that one is deranged (Ver-rückt) through encountering the god, as he is moved ‘out (ausgerückt) beyond the ordinary understanding of human being into the essential abode (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 199/GA 5, 267). The god is the attunement to our possibilities for taking up our existence in a way that preserves and cultivates our sense of belonging to our own essence as human beings. Obviously, human beings must already anticipate this encounter, and as we saw, said anticipation takes place through the medium of poetry and is sharpened by thought. We must name the emergence of being as the holy dimension in preparation for the last God, the most radical, transformative attunement we have yet experienced in the West to the utter groundlessness and contingency of our being and thus the necessity for our having to receive it as the gift of our own freedom, of our improvisation of existence without an archē pattern to fall back on, but which we implicitly trust to be free elaboration in accordance with the way in which we are given to be (CP, 289-90/GA 65, 411-13).
Thus, while there is no hint in Heidegger that we could ever measure our performed existence against a network of principles emerging a priori out of the situation of our performance, yet as I will argue in the next section, there is a sense in Heidegger in which the freedom of our being resonates, becomes in tune with, natural exigencies as they are poetically received and so mediated in human making. Heidegger’s post-War thought constitutes a kind of decision in favour of the view that these exigencies are truly realized to the extent to which we safeguard a sense of the holy at the heart of being, not finally in order to deny our contingency as agents, but paradoxically to free it up in holding open the possibility of our continual transformation in relation to things. Heidegger’s projection of the religiously grounded fourfold is just that attempt to safeguard this sense of being as emerging gift against humanist reductions. In what remains of this chapter, I will thus flesh out my argument that Heidegger’s articulation of religious themes, which forms the core of his description of human dwelling, is not an arbitrary move, but preserves in carrying forth the poetic freedom of human ethical decision in a way that transcends any simple dualism of subjective freedom beyond mere objective determination. Heidegger begins to carry out his “circling back” retrieval, so to speak, of productive and concrete life (now daimon life) beyond the positivism/transcendentalism impasse sketched out in the first two chapters which I have suggested – and will argue in the final section – actually denies any robust view of human freedom.  

By holding open the question of the way in which dependence on the gift figures at the very heart of human culture, Heidegger thus brings us to the cusp of the metaphysical decision upon which our age teeters. Of course, the exigencies of nature might not in fact disclose any dimension of height towards which daimon life aspires and from which it receives its binding condition; there may after all be only struggle, polemos, without the gathering power of logos (IM, 62/GA 40, 66). In this case, there would be no loss of the gods, but only their disappearance, and the disappearance also of the divinely mediated “site” of human making. My task in the remainder of this and throughout the next chapter is to outline Heidegger’s alternative: On the one hand, poetic naming of the holy allows us to remain open to the mystery of our own existence and thereby also to remain free from the encroachments of reductive rationalities; on the other hand, and this is crucial, our acknowledgement of the presence of the

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divine in our habituated relations to things in fact keeps us grounded in a sense of particularity and place, of time and generational continuity, freeing us from the universal sway of indifference, the monstrosity of an empty sublime, the “sole malignancy” (Unheil) (PM, 267/GA 9, 352). For if the divine is merely absent, then there is really no gift at all, no greeting from the holy in the “heavenly fire” of the Greeks (EHP, 139/GA 4, 116). And any apparent mystery of an excess of being disclosed through phenomenal presence finally amounts to an illusion, where the “giving” of being is merely an arbitrary, incalculable power which thus continually threatens to overthrow the continuity of human projects, and itself becomes the technology that disrupts everything human (OBT, 72/GA 5, 96-7).

To be sure, Heidegger does not equate the thought of being with theism, any more than he equates it in his later works with atheism (PM, 267/GA 9, 351-52). But this is not out of any notion that thought must (or even could) remain fundamentally agnostic; rather, Heidegger denies the sort of theism that tends to pull thought into empty abstraction, away from its proper task of pointing into concrete “dimension” of the human being’s “historical abode” (267/351-52). Such a pointing into this abode, which itself belongs to the ecstatic pull of our very coming to be, opens the site for a naming of the divine, a kind of poetic theology as Ben Vedder correctly contends. As we shall see, Heidegger thinks that this naming is crucial to the cultivation of ethos in our modern age.

3.3.1 The holy as the beginning and the end

I contended in the previous section that Heidegger names the absence in modernity of an overwhelming sense of presence of the divine as loss on the basis of his more radical thought of the nature of human dwelling as the poetic freedom that cultivates at once a natural and sacred aim that exceeds finite expressions of willing. The aim implicit in this human creative receptivity, which releases things into their worldly possibilities, is a kind of anticipation which

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108 Here I am echoing, if also developing, Mark A. Wrathall’s analysis of the role of Heidegger’s God in “Between the earth and the sky,” in Religion After Metaphysics, 84-5.
remembers or thinks back (Andenken) – anticipating that the “gift” of coming to be will be repeated anew (EHP, 109-10/GA 4, 84-5). The poetic and aesthetic gratuity at the heart of our relation to things thus points us beyond mere phenomenal immanence into their excess of being: It holds us open to ontological difference, the open region or “between” that constitutes the temporally ecstatic character of relational being. If the sublime is mediated to us as gift – as the very gratuity of coming to be – then our reception of it is religious, as it poetically names the figures of this mediation in divine agencies that shockingly remind us of our contingency, thereby releasing possibilities for further retrieval and consummation of this gift. Loss of the gods is an indication that modernity has fallen into deeper oblivion of the gift-character of being, and leaves only subjective self-assertion or else naked power in its wake.110

As we have seen, Heidegger contends that the poet is the one who reaches furthest beyond the immediacy of the actual situation in anticipation of what could be, recreating the real through poetic expression. As Ricoeur aptly puts it, the poetic text opens up new possibilities for our everyday being-in-the-world because of the “distanciation of the real from itself” introduced into “our apprehension of reality” through the mimetic function.111 Imitation here amounts not to the mere copying of the real, but to its metamorphosis “by means of what we would call the imaginative variations that literature works on the real” which in effect “re-creates” reality “by means of a mythos, a fable that reaches its deepest essence.”112 Heidegger does not quite put it this way, but citing Hölderlin he contends that poetry has the character of a dream, one which “expels those to whom it shows itself from the careless sojourn among the familiar and real, and throws them into the terror of the nonreal” (EHP, 136/GA 4, 113). The poet brings to the fore the terror of the non-reality of being at the heart and core of our apprehension of all that “is.” The poet utters that which is coming, namely the opening of a time of festival, where human beings receive from the gods the condition for their historical dwelling (137/114). The holy opens the time of the festival.

112 Ricoeur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” 43.
Thus, as Heidegger seems to suggest, the poet is the one who brings the hidden origin in being to language. The poet divines the emergence of being or all coming to be as the advent of the holy (EHP, 136/GA 4, 113). The poet takes on the “prophetic” role of mediating the holy to human beings by way of the spoken word. The poet thereby adopts the risk that his utterance “threatens to invert the essence of the holy into its opposite” (EHP, 94/GA 4, 72-3). That is to say, the “song” of the poet threatens to reduce the immediate to something mediated. The poet must therefore remain in the divine dream so as to speak the mystery of/as the holy (EHP, 91/GA 4, 69). This is so precisely in order that human beings can be rescued from their “careless sojourn” in the familiar, their complacency with worn out forms of existence, through the enactment of patterns of behaviour that open up new facets of social and historical identity.

The malignancy of our age, we recall, is bound up in the will which casts the world as image or picture (Bildung). The outcome of the modern aim of certainty is technological will to power which casts all of reality in its own image. In a later speech Heidegger contends that the attunement to being as rational a priori is capable neither of openness to the mystery (die Offenheit für das Geheimnis) nor of releasement toward things (die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen) (DT, 54-5/GH, 25-6). The embrace of the holy is the conferring of “grace” and the gift of “wholeness” of an “abiding presence” to things (EHP, 85-6/GA 4, 63). The poet is the one who translates this embrace of “fullness” in his unfolding and founding of world. The poet does not attempt to comprehend that which remains “unapproachable.” Instead, the poet allows himself to be deranged by the upsurge of the “awesome” and is thus ready to point us into more genuine possibilities for being-in-the-world in relation to things (85-6/63). How does the poet allow something that simply speaks in and through him? How does the poet receive the gift of language by speaking it of his own accord? There is no resolution to the paradox; rather, the poet is the one by whom all of existence is most intensely thrown into question, the one whose own existence is the sign of the origin.

But what is the embrace of the holy? And what is the criterion for genuine dwelling? Heidegger points to the “primordial rising” that the Greeks named in the figure of physis or “nature” (EHP, 87/GA 4, 65). The holy is the mysterious beginning, the opening of being which “comes to presence through itself” (87/65). That is to say that it is the original power of the turn (Kehre) or the throw (Entwurf) from which all things are given to be in their possibilities. To
remain in the embrace of this turn is thus to respond to it in turn: The human being is the opening of a counter turn, a kind of decision, within the turning of nature which founds its “truth” (CP, 61/GA 65, 87-9). The poet’s utterances must thereby arise from his attunement to the “spiritual” harmony of the real with the inner groundless principle of its unity (EHP, 86-7/GA 4, 64-5).

But if the holy is at root the beginning of being, i.e. the emergence of nature as the coming to be of things into their present possibilities, so also is it the end, that which is to come. Heidegger seems to suggest that the “natural” emergence of a sort of festival of relations among human beings, mediated by things, is at root a gift. Human acknowledgement of and response to the gift of being as what continually remains to come is thus in some respect the completion of any natural emergence into presence. But who or what gives this gift? Echoing Schelling and Hegel, Heidegger suggests that nature is the opening of an infinite relation: that it is finally the infinite that mediates relation to itself through the exigencies of temporal emergence (EHP, 200/GA 4, 175-76). Heidegger does not of course wish to construe being as will or self-determining subjectivity. But he seems to suggest here that the unapproachable centre that mediates our relation to itself is a source of greeting and of giving. It is thus a wholly “natural” end that remains mysterious, beyond the immanent fulfilments of natural longing (202/178).

Nature is aspiration toward the unreachable interior, the holy, which must constitute the occasion for its repetition as the open region of being. So too the human festival is the bringing to completion of natural exigencies in the greeting of the holy, this event and arrival of the gift.  

Insofar as from the human perspective, the holy is already language (since there is no subjective reserve beyond language), gods or divine agencies play a role in conveying the greeting of the holy to the soul of the poet. These agencies cannot be equivalent to the holy because must enter into relation with human beings, i.e. must emerge into presence, and so must be mediated by the eternal centre. The poet thus receives the “ray of light” from the god. The ray strikes the poet with “divine fullness” that “blesses him” and yet also shakes him to the core (EHP, 90-1/GA 4, 69). The shaking of the poet’s soul “lets the word come to be” (91/69). The word of the poet is the very temporal place of the gathering of the “eternal” into mediation. The eternal itself is the “firm law” of this “mediateness” (94-5/73-4). “The holy bestows the word,  

113 Of course, we might ask Heidegger whether this mysterious centre is in the end really distinguishable from the emergence of nature, and in what respect it can be construed as the transcendental source of a gift. I return to this in Chapter 5.
and itself comes into this word. This word is the primal event of the holy” (Das Wort ist das Ereignis des Heiligen) (98/76). But it is the divine agency that brings the word as the holy ray to flash in the soul of the poet, to be brought to utterance in the languages of those who belong to the earth. If I can be permitted to put it this way, described here is an “upward” and a “downward” movement, so to speak, in language. Language is the “downward” articulation and mediation of an eternal immediacy; and it is the “upward” reaching of nature beyond itself toward its eternal centre. Phenomenologically speaking, gods attune human beings to this eternal centre.

In turn, because the holy emerges in the word of the poet to “greet” us, we are able to dwell in the world and to respond to things in an authentic manner. The arising of this greeting takes place in the festival. The festival is a gathering together that brings forth a people into a common destiny and that sets them into a locale. For instance, in Hölderlin’s poem, the people are brought together into a common life and a shared destiny as a people surrounding the locale of the river. This commonality is itself “festive” in the deep sense of gathering, even though the life of a people together will be marked by certain celebratory occasions or festivals. Individual festivals are occasions that allow a people to be confronted anew by the greeting of the holy that is in fact the origin of their common dwelling (EHP, 128/GA 4, 104-5). “Festival” expresses the deepest aspect of the common dwelling of an historical humanity in which a people responds to the universal greeting of the holy. “The festival is the primal event (Ereignis) of the greeting, in which the holy greets, and in the greeting appears (128/104-5).” Implicit here is the notion that at the heart of human dwelling is a call or greeting and response structure whereby human beings receive the condition of their being (i.e. through divine agencies) and in turn respond to the mysterious givenness in things.

The holy opens up in/as the event whereby beings are brought forth out of concealment into their “truth.” Heidegger thus ingeniously reformulates religious transcendence in such a manner that he neither posits a world beyond experiential horizons nor does he commit the humanist reduction of human self-transcendence (ek-stasis) to sheer autonomous, self-determining will. As William Desmond puts it, “there is a gift that elevates the self: a passio that
lifts the soul, not a conatus in which it lifts itself. This gift is transcendental “excess” beyond the merely actual and the merely possible, the enactment of possibilities. There is, thus, no sphere of subjective freedom outside or beyond the coming into being of our free relations to things. Yet it is precisely at this point where our thinking is beholden to the “mystery” of the holy, where we find ourselves paradoxically greeted and destined to respond in language to an utterly gratuitous event. This response is already always bound up in the poetic expression at the root of human dwelling; the transcendence of human freedom is thus already language, i.e. the articulation of a sense that its free projections in some way express a given aim and order.

I now turn to investigate more closely the nature of the divine fire, the holy ray, in Heidegger’s figures of godhead (Gottheit) and divinities (Gottlichen). In Heidegger’s estimate, these dimensions of manifestation or disclosure are essential to human agency (belonging to the fourfold gathered together in world) insofar as the latter must remain bound to the given particularities of place and time.

3.3.2 Dwelling in the Fourfold

If Heidegger’s philosophy has a performative dimension as the attempted retrieval of something like religious comportment to the holy, the search for mediation between the human and the absolute, we must then ask what role Heidegger thinks that philosophy must play in the retrieval of this religious comportment. I have argued that Heidegger contends that language

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114 William Desmond, Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double? 97. Desmond does not think, however, that Heidegger’s philosophy can sustain this radical notion of givenness because it rejects any strong separation of created being from transcendent creator. I argue below and in chapter 5 that Heidegger can in fact be read as a thinker of the transcendent origin, wholly natural and yet also “beyond” nature as its hidden centre and telos, though I concede to Desmond that Heidegger often remains ambivalent on this score, largely out of his concern to avoid reductive metaphysical categories. My reading of Heidegger must therefore be in some respect a speculative one, but as I have been arguing, this sort of productive receptivity is in keeping with the spirit of Heidegger’s thinking.

115 William Desmond, Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double?, 97

116 Of course, we might still ask whether Heidegger’s holy could ever be the excess of a greeting or of a granting of being, rather than the “nothing” of an indifferent void, given his ambivalence about the source of this transcendental gift. On Heidegger’s own terms, everything is at stake here concerning the retrieval of the possibility for genuine repetition of an ethos for human being. I return to this discussion in Chapter 5.
simultaneously discloses and conceals an unapproachable dimension of height in all human making. Human dwelling is not just the outworking of an utterly gratuitous event of coming to be, but as free creative expression it anticipates the continued repetition of this event through the disclosure of an aim or order that transcends merely human goals. If not quite the notion of a transcendence beyond the whole, Heidegger’s philosophy (along with poetry from Hölderlin and Mallarmé) embodies what Charles Taylor aptly describes as religious longing for transcendent purpose beyond mere immanent flourishing, the notion that genuine repetition of human identity involves response to a call that is simultaneously its very condition for being: The response must in some sense be the reception of a gift.¹¹⁷

Of course, one cannot argue for the legitimacy of this concept of the holy in the sense of offering rational, a priori grounds for accepting it as the basis of the human condition. Yet as I have contended, at this later stage in his thought, Heidegger undertakes something like a speculative retrieval of the poet’s envisioning in order to reformulate the shape of our imaginings of the world and the ways in which we as human beings take up the task of existence. Insofar as the envisioning involves implicit trust in an aim beyond the merely human, and the attempt to articulate a holistic understanding of this aim in the context of human existence, it is a religious philosophizing. The term is not entirely out of sorts with Heidegger’s own pronouncements: In his essay on Hölderlin’s poem Andenken, Heidegger contends that the poet has a prophetic role (of course, in the original Greek sense of profétés) in uttering an anticipatory word of the holy (EHP, 136-37/GA 4, 113-14).¹¹⁸ Heidegger worries about importing too much of a “Roman” understanding with the term “religion.” Granting his rejection of the pursuit of “celestial

¹¹⁷ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, 559, 726.
¹¹⁸ Speciously, though, Heidegger also claims that this notion of the prophetic has nothing to do with the “Christian sense of the term” which relies too much on the “Roman” notion of “religion” as relation between men and gods for the sake of security of salvation and “celestial blissfulness” (137/114-5). Heidegger wants to separate the prophetic dream of the poet from the notion of revelation from God or gods, because he fears that the latter is too concerned with certitude of presence (secured as eternal salvation) and does not broach the question of the radical coming to be or emergence into presence of all that is. But as Derrida contends in Of Spirit, Heidegger’s radical separation does not hold, first because the Abrahamic religions are at root just as concerned as Heidegger with this phenomenon of the coming to be of all that is (and in fact Heidegger borrows much from them without giving acknowledgment), and secondly because there is a kind of “content” in Heidegger’s notion of the holy that relates it essentially to the appearing or manifestation of gods. Heidegger’s phenomenology of the holy, in other words, is already a theology. See Derrida, Of Spirit, 99-113.
blissfulness,” we yet acknowledge the religious dimension of Heidegger’s thinking here, particularly in the way Heidegger claims the need for mediation from non-human agencies to usher human beings out into the foreignness of their absolute home (136/113-14). The ultimate basis for this mediation is not rational (although, it opens up its own implicit sense of what counts as rational), but more resembles the religious notion of divine disclosure.

The dream of the poet brings the greeting from a foreign land. This land is that of our Greek ancestors who experienced the “heavenly fire” from the holy in an immediate way that we moderns seem incapable of experiencing (EHP, 136-37/GA 4, 114-15). But we must learn to experience this heavenly fire of the Greeks in our own way, so that we might learn to inhabit more genuinely the essence of what is already our own home. This is the utmost uncanny (Unheimlichste) realm (HHI, 69/GA 53, 84-5). Western humanity has reduced that which the Greeks experienced in heavenly fire or the “extraordinary” and “powerful” to the immense in merely quantitative terms (70/85-6). But it was this qualitatively extraordinary aspect of the real – in the sense of being non-ordinary, un-homely (un-heimische), even disturbing (Ungeheure) – that kept the Greeks at home with an uncanny otherness (70/86-8). This was the case, even if the Greeks’ poetic sense of heavenly fire had to undergo its own transformation in confrontation with thinking (113-14/140-43). Thus, while Heidegger indeed affirms that Western humanity must return to the ancient sources of mythic wisdom before the onset of the de-mythologizing thrust of philosophy this does not make Heidegger a “conservative pagan,” to cite Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus posits the false dichotomy, either of return to “local rootedness and the local gods” or the radical sceptical elimination of the local in favour of the “inwardness” of an individual relation to the absolute. Rather, Heidegger does not advocate a simple return to pre-modern notions of local enchantment, as we have already seen with his phenomenological notion of the last God as that ineliminable dimension of “goding”, but instead attempts to retrieve a sense of human relation to the local and particular as mediated by the absolute. This is the dream of heavenly fire, i.e. of manifestness of the universal, which the poet transformatively brings from the foreign land of the Greeks. Heidegger in fact remains with the paradoxical notion that local rootedness is in fact the productive condition for manifestation of the universal.

119 Hubert Dreyfus, “Christianity without onto-theology: Kierkegaard’s account of the self’s movement from despair to bliss,” 89.
I mentioned that Heidegger must retrieve some sense of mediation in order for his notion of the gift of the holy to make sense. And Heidegger seems to suggest in an indirect manner, in “Letter on Humanism” for example, that being must be thought in terms of the holy if Western humanity is to retain any sense of ethical continuity beyond the aporias of humanist reason. Heidegger thus makes room for divine mediating agencies of human relation to the absolute. Only here is specifically human doing and making truly a receiving that simultaneously expresses or images the eternal origin in creative repetition. Heidegger rejects the idea that the community between the human and the divine entails the final closure of the gift of the holy in the immanent ethical community, where the divine is fully de-mythologized in ethical relation. But neither is this gift an instance outside or beyond the “communal spirit” or principle of life that takes form through the poet’s being “animated” to speak (EHP, 114-15/GA 4, 90-1). This spirit animates also the entire expression of nature, but is not idealist self-closure: Spirit is finally the disclosure or radical opening of the origin that simultaneously shows and conceals itself, in a “giving forth” of manifestation that remains also a longing to return to the “homeland,” or to the hidden origin within all that is manifest (EHP, 116-17/GA 4, 91-3). It is thus the ecstatic between that receives or poetizes the greeting of this mysterious origin as that which is still to come: “But one of the mysteries of re-thinking-of [An-denken] is that it thinks toward what-has-been, in such a way, though, that what-has-been comes back to the one who thinks of it, coming from the opposite direction” (123/100; author’s italics). Thus, in order to be what it is as self-concealing, the origin must somehow disclose itself to human beings as such. It must approach human beings and arrive in time in the differentiated unity of human and divine, in the “wedding festival of men and gods” (126/103). The festival of greeting that constitutes human dwelling, poetic expression of the mystery that exceeds human beings, thus incorporates a kind of mythic reference to a divine agency that points us into/toward the sublime limits of our being.

Heidegger speaks of God and gods, the divine and divinities in many places in his post-War lectures and essays. In his “Letter on Humanism,” for example, Heidegger speaks of the dimension of divinity or “goddling” (Gottheit), and of God and Gods (der Gott; die Götter) (PM, 252, 267/GA 9, 331, 351-52). In other post-War essays, he speaks of divinities (Göttlichen) the “beckoning messengers of godding” (die winkenden Boten der Gottheit), and of the “God of philosophy” versus the “divine God” (der Gott der Philosophie; der göttlichen Gott) (GA7, 151; ID, 140-41).
Clearly, beyond the God of philosophy (onto-theo-logy) there is room for another sort of possibility for God’s manifestation. If we are to take Heidegger’s *Contributions* as template for his later pronouncements about God and gods, then we must acknowledge that according to him it is of the nature of God to unsettle human beings by passing by (CP, 290/GA 65, 413). God is present in the uncanny absence that draws human beings out beyond themselves, in that moment of bodily transfiguration in which human beings articulate themselves differently in response to the world. With the story of God passing by Moses on Mount Sinai clearly in mind here (and with echoes of both Kierkegaard and Schleiermacher), Heidegger suggests that God’s passing is a kind of irruption of the unknown into human life which can be acknowledged and honored only if we can “withstand” the rupture of our normative habits by something higher so as to receive these back with a new sense of historical “belongingness” (CP, 290-91/GA 65, 412-14).

Heidegger anticipates the passing of a “last” God that ushers in a new beginning for Western humanity, freeing us from our loss of a sense of place and time in technological modernity (291/414).

But this freeing requires a dimension of height (*Gottheit*) that cuts across our normal sense of ethical continuity and grounds it in the singular instance or moment. The poet receives the singular instance of divine flash, the holy ray, and utters this as the law or measure of our being; the thinker takes this over as what obliges (*das Gemußte*), something that compels us toward our essentially historical way of being, to take this up in a genuine way (CP, 292/GA 65, 414-16). The aesthetic thus passes over into the religious in founding a sense of historical

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120 See also Andrew J. Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2010), 86-7. Mitchell traces the transformation of Heidegger’s thinking of space through meditation on the ways in which the sculpted work of art opens a dimension of relationality for human dwelling. Interestingly, he confirms my own contention in this work that Heidegger comes to reject the notion of the spacing and timing of being as articulations against the void, contending instead that space and time must belong – as spacing and timing – to the medium of relationality that forms appearance. This medium is not void: As wholly positive, it embodies the tension of the exceeding of limits and self-transcending blending of things in relation to their exterior. Art opens a “thick” space of belonging together, “poetic places,” where things can remain wholly open to significances that exceed their brute presence (86). In fact, as Mitchell argues, Heidegger later contends that the thing is really itself a “place” for the gathering of relations. Granted this, in my view Heidegger repeats here the ancient notion of sacramental space and time, where the thing is the embodiment the very relation of which it is also the sign. Being as the medium “between” the presence and absence of things, their relationality, and is not therefore mere void.
continuity for human dwelling one which includes an inner compulsion exceeds the merely human. This immanent compulsion which is still irreducible to the ethical and legal command strictu sensu (a “table of commandments” is not the sole need here) is the condition of possibility for human dwelling (CP, 290/GA 65, 413).

Thus, gods and divinities are indeed mythic figures, but nonetheless are thought to bring human beings to the measure of their being out of a sense of divine height. On the one hand, there is a sort of reflexivity in the poetic and aesthetic sphere of embodied doing that is prior to self-reflective consciousness and which expresses an implicit, even “natural” desire to harmonize with that which most fundamentally is. On the other hand, in order for this implicit harmonizing to be more than just the hopeful assertion of will in the face of an apparently indifferent reality (as Milbank aptly summarizes the unwitting conclusion of modern humanist thought), we must conjecture that our tendency to mythologize the very enactment of our finite modes of being and doing is itself a mode of participation in and expression of this reality. Thus religion asserts itself here, as the sense that out of our reflexive harmonizing with the coming into being of all that is emerges the sense that we somehow develop this gift in our actively unfolding it as the rooted historical community.

Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold, accordingly, holds the two aspects of this dynamic of self-mediating reception, on the one hand, and unilateral donation, on the other, in a kind of productive (though not systematic) tension. Human beings, live in proximity to divinities which secure for them a sense of place, time, and continuity (“Building Dwelling Thinking,” PLT, 151/GA 7,155). Human beings depend on these hints in the presencing of things to point them toward divine height, the manifestation of the essentially unknown (151/155). At the same time, to be acknowledged as such, divinities need the event of being’s opening that grounds itself in human agency. There is a kind of self-mediating movement on the sides of gods and humans (“mortals”). The contingent opening of the place and time of dwelling is simultaneously aspiration to its irreducible eternal “other” that sees itself in the figures of the divinities; the emergence of eternal in time is thus also a kind of needfulness, that of the divinities who seek manifestation as such through the dynamic interplay of things and world which is held together in the poetic receptivity of human building. The god manifests in its mysteriousness as an

unknown “other” which yet somehow gives to human beings the “measure” of their own being (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” PLT, 220/GA 7, 200-1). (We might reflect here on Kant’s notion of the moral law given from a height that is somehow simultaneously human and divine, or on Kierkegaard’s notion that the ethical receives its condition from a higher, unspeakable moment.)

The togetherness of humans (“mortals”) and gods also secures another axis of mediation, that between the earth and the sky. Heidegger’s genius here is in his harmonizing of the ethical “moment” of human historicity and divine law with the emergence of an organic togetherness that mirrors it and is mirrored by it (“The Thing,” PLT 178/GA 7, 181-82). Human beings in their “toil” are bound to the earth (“Building Dwelling Thinking” 147/151). As bodied beings, we depend on our “grounding” on the earth to grow food, to construct shelters, to build farms and factories, schools and churches, etc. But humans also look up towards the sky, to the “gifts” of the rain and the sun; we are at the mercy of the seasons (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 218/200-1). As mortals we human beings depend for our sense of place and time on the rhythms and dynamic interplay of the aspects of earth and sky.

The earth and sky form the dynamic of jutting forth and receding of nature, i.e., the interplay of emerging and withdrawing to make room for emergence. The plant bursts forth from the earth toward the sky to receive rain and sun. Here earth emerges in the plant and the sky forms the background of this rising forth; but sky also sends its own nourishment to the earth which draws it forth for the plant. There is thus a kind of reciprocal movement of affirmation of the other in oneself and of affirmation of oneself in the other at play in the dynamic that Heidegger calls earth and sky. This axis of meaning cuts across our sense of continuity and significance as human beings. Earth is “the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, speading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal” (“Building Dwelling Thinking,” PLT 147/GA 7, 151). It is not just something that we are provided for our subsistence. Earth is the irreducible aspect of the real that arises in and “grounds,” so to speak, the places we cultivate for our sense of belonging. Similarly, as the “vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting of clouds and

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122 Heidegger thus adds to his initial claim from “The Origin of the Work of Art” that the earth is the hidden realm that juts forth into world. Here the sky represents another axis of meaning.
blue depth of the ether,” sky is the cosmos that orders our sense of time and thus of purpose (147/151). It belongs to the way in which we human beings experience ourselves as part of the real, without itself reducing to this experience. Both of these aspects of the real thus interweave with each other in their mutual establishing of human place and time. Conversely, they are held together in mutual significance in and through human dwelling.

But why divinities? Heidegger indeed contends that each of the aspects of the four is mirrored by each of the others. First, earth and sky open human beings to the irreducibly ideal dimensions of order and harmony, respectively. In his reflection on Trakl, Heidegger refers to the sky as the “blue depth of the ether” and as the “blueness” of the simultaneous shining forth and withdrawal of the holy (OWL, 165/GA 12, 39). The sky draws the gazes of mortals upward into its depths, even as it is also the realm of sending-forth. It is the initial appearance to mortals of the harmonizing of presence and absence, the establishment of time. If human beings measure out a life on the earth through their building and cultivating, they do so by measuring themselves “against the heavenly” (“...Poetically Man Dwells...” 218/GA 7, 198-99). The heavenly opens the first thought of a dimension of height beyond the play of appearances that harmonizes them. Conversely, the earth gives rise to an ideal sense of ordering of place, of proportionality and symmetry, opening the first thought of a deep structure ordering the manifold of beings. Order and harmony irreducibly cut across the dynamic of the interplay of mortals with earth and sky, and another aspect of being’s unfolding is needed to think it. Secondly, as Mark A. Wrathall contends, “An openness to divinities that themselves attune us [...] makes it possible to experience things in the world as sacred, and as making demands on us, which in turn allows them to have existential importance for us.”

There is an otherness at play in our relation to things that beckons us out toward its mysterious givenness. As Andrew J. Mitchell contends, the divinities are no more to be regarded as something in themselves as the other aspects of the fourfold. Rather, they are the hints in emerging nature that beckon human beings out toward the the element of the unknown and inhuman that belongs to their essence. Without divinities the harmonious interplay of ethical existence and natural emergences cannot really be secured: for either reality finally reduces to subjective self-mediation (transcendentalism) or to mediation by

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123 Mark A. Wrathall, “Between the earth and the sky,” 84.
an indifferent other, equivalent to sheer power (the secret essence of positivism). In either case, Heidegger seems to argue, there is no hope of restoring either a sense of place and time or of ethical continuity in our late modern age.

As a whole, then, the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities, is the opening of possibility for the interplay of the self-showing of things with human making and cultivating ("The Thing," PLT, 179/GA 7, 182-83). It thus opens the space and time of possible reciprocity between humans and the non-human world, between humans and other humans, and between humans and the divine. But this sphere of reciprocity or open “time-play-space” of mediation remains ultimately open to the mysterious otherness giving itself forth in the origin. The poet, in enduring the holy ray of the divine, can point us into this mystery and mediate to us its wholesome gift and greeting.

3.4 Conclusion: Between Religion and Philosophy

I began this chapter with the question of possibility of, even of the need for, a philosophizing that is able to speak from the wellsprings of religion. This might indeed become a religious philosophizing, even if religion undergoes its own transformation at the hands of philosophy. My overriding question throughout has been that of philosophy’s relation to its other exemplified by religious life and its absolute object. I have argued in this chapter that Heidegger’s later philosophizing in proximity to the poet discloses the thinker’s own willingness to bring thought to its limits in thinking on the absence of the gods as loss, i.e. as our loss of a dimension of height, ultimately securing our sense of being as gift or donation. We thus see Heidegger attempting to move past an empty positivism, on the one hand, and an all-encompassing transcendental subjectivity, on the other, both of which according to him amount to the same loss of the distinctively human.

In the idiomatic language I introduced in Chapter 1, we might say that Heidegger “circles back” in a kind of transformative retrieval or repetition of religious life and its object. There is here no “otherworldly” sphere of unchanging essences, but neither are we left with a disenchanted world of instrumental rationality. Rather, Heidegger turns to language or the “gathering together” (logos) that takes place in/as the “site” in which humans cultivate and bring
forth the real. Indeed, humans implicitly understand their relation to things to be the outworking of a givenness that is not entirely under their control but which they help unfold. The poet establishes the furthest reaching repetition or “saying” of this emergence, envisioning possibilities for human response to the real.

But the opening of the real, the coming to being of all that is, reveals an essential ambiguity between the outworking of the real (still what Heidegger would call the “relational-sense” (Bezugssinn) of being) and the event by which the real emerges. The poet is the first to name this ambiguity – the opening of the mythic – at the heart of our relation to the real. Poetry dwells on the mystery of this gift of coming-into-being. Its mythic function is to remain with the ambiguity at the heart of language: The poet reflexively measures out the implicit law of human being by bearing witness to an indeterminable source that surpasses the human by holding the human open to its reception of itself as a gift. Gods are needed to mediate this overpowering source to human beings as the possibility for continued repetition, without which there is only the terror of the void and of the loss of the human (EHP, 94/GA 4, 58). The poet has the courage to intimate the coming of the last God in the time of the absence of gods, between thought’s first inception in Western metaphysics and its “other beginning” which finally grasps the belonging together of human being and the real in the irreducibly mysterious event of givenness, and thus the utter gratuity, i.e. contingency of human existence (CP, 125-27/GA 65, 179-82).

The poet speaks the mystery of our relation to the absolute, that mystery which Western metaphysics has sought to utter in its own way through purifying itself of the poetic and mythic. Heidegger contends that thought must remain with the essential ambiguity of poetry if it is to bring thought to the limits of a confrontation with its other. As we have seen, according to Heidegger the ethical continuity of historical humanity is at stake. Philosophy must hear the poet’s ambiguities as the ambivalence of being as both gift and as human appropriation. This gift belongs to the real as its emerging possibilities poetically completed by human beings, and yet remains irreducibly other to any of these. Of course, we might stand to ask Heidegger how the “mirroring” relation in the fourfold could really disclose anything at all like a greeting from the unapproachable centre it unfolds. Is this centre glimpsed in the mirror? Can a mirror be also like a window in which we simultaneously glimpse ourselves and the other? Or, as in a house of
mirrors, are we stuck looking at endless reflections finally without any other? I address these questions in Chapter 5.

We might, of course, also ask what shape or form philosophy must take in light of its attempt to think *religiously*, to think from and into the object of religion. Even if it takes its prompting from the poet to remain within the essential ambivalences afforded by our relation to language, philosophy is also tasked with thinking in a conceptual (and this means systematic) manner. Is Heidegger’s thinking yet another form of metaphysics? Or does his rejection of “systems” of thought rather signal the emergence of so-called “post-metaphysical” reflection on religion? Is there another alternative? As I shall argue in the next chapter, it is not at all the case that Heidegger rejects or somehow moves beyond metaphysics, but as I have shown, he leaves behind the duality of positivism/transcendentalism that has burdened so much of Western metaphysics. As we have begun to see in this chapter, there is an ethical stake in Heidegger’s retrieval of religion. We must therefore continue to think through the implications of this retrieval. Against finally the incipient *nihilism* of so-called post-metaphysical thought, I articulate a fruitful alternative in what I take to be Heidegger’s “suspended” metaphysics of prayer beyond the formal emptiness of a “rationality” increasingly given over to technology.
Chapter 4: Beyond Nihilism: Religious Thinking as Suspension of Metaphysics

4.1 Recapitulation of the Task

At the close of the preceding chapter, I suggested that Heidegger’s retrieval of religion has ramifications for our understanding of the philosophical project in general and of metaphysics in particular. I argued in Chapter 3 that the religious feeling of dependence that roots our mythic response to the absolute unfolds itself poetically as human dwelling. To remain close to its uncanny home, philosophy must therefore heed the poet. But the question of the role of metaphysical thought in Heidegger’s reflection on our being has yet to be addressed. If metaphysics has traditionally been defined as systematic reflection on the nature of reality, how does Heidegger think through the implications of this project? Does he simply reject as onto-theo-logy the metaphysical project as a whole, or does he make room for systematic thinking beyond absolutely self-determining thought? Can religious feeling lend itself to a mode of reflection that speculatively develops its own tacit awareness of dependence upon an absolute other in an attempt to put this relation of dependence into thought? What would this mean in the context of Heidegger’s attempt to remain rooted in the words of the poet? Might this indeed require the attempt to release (gelassen) that unspeakable source indirectly uttered by the poet, through a sort of reflection that translates the poet’s image in the meditative work that attempts to unfold the mystery of our being (FS, 34/GA 15, 63; DT, 55-7GH, 26-8)?

Heidegger’s philosophy as a whole, as we have seen, concerns the question of the ecstatic opening of the mysterious ground or source of “being” or coming-into-presence. In traditional terms, we might say that Heidegger poses the question of our temporally unfolding relation to the
fount and origin of time: the reflexivity of finite being that unfolds and brings to expression the in-finite source. This relation has the character of an event by which human beings poetically appropriate and express the coming-into-presence of being as their own, taking up and articulating this emergence in the form of their own aims and projects, creatively unfolding and establishing a “world” for the gathering together of the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. As we have seen, Heidegger argues that human relation to the divine – to the gods/divinities of the fourfold and to the God who attunes us in its passing – is an essential aspect of the way in which the primordial event unfolds. Divine agencies attune us to the unfathomable depth from which this event emerges as a dimension of height, the holy, which greets human beings as an overflowing gift out of their restless longing for origin. In poetic utterance, human beings provide the temporal “site” for divine conveyance of this eternally unutterable source.

Hence, Heidegger leaves open a place for religion or for the relation of “binding back” (re-ligare) in being. But precisely what is bound back, and to what? As we also saw at the close of chapter 2, Heidegger’s reading of Schelling reveals the former’s interest in the question of the eternal as the mystery of the origin. The eternal is not, strictly speaking, anything “outside” time. Instead, it is the “fullness of time itself,” essentially the mysterious opening of time which diverges into hidden ground and existential disclosure of this source (ST, 113-14/GA 42, 192-93). The eternal is thus the opening of the relation of finite expression in its existential particularity to the ground. We have gone some distance in gaining an understanding of how Heidegger attempts to articulate this relation. But Heidegger also argues that philosophy is in no place to mediate the relation of ground and existence in the articulation of logical unity. Such attempted mediation (as we saw) collapses the relation of time and the eternal into onto-theology. Here the time of being is repeated as the logic of an entirely self-mediating and self-overcoming whole. The final expression of this “logic” is the will to power and the will to will (itself eternally as will) (ID, 66/134). However, Heidegger remains open to thinking beyond the eternal return (after the death of God) toward an eternal that somehow arrives to us in time as its essential ground. He remains open to a sort of religious thinking.

However, as I shall argue in this chapter, Heidegger is not the straightforwardly post-metaphysical thinker that he has been made out to be by a generation of commentators on his
relation to religion. If thought of the divine does not die under the knife that has slaughtered the god of onto-theo-logy, that is, if thinking still must question our temporal relation to the eternal beginning, then it stands to reason that we must at least ask whether and how there is room for a kind of metaphysics in Heidegger’s thinking. I will define metaphysics extensively in this chapter; for now, I am using the term to denote simply the task of a thinking articulation of reality or what is and how it is. I contend first that Heidegger’s relation to metaphysics is more complex than oft realized, and secondly that there is room for speculative thinking of our relation to the absolute in Heidegger’s philosophy. It is not the descriptive task of an articulation of what is (as such) that Heidegger aims to overcome. Heidegger does not suggest that the descriptive task of metaphysics stands necessarily opposed to transformative questioning. Transformative questioning rather opens the way for thoughtful articulation of the mystery of existence.

As I hope has become clear, Heidegger calls the Western metaphysical tradition into question in order to revitalize this tradition by directing it back to its essence, the wellspring of logos from which our thought utters its first words. There is already a kind of speaking going on in/as the emergence of being, to which human beings must co-respond (ent-sprechen) in turn. We saw that humans respond poetically to the “call” of language through building and dwelling, forming out their world through the cultivation of things. The metaphysical tradition, according to Heidegger, just is this history of human correspondence to being. The centre of gravity of metaphysics as a whole, so to speak, is much lower than academic thought: Metaphysics is the peculiar response to the truth of being – to “what there is” – embodied in the practices of an historical community. As we will see, however, there are other, secondary senses in which Heidegger uses the term metaphysics, including metaphysics as the discipline of philosophers. But an age is never without its metaphysics, according to Heidegger, because it is never without a kind of decision regarding the truth of being. Metaphysics in the narrower sense develops what is already pre-reflectively understood by a people. Both the broader and narrower senses become inauthentic when they fail to cultivate wonder at the mystery of existence.

What does this discussion of metaphysics have to do with religion? Heidegger’s thought on metaphysics was influenced by two great thinkers who wrestled with the question of our relation to the real in the absence of any objectively abiding essences: Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. In our relation to the real we are confronted by the paradox that we as finite agents
both are active in our work of taking up and disclosing what is, often in a transformative way, and yet somehow receive and are acted upon by that which is. Heidegger puts it thusly in a later sketch for a lecture on metaphysics: “Reality is of such a nature that everything real pre-empts man everywhere as effector and an effecting being, as a co-worker and something effected” (“Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics,” EP,73/GA 6.2, 437). Heidegger articulates his own reflections on metaphysics in wrestling with the same questionable nature of our existence that occupied these thinkers. He stresses the arrival of the eternal as the opening of gift. But to remain with the paradox entails also the seamless transformation of the singular gift into the play of differences – the emergence of “what is” – through creative and even speculative human venture. Such an outworking venture may indeed have a reflexive element which gives it response to being as gift, a kind of thinking (Denken) as offering thanks (Danken), and in this respect it remains religious.

In suppressing its religious dimension, our thinking turns toward nihilism. If thinking arises from an abyss of non-reason, then what it really amounts to is the celebration of its own death and the death of every “god” of which philosophy can speak. This celebration of the death of thought has taken place in the deep entrenchment of an understanding of being as technique or “en-framing” (Ge-stell). En-framing is the manner in which the meaning of being is disclosed in our modern age. It is the challenging demand (Herausfordern) that calculative rationality places on the potencies of nature to be “placed” or harnessed for some aim. The demand is “unreasonable” in threatening to subvert the very ground from which it draws its power to exist (QT, 14/TK, 14). It is thus secretly the judgment of the final unreason of the real and of death as the event of its emergence. Our harnessing of nature in and through language and technique, shaping it to our whims, turns out to be enslavement to an abyssal power (DT, 55/GH, 26-7).

I argue that Heidegger looks to disclose a “religious” or a “pious” element at the heart of philosophical thinking – not only in the fact that it embodies an element of “trust” in what it cannot completely disclose – but also in the fact that, as belonging to language and a poetic horizon of disclosure, thinking depends on this horizon for its meaning. As I mentioned, that which Heidegger calls thinking (Denken) must bring the poet’s utterances into reflective development. Here I wish to inquire about the extent to which this also means that a phenomenology of religion must move beyond the interpretation of religion into a sort of
“pious” or “prayerful” thinking whose aim is participation in the object of religion. Here I have in mind something like Kierkegaard’s notion developed in *Fear and Trembling* of the “teleological suspension,” the notion that for something truly to be what it is it must *receive* its condition from that which exceeds it.125 Heidegger seems to suggest that a relation to the world that is “totally different” from the fatalistic logic of modern technology calls for the end of thinking caught in the habit of being merely useful, in order that we might receive back our pragmatic relations and habitual modes of dwelling as a *gift* (DT, 55/GH, 26-7). This is to enact differently the sending/destining (Geschick) of being in virtue of an (absurd) reason (Grund) that is “without why,” utterly gratuitous self-giving (PR, 35-40/GA10, 67-75).

In what follows I attempt to disentangle the different senses in which Heidegger uses the term metaphysics in order to articulate the religious problem central to his account of thought. I then briefly discuss Heidegger’s retrieval of Nietzsche on nihilism in order to show what is at stake in Heidegger’s attempt to address the problem facing Western metaphysics – the question as to why there are beings at all instead of nothing – to reawaken wonder at the eternal gift of being that opens up (in) time. This is the wonder also of Prince Hamlet which throws into question one’s own existence (“to be or not to be?”) in the face of appearances which seem to emerge, orderly, out of nothing. Does the *appearance* of stable identities merely obscure the endless recurrence of rupture and dissimulation? Or do appearances instantiate identity through repetition – albeit without “Platonic” original – of an eternal source beyond their mere play?126 Heidegger often remains suspended between the (former) “Nietzschean” and the (latter) “Kierkegaardian” decisions. But Kierkegaard’s notion of the teleological suspension, I argue, sheds some light on Heidegger’s construal of the impulse at the core of metaphysics as aspiration to an eternal source beyond the whole of appearances. At the close of this chapter I will call into question Heidegger’s continued insistence on the distinction in kind between his own thinking and the “theological” thought of religious traditions.

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125 See also John Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 312-13. My reading of Kierkegaard follows closely the work of Milbank, along with that of Merold Westphal.

4.2 Transforming Horizons: Thinking in the Purview of the Poetic

As we saw in Chapter 3, Heidegger contends that modernity is characterized, among other things, by its “indecision about God and the gods.” Modern humanity in its technological practices increasingly finds it impossible to discern any sort of call that places a claim on it, binding it to a meaning that somehow transcends human interests. But in describing modernity by its “indecision” (Entscheidungslosigkeit) Heidegger suggests that even the phenomenon of the absence of gods somehow has a hold on human life. The “pull” of an absolutely Other to all human self-experience can be understood from our response to features of the real that we disclose but which could not have emerged from us.127 And so the absence of a unifying way of responding to this Other – i.e. by acknowledging the gods – is not an indifferent absence. It is experienced as loss, just as one might meet the absence of a loved one with the heartache of dashed hope or the exhilaration of longing.128 As Mugerauer contends, the loss of the gods “is an aspect of the loss of being. And this involves the unfolding of truth, thinking, and our own essence.”129 Modern humanity increasingly finds it impossible to find the “measure” of significance (i.e. for our relation to the real) in the way things have always been “from time immemorial” or in an established order of things. This is, of course, not entirely negative, but evinces the transformative power of human thought, of our ability continually to disclose the measure of the real in the fashioning of new and different rituals, including ones that re-arrange and overthrow long-established patterns. But in saying that modernity is caught in indecision concerning the gods, Heidegger seems to suggest that it is not enough for us to remain agnostic in our thinking concerning our relation to the whole of life, to being or reality as it is given, i.e. as it emerges into and as our experience of the world. Our experience of the givenness of ordinary meanings that could not have emerged from us opens up the question of the givenness of meaning as such, of the source of its binding power. This question cuts across all fields of human action and discourse.

What thus began as a phenomenological investigation of religion, I argue, is fulfilled not merely by way of an accurate description of religion, but with the disclosure of religion at the

127 Russon, “Self and Other in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit,” 14.
129 Mugerauer, Heidegger and Homecoming, 80.
very heart of the phenomenological investigation. To establish this claim, we will have to examine how the religious response to the absolutely other figures in Heidegger’s reflection on metaphysics or the form of our understanding of what is and how it is.

We have seen that religious aspiration takes the mythic form of a “word” (*logos*) that speaks the unspeakable source or articulates the mystery of being. Myth takes form in the poet’s divinely attuned speaking of the holy greeting. In this way myth passes over into *habit* in our patterned ways of “dwelling” or of responding to the real in light of poet’s holy greeting. As I will argue in this section, these patterned responses occasion *reflection* on what is most deeply contemplated and desired in our initial impulses and articulated in ritual repetition (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 57/GA 5, 75). Metaphysical reflection (*Besinnen*) is rooted in mythic wonder at that which greets us in/as the emergence of presence. But metaphysics holds common assumptions about this emergence open to questioning scrutiny. Our intuitions about the source must be reflected upon in order to remain their “truth” or the necessity of an unfolding disclosure of possibilities (73/96-7). Reflection refuses to remain bound to dogmatic limitations of a tradition. Rather, it *transforms* the tradition by releasing its most genuine possibilities as wonder at the mystery of disclosure.

Thus, Heidegger ruins the metaphysical “logic” that cuts itself off from the mystery of disclosure. He thereby aims to release the genuinely positive moment borne by the metaphysical tradition, i.e. the decision or essential happening that opens possibility itself. Heidegger brings metaphysical logic to its limits in his efforts to undertake the leap beyond systematic conceptual thought, the moment of decision that the former cannot bring about. It is here that metaphysics *returns to itself* in the renewal of wonder at that named by the poet. The ruin of metaphysics as onto-theo-logy turns up the genuine possibility of thinking toward something beyond the grasp of reason, which can be said only poetically. If the poet brings the greeting of the holy, thinking carries out the leap of a response. Reflection (*Besinnen*) corresponds to the more originary and mysterious contemplation or pondering-into (*Nachsinnen*) that brings all into disclosing light (IPTP, 48-9/GA 50, 143-45). The holy or height (*Hohen*) and majesty (*Hoheit*) of the concealed essence of disclosure is thus in some respect thinking (IPTP, 48-9/GA 50, 143-5). Such would entail that the leap or decision of thinking in fact brings into the moment the absolute

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coincidence of thinking and being – that which onto-theo-logy aims to achieve in the idea. Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of metaphysical logic opens thought up in a *religious* suspension, as I will now attempt to show.

4.2.1 Metaphysics in Four Senses

In a later introduction to his famous lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger claims that his thinking “sets out to experience the ground of metaphysics,” and that in one sense this means that thinking “has in a sense left metaphysics” (*hat das Denken in die Metaphysik in gewisser Weise verlassen*) (PM, 278-79/GA 9, 367). Thinking the truth of being is the overcoming (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics. But precisely in its being overcome, metaphysics is not abolished, but is brought back into its essence, is even met with its transformation (*Verwandlung*) (279/367). What are we to make of these claims? On the one hand, thinking leaves metaphysics to itself. The verb *verlassen* carries the connotation of an emptying out or a leaving desolate. But Heidegger uses the metaphor of tilling of the ground and plowing of the soil to prepare for the flourishing of the metaphysical “root” of philosophy (279/367). Thus, on the other hand, thinking returns to metaphysics in its essential ground: re-turns the soil, so to speak, to prepare for new growth. Something must be overcome, uprooted, dug out and overturned, to allow for this growth. In this respect thinking has been the deeper aim and impulse of metaphysics all along. If metaphysics aims to bring to language “being,” the self-concealing event of emergence into presence, thinking returns to this medium of language to rejuvenate metaphysics.

Metaphysics puts into language, articulates “what there is” and “how it is” most essentially. That is to say, it reflects on beings as beings. It accounts for what it is about the identities we encounter that makes them such (PM, 287/GA 9, 378). As this sort of inquiry, metaphysics concerns itself with what can be presently known or understood about beings as such. According to Heidegger, this inquiry has two fundamental aspects, as exemplified in Aristotle’s famous inquiry into the topic of being qua being (i.e. being insofar as it is). On the one hand, metaphysics accounts for abiding features of beings, e.g. the patterns of appearance that characterize the universal form which grounds them in their identity, the truest sense of
“what beings are”. On the other hand, metaphysics also accounts for the ways in which things show up in hierarchical orderings which point toward the highest instance, such as the Aristotelian notion of thought relating itself to itself, the truest sense of “how beings are” (287/378). Metaphysics looks to the features of universality and teleological ordering implicit in beings.

Metaphysics has thus historically taken the form of onto-theo-logy. As we saw in Chapter 2, onto-theo-logy embodies the work of forming out an ontological investigation of universal features of beings and a theological investigation of that to which beings are implicitly ordered (PM, 287/GA 9, 378). But does this then mean that the thought of being requires metaphysics to be simply left behind in its essence? If onto-theo-logy obscures a more essential thinking relation to being, and if it is the heart of metaphysics, then how could metaphysics ever be rejuvenated? Or can onto-theo-logy itself be transformed in its essence? Can it remain what it is and yet also become other to itself?131 What sort of thinking would be required to accomplish this task?

It seems to me that there are at least four senses in which Heidegger uses the term metaphysics in his work. First, Heidegger sometimes uses the term metaphysics to refer to the entire constellation of habits of mind and bodily practices that combine to shape and unfold the basic understanding of the “truth” of being that characterizes an age (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 57/GA 5, 75). These habits form the very texture of our practical understanding of reality. In this sense, metaphysics is the constellation of orienting attitudes of an historical people that endow it with an ultimate sense of “what there is” and “how it comes about.” Our activity of building (in the poetic sense of making) is imbued by a kind of metaphysical response to the truth of being. It discloses aspects and orderings of beings that reveal themselves as rational possibilities for beings in general. Our deeply entrenched habits of response to beings take on a kind of normative weight which grounds the outlook of an age. As Heidegger puts it, metaphysics is an interpretation of beings that governs (durchherrscht) the sorts of decisions and ways of looking at the world that characterize an epoch and are available to us (57/75). So far,

131 I am in agreement here with Iain D. Thomson that metaphysics attends to some of the basic aspects of the way in which being manifests, but its onto-theo-logical outworking is not historically necessary. Thus, it is open to thinking to disclose other ways of attending to these aspects of being’s manifestation, that is to say, other ways of being metaphysical. See Thomson, Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education, 39.
we have not yet considered the possibility of weighing the value of relative and often competing norms between a plurality of communities and historical epochs. But Heidegger’s basically holistic position commits him to the view that our judgements of value arise always within the context of a dynamic and partially unconscious construal of the truth of being. The possibility of doing academic metaphysics, of judging between different ways of looking at the world, belongs to the more comprehensive phenomenon of the metaphysical decision (Entscheidung) that characterizes the being-in-the-world of an historical community.

Hence, Heidegger refers in the second case to the reflective activity (Besinnung) within an historical-metaphysical context that emerges in the thought of a great thinker. The thinker draws out implicit presuppositions of his age and places them in the language of thought. In the process of doing so, these presuppositions are often transformed, as the metaphysical thinker seeks to disclose the deep ways in which they are oriented by the desire and aim of the universal. Thus, for reflection on an age’s presuppositions to take hold, the “metaphysical ground” of these presuppositions “must allow itself to be recognized in them” (“World Picture,” OBT 57/GA 5, 75). Metaphysics reflects on the manifestation of being or the way in which things become manifest. This given manifestation is always given to us in/as the opening of our own possibilities for being. Metaphysical inquiry thus points to the way in which being’s manifestation is presupposed in/by our most fundamental habits of dwelling and offers an account of this manifestation in reflecting out of human experience (WP, 79/GA 11, 22). In this respect metaphysics thinks the way in which the manifestation of being belongs together with the unfolding of human being with respect to their unifying ground (ID, 32/96). But great thinkers, from Socrates to Kant to Hegel, account for the belonging together of human beings with the manifestation of being in such a way that our whole way of relating to the world is called into question (PM, 82/GA 9, 103-4). They have the courage to remain in Angst brought on by the realization that nothing can be accounted for as the ground of beings, nothing can be given in response to the question of ground as such (PM, 93/GA 9, 118). But precisely out of this

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132 See also John Russon, Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology, 222-23.
133 In later works beyond his famous lecture, Heidegger begins to distinguish metaphysics from thinking and to associate only the latter with the courage to remain open to questioning. Read in tandem with one another, however, these works indicate that Heidegger sought to transform metaphysical inquiry into its essential character, and not simply to leave it behind as an inauthentic way of thinking.
attunement, great thinkers articulate the most fundamental possibilities for our being that emerge from this questioning confrontation with “nothing” (96/121-22). In this respect, the metaphysical thinker shares something in common with the poet, the attempt to bring the most essential ground to language, a theme to which I will return.

Third, Heidegger speaks, especially in his later thought, of the history of metaphysics, and this in three basic respects. First, the history of the West has been characterized by epochs in which the “truth” or way in which being becomes manifest has been differently understood. In keeping with his view that being unfolds with the help of human beings but also in some respect beyond their control, different epochs are characterized by different ways in which being “shows itself” or is given to human beings to be understood. Metaphysics is the history of this unfolding of epochal change in the disclosure of being (“Overcoming Metaphysics,” EP, 90/GA 7, 75-6). Thus, metaphysics is the “history of the secret of the promise of Being itself” (die Geschichte des Geheimnisses des Versprechens des Seins selbst ist) (NvIV, 227/GA 48, 370). In other words, in essence metaphysics is the occurrence in which being “promises” itself to historical humanity in beings. Heidegger speaks of this promise of being as the “mystery” or “secret” (das Geheimnis) (226-7/369-70). When human beings comport themselves to things, they implicitly understand the mode in which things are unconcealed or come into presence. This mode of coming-into-presence is understood in the promising nature of the way in which things continually make themselves available to us. In this respect, our comportment to things is a sort of trust in their enduring reality. Heidegger contends that this reality somehow appears as the unconcealment of beings. But it follows that there must be a sense in which the unconcealment (Unverborgenheit) of beings is experienced as concealing withdrawal (sich verbergenden Entzug) of their ground as beings (226/369).

Second, then, the history of metaphysics has been the history of forgetfulness of the essential mystery of being’s manifestness. We tend to fall back into habits and patterns of responding to being such that we take ways in which beings manifest themselves exhaustively to characterize their being or possibility for manifestation as such (ID, 73/141-42). Great thinkers transform their epoch by helping re-awaken wonder at the mystery of disclosure. But they tend
also to obscure this mystery in other ways because they fail to realize the full implications of their own thinking.\textsuperscript{134}

Third, with each epochal change the question of manifestness engulfs humanity with increasing intensity (ID, 72/141). But humanity’s being gripped in the anxiety of the question of being as such is sharpened as it becomes more evident to it that no determine knowledge of the finite – of the final meaning of things in their essential possibilities – is possible for metaphysical inquiry. But there looms here also the greatest threat of oblivion to being if human beings turn away from the ground all together, refusing the mystery of manifestness (72/141).

Metaphysics is the historical unfolding of manifestness; but this unfolding is characterized also by our tendency to forget the mystery, to lapse into a mode of understanding being that occludes in some way the difference of beings in their manifestness from the very event of this manifesting. We tend to forget that this event of manifesting is always partially concealed, partially withdrawn. We cannot survey the ground of beings in their manifestness because we ourselves belong to the very emergence of this event. Thus, in the forth sense, there is a respect in which metaphysics pretends to give the measure in advance of this ratio of beings to their essential being (ID, 50/116-17; “The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 59-60/GA 5, 78-9). According to Heidegger’s interpretation, metaphysics tends increasingly in the modern period toward the mathematical surveying of grounds, the “constant activity” which projects a “ground plan” for how being must disclose itself in and through beings. The ground plan (e.g. a nature regulated by laws) must be adjusted to the observable ways in which the object discloses itself to view, so as to obtain certainty of the “being” of the object (60-1/79-81). Conversely, the object itself tends by the same methodology to be forced into a peculiar manner of being disclosed, to conform it to the projected ground plan. At bottom, the aim is to secure the position of knowing from which the manifestness of the real can be surveyed in its essence, i.e. out of the very way all comes into being (67/89). This is the aim of onto-theo-logy, to secure a correct notion of manifestness as the truth or essence of manifestness itself, culminating as we will see in technological will to power.

\textsuperscript{134} Heidegger’s 1929 reading of Kant offers a clear example of this way of reading texts as much for what they fail to disclose as for what they do disclose.
Before moving on, I will briefly deal with an objection to Heidegger’s notion of the history of metaphysics as the history of being. John D. Caputo accuses Heidegger of offering a fallacious argument for the notion of historical unfolding:

In the genetic fallacy one tries to reduce the validity or meaning of something to the historical circumstances under which it arises; its historisch origin is taken to be the basis of its sachlich validity. Heidegger follows the opposite tack: because the very meaning of truth as correctness derives ontologically from truth as aletheia, there “must” be a historical correlate that instantiates this genesis. Because correctness arises from unconcealment as a matter for thought, that is how it “must have been” historically. Because truth as correctness depends for its condition of possibility upon unconcealment that is what aletheia must have meant before it was historically formulated as correctness.135

Caputo is objecting to the “mythological” notion of a thinking that identifies the transcendental manifestation of being with a supposed empirical or historical beginning in the experience of the Greeks. Caputo finds it highly implausible that thinking must somehow retrieve a more originary understanding of manifestation through achieving an even more originary experience of it than that of the Greeks. It fallaciously argues that somehow some epoch, some interpretation of the truth of being can be privileged over others because it is rooted in a more originary experience.

On the contrary, Heidegger is making the much more radical claim that it is impossible to disentangle the condition of possibility from the instance that imperfectly discloses it. Thus we are left with the necessity of a kind of conjecture as the unfolding meaning of the tradition we inhabit, without of course coming to understand the infinite weight of this tradition in its entirety. There is thus something essentially “Greek” about the way in which manifestation has taken place in the history of the West, though in retrospect we can “read into” history certain transformative movements which the past context paradoxically opened up but which it did not completely achieve because they were not in the horizon of available understanding.136 The phenomenon is thus neither purely a priori, nor purely empirical, but is the holding together of both in an unfolding that remains partially mysterious to us.

To recapitulate, these are the four senses of metaphysics in Heidegger:

1) As the pre-reflective interpretation of the truth of being that grounds an age.

135 John D. Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 27.
136 I address Caputo’s critique of Heidegger in more detail in the next chapter.
2) As the great thinker’s activity of bringing the essential presuppositions of his age into reflection so as to articulate them in a more essential (and transformative) way.

3) As the historical unfolding of being in different epochs of manifestation that only partially disclose the meaning of being as the event of manifestation itself. The overall tendency of this historical unfolding is the fall into forgetfulness of the mystery of disclosure or the coming-into-being at the heart of all that is; but this tendency also sharpens Angst that prepares the West for another beginning, for a repetition of the metaphysical tradition that retrieves it more radically.

4) As onto-theo-logy or the position by which we can survey the inner unity and ordering of beings as such – a unifying “given” – with respect to what they are and how they manifest.

The question I raised concerns how – if as human beings our experiential comportment involves a kind of metaphysical response to being as such or “what there is and how it is” – how this metaphysical comportment can be fulfilled in a genuine way. The question seems especially pertinent given Heidegger’s claim that our tendency to “fall” into oblivion of the mystery in some respect belongs to the essence of metaphysics. If this is so, can metaphysics be transformed in its essence, opening the possibility for a kind of metaphysical thinking without the requisite fall into oblivion? Moreover, are we to understand the unfolding history of the matter for thinking as nothing more than a series of arbitrary breaks or ruptures that interrupt every construal of the relation of beings to their mysterious ground, as John Milbank argues against Heidegger?137 Taken in this respect, Heidegger’s thinking would resemble what I have called the “Nietzschean” tendency to construe our relation to the mystery of being as one of the abyssal rupture of identity under the universal condition of sheer perspectival difference. Is the mystery simply that of the abyss? After Heidegger, the question is no longer whether anything subsists beyond or behind appearances, since being is nothing “other” to the enactment of possibilities. Yet we saw in Chapter 3 that Heidegger argues that genuine perspectival difference is affirmed only where one also affirms the harmonization of these perspectives through the infinite relation.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Heidegger’s meditations on Hölderlin led him to anticipate the decline of modernity’s pursuit of certainty and the awakening or rejuvenation of a sense of the

holy at the heart of human freedom. As Thomas Langan contends (reading the postscript to Heidegger’s famous “What is Metaphysics?”), Heidegger aligns himself with religious traditions by acknowledging that human freedom is rooted in the necessity or need of being an offering to that ultimate reality to which we belong and which opens up in and through our expression. The opening of our relation to being in Da-sein is this binding necessity which Heidegger calls the holy (das Heilige). Human beings are destined in virtue of their own essence to be the response to the emergence of being. Where Heidegger departs from classical religious thought is in his rejection of the idea that this holy is something beyond the opening of a finite range of possibilities in Da-sein. Yet as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3 Heidegger seems equally influenced by the German Idealists and by Hölderlin to insist that the incalculable essence of human existence is infinite in the sense of being, not merely the finite range of possibilities projected within a temporal horizon, but limitless freedom. Heidegger recognizes the need for limitless essential freedom if our world, the range of possibilities we inhabit is to be radically and fundamentally transformed.

But as Langan inquires is this essential freedom also a source of being which human beings positively encountered by human beings? Langan contends that Heidegger fails to uncover any “positive principle upon which to ground the phenomena he has uncovered.” The reason for this, contends Langan, is that the only ultimately positive principle of being in Heidegger’s philosophy is radically founded in finite freedom.

A finite freedom ‘thrown’ into the world, coming from nowhere and going toward death, i.e., toward nowhere, passing by way of an ‘imperishable’ Being founded by the perishable acts of Being-for-death does not provide an adequate ground for an explanation of the phenomenon of true sacrifice, of the total sacrifice of martyrdom, for instance; nor does it provide any basis for resolving in the name of a higher principle a conflict of several Dasein engaged in opposing acts of revealing Being.

In other words, on the one hand, Heidegger’s might claim to have genuinely thought the root of religion without any notion of transcendence, but his phenomenology seems rather to nullify religious intentionality, i.e. intentionality that exceeds the realm of possibilities in the current “given” human situation. On the other hand, the finite freedom of Da-sein opens the possibility of infinite monadic perspectives on the world without any harmonizing principle or telos.

139 Langan, “Is Heidegger a Nihilist?” 318.
Yet Heidegger provides the beginning of a response to this quandary in his reflections on Hölderlin, making reference to an overflowing source and eternal origin. I argue in the remainder of this chapter that Heidegger’s thinking in fact opens the way for rejuvenation of the notion of participation in an eternal origin. I argue that this move is required if Heidegger is to transcend the nihilism he so carefully identifies in his thinking. But how does one avoid falling back upon the notion of an a priori ground which Heidegger rightly calls into question? Here, Søren Kierkegaard’s thought proves a helpful supplement to Heidegger.

4.2.2 Nihilism and the Religious Turn

I will here trace Heidegger’s thought on the object of metaphysics, the history of nihilism in the West, and the possibility of an overcoming that reawakens the philosophical attempt to think the other of thought, to correspond (Ent-sprechen) in a genuine way to that which cannot be thought save out of its emergence and as emergence, that is to say paradoxically as the disclosure and concealment at the origin of time itself. I argue that Heidegger aims for precisely what Kierkegaard calls the “religious” relation of the eternal to time.

Heidegger argues in his postscript to his famous lecture on metaphysics, that precisely “nothing” is the “sole object of metaphysics” (PM, 232/GA 9, 305). But we are not to understand what is designated here in terms simply of emptiness. This would be to remain with the mood or attunement of “logic,” which attempts to secure for itself the given matter precisely as and how it is given. “Nothing” signifies nothing, i.e. nothing that can be given in the presence of thought. Its logical value is therefore the negation of presence. But is then the attempt to think “nothing” as though it were more than merely negation, i.e. the indeterminacy of being beyond beings, doomed to failure?

Not, Heidegger argues, if thought from the mood of anxiety, more fundamental than that of logic because for it no basically given object persists except the whole emergence into possibilities of existing comportment to beings (PM, 233/GA 9, 306). And this object throws the observer into anxious attentiveness to the claim laid upon him by an indeterminate essence (234/307). The claim inspires awe over the fact of determinate meaning; things are cast in a different light, not as the categorical certainties cast across time, but in the continued arrival of radically different moments that somehow manifest as enduring meanings. The appropriate
response to this claim is a thinking that thanks, i.e. that responds in the necessity of an older “logos” than that of (scientific) logic, one which is always already unfolding in/as response to the concealing essence of disclosure (236/310-11). Heidegger’s is not a philosophy of anxiety for its own sake; anxiety opens the deeper possibility for thanking as originary response to being.

Thanking is a kind of response to the gratuity of the unfolding of meaning through preservation of the free opening (Dasein) of this gift that is singularly one’s own (PM, 236-37/GA 9, 310-11). Moreover, preservation requires, not the bringing of life under norms revealed by logic, but the “sacrifice” of thinking that relinquishes every standard, every measure of the possibility of what is given and how it is given, relinquishes as nothing the object of metaphysics – being as such – in order to take up this object in/as the fuller significance of the given, always to arrive (237/310-11). Originary thinking that is a thanking thus also marks the opening of the historical. It points to our proximity to the “indestructible,” to the relation beings to their complete essence, their truth as beings, which conceals itself (236-37/311-12). As such pointing or indicating of our own belonging to the disclosure-concealing, thinking is the “saying” of this event, of bringing it to language in a genuine way. If there is no standpoint from which to survey the event of disclosure, then thinking itself must belong to the historical emergence of this event; it must therefore be the genuine way of bearing witness to it through its appropriation, as Richard Polt notes. This thinking has already in some respect distanced itself from the sheer happening, the sheer gratuity of being through its appropriation of this event.

As we saw in the previous chapter, said distancing happens through our creative articulation by which we respond to the claim through poetic speculation. But thinking, as we see here, is not just imaginative disclosure of world; it is an attempt in its own right to put into play the given reality that metaphysics takes as its object. It is the attempt to communicate this object in the manner in which it is given. But thinking comes to understand that the object of metaphysics is given only in the manner of an event that must be appropriated. It comes to understand this through its own appropriation of the claim of this object. As Heidegger contends in his essay “Identity and Difference”: “For it is man, open toward Being, who alone lets Being arrive as presence” (ID 31/95). Such thinking takes place only in a series of leaps by which the

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142 Polt, 170-71.
meaning of tradition, i.e. the possibility of inter-subjective relations, is received back as gift without logical necessity: “Tradition prevails when it frees us from thinking back to a thinking forward, which is no longer a planning” (ID, 41/106). The thinker’s sacrificial “leap” away from every measure of necessity can thus become the way of responding to the deeper, more genuine claim on us by the happening of being.

Precisely what is at stake here in my talk of response to the claim is the overcoming of nihilism. Heidegger’s discussion of nihilism arises in the context of his treatment of Nietzsche’s thought. I do not have the space to delve into Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche. Significant to my discussion is Heidegger’s emerging understanding of the predicament of nihilism in the West and perhaps increasingly as a global phenomenon. As we saw in Chapter 2 and in the previous section of this chapter, metaphysics in its onto-theo-logical constitution is the historically shifting attempt to grasp an irreducible and inveterate given as the objective law of reality, or as absolute position within the real from which thought can survey all of the possibilities of its unfolding. In coming to terms with Nietzsche’s thought, Heidegger reasons that onto-theo-logy historically unfolds as nihilism.

Nietzsche’s word, “God is dead,” “gives the destiny,” contends Heidegger, “of two millennia of Western history” (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT 160/GA 5, 213). The destiny (Geschick) is that of nihilism. Nihilism is the “world-historical movement of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into modernity’s arena of power” (163-64/218). What is this arena of power, and what does it mean for the peoples of the earth to be destined to it, to be drawn into it? Heidegger gives the answer to the question through his unfolding understanding of metaphysics: “Metaphysics is the space of history in which it becomes destiny for the supersensory world, ideas, God, moral law, the authority of reason, progress, the happiness of the greatest number, culture, and civilization to forfeit their constructive power and to become void” (165/221). Metaphysics is the “realm for the essence and event of nihilism” (165/221). The idea of an original unity prevailing across the flux of difference gives rise to movements, historical epochs that enact the ideal unity in the creative emergence of myth and artistic expression. Human beings attune themselves to the rhythms of creative emergence, giving rise to the profoundest expressions of this universal; but thereby they also bind themselves to destiny of these rhythms whose origin cannot be named (164/220). The universal cannot be contained by its expressions
because in itself it is the upsurge of powerful expression, the universal difference which transcends and ruins every ultimate claim to identity. The modern is the disillusioned final sway of difference without unifying ground. Difference cannot be named as such. Human beings remain merely in the powerful sway of nihilism, the elimination of every unifying self-identity.

Onto-theo-logy thinks from the basis of a self-identity and its unifying gaze on the real. But according to Heidegger Nietzsche’s word of the death of God points to the emergence of a turning point in the history of metaphysics. The turning point is the same phenomenon Heidegger contends with in his lecture “What is Metaphysics?” Modernity is the end of philosophy’s attempt to bring the universal into theoretical or objective awareness. The final disillusionment of metaphysics is the awakening of the question of nothing. Nothing is the ultimate object of inert self-identity, because this object cannot be anything besides the eternal return of self-positing with no graspable moment, and that is to say, no perspective or point of view from which anything of value can be understood (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 173/GA 5, 232-33). The self-positing passes immediately over into differentiation of perspectives. Each perspective in its difference from all of the others eliminates itself as the unifying perspective. Onto-theo-logy thus passes over into the elimination of unifying perspective as a whole. Its universal is finally the end of possibilities, which can be experienced only as impossibility, i.e. as death, as Heidegger already saw in Being and Time. But death signals here, as in the death of God, the turning point by which self-positing will can be overcome (193/258-59).

Heidegger repeats here his thought developed in the course on Schelling that the essence of metaphysics can only be the turning of being itself and the decision arising in this turning. Attempting to think beyond Nietzsche while remaining with the essential movement of his thinking, Heidegger raises the crucial question of the possibility of difference from an annihilating will to power. Heidegger thus raises the question of the possibility of an art whose content does not reduce to the securing of perspective against others. The will to power is still reactive as self-securing: “The will to power knows itself as that which essentially sets values, that which secures itself in the positing of values, and that which thereby constantly does justice to itself and in such doing is justice” (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 183/GA 5, 245). It is thus an “eternal return” of an overpowering (178/238-39). Something, some value, must be overpowered for this overpowering to return to itself, as itself. Thusly, Heidegger reasons, the willing subject
returns at the end of modernity in the guise of an “objective” will that wills nothing or wills endless differentiation. Metaphysical certainty is not here overturned but secured in the will to power (178/238-39). Annihilation of all certainty in a unifying self-identity may secretly turn out to be the menacing return of this very identity. Indeed, Heidegger views our being swallowed up in the universal sway of technological power as wholly consistent with the outworking of self-positing rationality.  

What alternative to the eternal return of will does Heidegger then develop? I argued in Chapter 2 that Heidegger looks to the possibility of another mood or attunement to the emergence of being, one that brings human beings into the moment of decision. This mood cannot be that of pure reason or “logic” but must remain attentive to the gratuity that “speaks” in the ambiguities and excesses of language; hence, Heidegger’s turn to the poet’s naming of that unthinkable difference of “being” from the beings disclosed or manifested. A different sort of thinking must, however, develop this logic of poetic immediacy, lest we simply remain within an uncritical indeterminacy indistinguishable from mere nothingness. For then there would no genuine understanding of being as gift, since all myth of the self-concealing given would simply amount to an impossible name that masks its legitimizing of arbitrary power, as Lacoue-Labarthe fears. But the alternative to an eruption and endless fictioning of power in arbitrary figures cannot be the return of critical rationality in a higher form. For as William Desmond convincingly argues, a demythologized discourse that no longer hyperbolically names the absolute falls in the same continuum of self-mediating or self-positing “reason” with modern technology. Heidegger is correct, therefore, in his suspicion of systems of value-grounding reason (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 76-7n6/GA 5, 100-2). The extremes of arbitrary power, on the one hand, and a purely formal rationality, on the other, are secretly in collusion as self-determination (Selbstbestimmung) (81n8/107). As an alternative to this modern phenomenon of nihilism, Heidegger indicates the “logic” of the gift, as in the mature thought of his 1966/67 seminar on Heraclitus (elucidating fragment 64): The eternal breaks forth in the lightning flash,

144 Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry, 49-51.
i.e. the moment of decision by which mortals are steered in decision by the gods (HS, 10-12/GA 15, 23-5).

The gift imparted by the gods is the movement of logos. In conversation with Heidegger during a seminar in 1966/67, Eugene Fink notes, “The movement of logos, which brings-forth and establishes, steers and determines everything, corresponds to the lightning movement that brings-forth” (HS, 9/GA 15, 21-2). Heidegger suggests here the possibility for a thinking orientation to the eternal origin of bringing-forth as such without the reactive aspiration to self-identity which Heidegger thinks persists in inverted form even in Nietzsche’s philosophy.

Unsurprisingly, Heidegger comes closest to affirming the logic of the gift when he adopts Kierkegaard’s language of repetition. But he notoriously claims that Kierkegaard “is not a thinker but a religious writer” (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 186/GA 5, 249). In the Heraclitus Seminar, Heidegger suggests that religious faith remains bound up in a reactive element, a “coercive holding in line,” to which older myth of the divine is foreign (HS, 12-13/GA 15, 25-7). Yet to my mind at least, Kierkegaard helps illuminate what is going on in Heidegger’s attempts to retrieve the metaphysical tradition in an essential way. Indeed, Heidegger’s thinking might not be essentially different from Kierkegaard’s notion of the religious. I will address only one work of Kierkegaard’s which I think sheds some light on Heidegger’s relation to metaphysics: Fear and Trembling.

Kierkegaard argues that philosophy must acknowledge the impossibility of reaching the identity of the eternal with the temporal, the absolute with the relative. This impossible identity is according to Kierkegaard, however, the very condition for being a self, insofar as the self must be the positive synthesis of these elements. The self is such that it must concentrate its entire “substance” or its whole life in some particular love. This love is unconditional in the sense that it is the way in which the individual self relates to himself precisely as an existing individual. The love thus becomes the condition by which the individual learns to become a self, to inhabit the world in a certain way as an existing individual. Kierkegaard’s example is the youth who falls in love with the princess. His love for her comes to define the whole of his reality as an existing self. His relation to her becomes the means by which he is able to be a self.

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Kierkegaard’s point is that the individual is completely absorbed in the object of his love; he is unconditionally involved in it. He is a “knight” who risks everything for his love. The whole meaning of actuality is drawn into this desire. The desire is thus that this love will constitute something of eternal and absolute importance. The desire itself assumes a “religious character” as “love of the eternal being,” i.e. as love of that “other” which is alone capable of sustaining the individual’s freedom of self-relation across radical transformation. Self-relation in this way can be only eternal in the sense that it is unconditionally prior to and the condition of traceable temporal sequences. No reflection, Kierkegaard notes, can produce the movement of self-relation or the continual leap of existence. But philosophy can help the self acknowledge the impossibility of producing this movement by its own resources so as to bring it in “resignation” of everything finite to conscious awareness of the absolute direction and orientation of its love.

Of course, the individual may very well allow his passions to dissipate into worldly cares, so that he forgets the contradiction of his temporal longing for an eternal expression of his identity. But in this case, the existing self will never be able to have itself in an essential way. It will always be “running errands in life” and will never have the ability to enter into a privileged moment that defines his existence as a self. Moreover, the self desires to remain the same, since according to Kierkegaard it is only the “lower natures” that transform into completely new identities without recollection of the essential. To exist in the first way, in dissipation, would be to flee from religion. To exist in the second way, across the endless shift of possibilities, would be to denounce it, but it would be also to embrace identity only as finally nothing and to reject the notion that suffering bears anything more than fleeting significance.

The concept of the religious in Kierkegaard thus designates love of the absolute source that remains the same in self-relation. As Hubert Dreyfus notes, the unchanging character of the

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147 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 43.
148 See also Hubert Dreyfus, “Christianity without onto-theology: Kierkegaard’s account of the self’s movement from despair to bliss,” in Religion After Metaphysics, edited by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 97.
149 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 43.
150 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 47-8.
152 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 43.
153 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 43.
essence to which the identity of the self belongs constitutes its *eternal* nature. By “eternal” is meant nothing beyond time as it is for the metaphysics of a super-sensory world. As Heidegger also surmises through his reading of Schelling, the eternal is the opening of time in the moment, i.e. the event that opens the “time” of emerging possibilities. Since this event takes place in time, it emerges in the privileged moment (St. Paul’s *kairos*; Kierkegaard’s *Augenblick*) that awakens one to possibilities for meaning. Because the event transpires out of the passion (mood or attunement in Heidegger’s language) that defines my existence as a whole, it comes to light out of commitment, where something is taken to be of definitive importance. Following this Kierkegaardian line of thought, Heidegger contends that an age or epoch is also defined by its commitment to a particular understanding of truth. This is the “world” out of which individuals define themselves by some love, some commitment to the absolute.

Like Heidegger, Kierkegaard reasons that our present world-epoch is burdened by nihilism. And like Heidegger, Kierkegaard is suspicious of attempts to subsume the event of being or the emergence of positive occurrences, “moments” of transition and appropriation under the universal sway of logic. On the one hand, modern philosophy has according to Kierkegaard merely pretended to move beyond Socratic resignation into a mode of knowing certainty. Our age lacks the passion of commitment and increasingly cannot remain even with the philosophical movement that pushes every “certainty” to its paradoxical limits as the certainty of an *absurdity*. As a result, in pursuit of the only objective certainty we human beings find ourselves confronted by the loss of meaningful difference. On the other hand, if the self remains bound up in the transition into actualized possibilities – recalling here Heidegger’s talk of *Er-möglichkeit* or “en-possibilizing” – then its essence cannot be grasped from the secure standpoint of knowing.

I take these two points of skeptical reason to characterize Heidegger’s critical response to the metaphysical tradition. But the question I have asked is whether Heidegger does more than subversively adopt the language of metaphysics to expose the tradition to ruin. Again, Kierkegaard’s thought proves illuminating. Heidegger aims to preserve the essence of metaphysics in a higher relation to the holy and thus “absurdly” depends upon the “gift” of a moment in which that which is impossible becomes possible. The moment interrupts our

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155 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 42n.
ordinary understanding of the nature of things, yet makes reality intelligible as something “suspended” in an unspeakable source that infinitely exceeds it. As such, it transforms our own understanding of the real. Such transformation is analogous to what Kierkegaard indicates with the term faith, as I shall now explain.

4.2.3 Faith and the Overcoming of Metaphysics

Does Heidegger’s thinking have an analogy in another thinker, even a religious thinker? Does Kierkegaard think? According to Heidegger, Kierkegaard is a “religious writer” and not a thinker. He has no relationship to metaphysics. He is “essentially different” from Aristotle (and from Nietzsche) in this way (“Nietzsche’s Word,” OBT, 186/GA 5, 249). The difference is not pursuit of the divine. On Heidegger’s account, Nietzsche’s madman, with the courage of the thinker, also calls out de profundis in search of God (199/267). In fact, Heidegger’s attempt to think beyond metaphysics, to remain with the truth of being, is a kind of faith.

Kierkegaard would no doubt suggest that the holy greets us out of the Genesis story of Abraham’s “sacrifice” of his promised son Isaac on divine command. In pseudonymous voice (Johannes de Silentio – ironically “silent” about the matter of which he speaks) Kierkegaard speaks of his longing to see Abraham’s faith:

Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had heard that beautiful story of how God tempted [fristede] Abraham and of how Abraham withstood the temptation [Fristelsen], kept the faith, and, contrary to expectation, got a son a second time. When he grew older, he read the same story with even greater admiration, for life had fractured what had been united in the pious simplicity of the child. The older he became, the more often his thoughts turned to that story; his enthusiasm for it became greater and greater, and yet he could understand the story less and less. Finally, he forgot everything else because of it; his soul had but one wish, to see Abraham, but one longing, to have witnessed that event. His craving was not to see the beautiful regions of the East, not the earthly glory of the promised land, not that God-fearing figure of the aged patriarch, not the vigorous adolescence God bestowed upon Isaac—the same thing could just as well have occurred on a barren heath. His craving was to go along on the three-day journey when Abraham rode with sorrow before him and Isaac beside him. His wish was to be present in that hour when Abraham raised his eyes and saw Mount Moriah in the distance, the hour when he left the asses behind and went up the mountain alone with Isaac—for what occupied him was not the beautiful tapestry of imagination but the shudder of the idea.
That man was not a thinker. He did not feel any need to go beyond faith; he thought that it must be supremely glorious to be remembered as its father, an enviable destiny to possess it, even if no one knew it.\textsuperscript{157}

Kierkegaard renounces thinking in an ironic manner. The thinker pretends to comprehend the system of which faith in the unexpected and impossible is part. Such a “prodigious idea” is beyond the power of one who remains in transition to another moment where the inconceivable may become possible.\textsuperscript{158} Abraham did not comprehend such an idea. He did not have the system before his imagination as a “beautiful tapestry.” He could not have thought Isaac’s return as a possibility. Instead, Abraham shuddered at the idea of the absurd, at the thought that something which contradicted the known laws of nature and of morality could in fact be commanded, and that \textit{this command} would be the only way to fulfill the promise of an everlasting people through the son. The absurdity is that the singular act would itself be the law of the whole. As such Abraham’s unruly action confounds all attempts to place it under the universal. Could there be an incommensurability of the existence of the single individual with the universal which is not evil but is in fact the very aim and condition of all universality?\textsuperscript{159} Such a “possibility” could not be thought directly. Thus, Kierkegaard indicates it indirectly only by contemplating Abraham’s movement. The outcome of the reflection cannot be specified, and the readers alone are able to enact this outcome differently for themselves.\textsuperscript{160}

Abraham made the movement of faith, which according to Kierkegaard means that he held out in the absurd belief that Isaac would be returned to him beyond the moment of death. This is not the movement of the tragic hero who believes that the universal can be preserved in a higher moment through the sacrifice of the son, who sacrifices his own affections “to save a nation” or to “uphold the idea of the state.”\textsuperscript{161} This is not a \textit{founding sacrifice}, as John Milbank puts it, “but rather the absurd sacrifice of the one individual who is absolutely irreplaceable, who uniquely and without possibility of substitution (he is the lone, late, miracle child) bears the whole future city in his loins. \textit{This} sacrifice can only be the offering of the entire city itself, in all

\textsuperscript{157} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 9.
\textsuperscript{158} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 7.
\textsuperscript{159} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 55.
\textsuperscript{160} Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 299.
\textsuperscript{161} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 59.
its temporal duration, which is only possible before it even exists.” In making this movement
Abraham refuses to “give up on a desire for the infinite (for ‘God’), that is not satisfied by any
finite attachments,” and yet at the same time also refuses “to give up on the indeterminate
promise of these finite attachments themselves.” Abraham absurdly reasons that Isaac will
return and that faith requires the belief that death is not the final word: “Death is inseparable
from the feeding of life by life, so that the absolute upholding of ‘life’ which demands the ban on
murder will also tend contradictorily to demand sacrifice – of the few to the many, the person to
the community. By contrast, the ‘final suspension’ of the ban on murder is a faithful refusal of
death, and the entire economy of death, in its apparent manifestation.”

In Abraham’s situation, the ethical is precisely the duty to love his son. “There is no
higher expression for the ethical in Abraham’s life than that the father shall love the son.” But
Isaac himself is the promise of the universal, of the continuing nation. Abraham thus has no
higher expression of the universal to fall back upon in order to justify his sacrifice. “The ethical
in the sense of the moral is entirely beside the point.” There is here a “teleological suspension” of
the ethical. The father’s love for the son, the entire content of the ethical, is not relinquished but
is preserved in a higher relation (telos) beyond the ethical. But this relation to the infinite is
immediate. Kierkegaard calls it the absolute relation to the absolute. It cannot be taken up into a
higher form of the universal because this relation determines the individual’s relation to the
universal. Through its interruption the universal becomes intelligible, i.e. as the whole of
reality that opens up to and points beyond itself to the infinite and that receives itself back from
this source.

Heidegger’s notion of thinking, too, refers to a movement that cannot be brought under
the universal. The history of metaphysics is in one respect the history of attempts to discern
the inner logic of existence. Although, Heidegger is often accused of equating metaphysics with

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165 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 59.
166 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 70.
167 I say notion of thinking because thinking involves a setting in motion or getting underway
that is not wholly produced by human beings. We must somehow let be (einlassen) the gift
(Gabe) of what calls for our thinking. We must become gifted (begeben) by a command that
releases us into the freedom of our nature (WCT, 124-33).
onto-theo-logy, his thinking is rather the more subtle attempt to release the impulse of metaphysics from attempts to disclose reality under the “logic” of the self-determining whole, i.e. that which seeks to define the real on the basis of the universal ground and highest possibility for its being. Releasing (Gelassenheit) is “comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, openness to the mystery” (DT, 55/GH, 26). We recall that metaphysics is the whole of an age’s response to being as such. It is the expression of the grounding principle of nature and of the moral. Even the nihilism of our technological age is in a certain respect a response to the question of “what there is” as a whole. Gelassenheit is openness to the meaning of the real, a real which cannot grasp itself as the universal whole, cannot determine itself in time as the absolute. An infinite passion, Gelassenheit relinquishes the search for a measure of certainty in our relation to beings.

Besides being the history of onto-theo-logy, metaphysics is the history of a question, of wonder at the disclosure of being. Great thinkers revitalize this wonder by using the language of metaphysics to help illuminate the real. Heidegger himself claims to use the language of metaphysics in such a way, to draw our attention beyond that which can be expressed therein: “This dubious procedure is initially unavoidable, specifically since what always counts is not to eliminate ‘metaphysics’, that is, the inceptual question of being, but in and through metaphysics to allude to what is entirely different from metaphysics” (BS, 342-43/GA 66, 387-88).

Metaphysics is wonder at the disclosure of the real, of its sheer gratuity and utter contingency. Metaphysics aims to grasp what is essential to this gratuitous disclosure of the real. But metaphysics cannot grasp the essential, cannot finally determine what is possible and necessary, on the basis of any universal law, i.e. of the way in which beings come to presence. The result of such attempts is the inevitable exclusion of incomprehensible aspects of the real from essence. Metaphysics then remains blind to the contingency of the happening of being, of the budding tree or the rose that blooms “without why” (PR, 36/GA 10, 69-71).

Metaphysics must then in a sense “sacrifice” the contingent particular in its utter particularity to the comprehension of the whole. The alternative is the absurd “logic” that is willing to relinquish comprehension of the whole, i.e. of its essence, in order to receive back this essence or the whole of finite being as gift. There would be no reactive attempt to mediate to human comprehension the happening of finite being as a whole. In a certain respect, this marks
the death of the philosophical logos which demands objective truth or the integration of particulars under the universal.

Yet Heidegger also anticipates and rejects the “postmodern” dismissal of metaphysical thought about the essence of the real. Only where we take metaphysics seriously as commitment to the truth of being can there be an overcoming that brings about the impossible, as Dreyfus puts it. The impossible would be a kind of free abandonment to disclosure with the hope of receiving back a truer, more genuine relation to the real without this relation being the subsuming of its particularity into the whole. But this is to assume that there is indeed an essence of the real to be received back as gift, though no external or self-subsisting reality is thought under the figure of the gift. Hence, Heidegger contends that no reason in fact can be called upon to illuminate the shifts in epochal understandings of the truth of being, for example as the unfolding of greater or new insight into the real. Each epochal shift is a transformation – a sending or destining (Geschick) of being – that evades comprehension (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 66/GA 5, 87-8; PR, 93/GA 10, 156-57). Yet Heidegger does not infer from this the inevitability of anarchic difference as the final “truth” of metaphysics; he infers more radically the need for a higher questioning of the sending of being. This questioning holds open to the promise inherent to the nature of language itself, i.e. the contingent (and inherently contestable) affirmation that something essential is indeed given to us repeatedly (WCT, 124-30/GA 8, 126-31). Hence, Heidegger’s indebtedness to Heraclitus means also his denial of the necessity even that our “steering” on the river of change must be coercive, the holding in line of some particular course: The steering may indeed be non-coercively directed by the gods themselves. With uncertainty we risk a determinate course without the ability to decide whether our actions are violent or whether they will rather turn out to fulfill a natural aim we could not otherwise have known (HS, 12/GA 15, 25-6).

Hence it is no surprise that in the 21st century critique has failed to steer humanity out of its domination under the sway of technology. Technology has the character of placing everything into the framework of “standing reserve.” Nature shows up as so much potential to be actualized. We shape entire landscapes to produce at our whim; mold human beings into “resources,” i.e. functioning parts of the endless cycle of production and consumption; stockpile commodities,

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including increasingly the necessities that sustain life on this planet (QT, 15-18/TK, 15-18). Critique can overcome the universal sway of technology and its calculating rationality only through realizing the self-determining universal on a higher level. But Heidegger remains justly suspicious that this movement is rooted in the very same logic: “The decisive question now runs: In what way can we tame and direct the unimaginably vast amounts of atomic energies, and so secure mankind against the danger that these gigantic energies suddenly—even without military actions—break out somewhere, ‘run away’ and destroy everything?” (DM, 51/GH, 20-1). Yet Heidegger suggests the need for a thinking that produces no results, yields no “solutions,” and that would appear to abandon all humanly good intentions to a god who alone can save us.\(^{169}\)

This sort of thinking, argues Heidegger, “demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all” (DT, 55/GH, 24). Heidegger considers the response to technology by which we “affirm the unavoidable use of technological devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste to our nature” (55/24). Against, “We let technological devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher” (55/24). Heidegger does not advocate reactionary rejection of technology and the retreat into an aesthetic enclave. Rather, he envisions the meaning of our technological relation to nature to be the positive risk whose aim is to bring the holy into the “speech” of mortals, a kind of Prometheus fire that cannot be governed but only allowed to consume our loves and attachments without irrevocably burning them up. Such a movement demands meditative thinking (\textit{das besinnliche Denken}), such that looks to the promise of “a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it” (55/24).

The movement Heidegger indicates here resembles the movement made by Kierkegaard’s knight of faith in giving up the son for the promise of his return without peril. What has holy fire to do with the kingdom of God (if the reader will permit a Derridean irony)?\(^{170}\) Does Kierkegaard still think the truth of being theologically as the will of God? (“Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics,” EP, 70-1/GA 6.2, 435-36)? If so, is this necessarily an ont-

\(^{169}\) I am alluding to Heidegger’s 1966 interview with \textit{Der Spiegel}.  
theo-logical move? Heidegger writes to a student that the absence of God in modernity is the “hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus” (“Letter to a Young Student,” PLT 182). The fullness of these phenomena has yet to come, which is not to say (following Derrida) that they have not been what they purport to be. But following Kierkegaard’s own logic, we must say that we have not yet thought them, that the essential content of these pronouncements remains to come, that it could not be what it is without its further repetition.171

Yet does this not also mean that there is also a sort of faith in Heidegger? Heidegger must indeed think out of the promise of language, in conversation with the poet, believing that the holy will return in the gift of the gods. This thinking enacts itself through the leap. I thus turn in the remainder of this chapter to make a case for the religious nature of Heidegger’s own overcoming of metaphysics. Moreover, I will inquire as to whether Heidegger’s thinking must also remain in some respect theological in affirming an absolute gratuity of being beyond the relations that pertain between beings. As I shall argue, for this gratuity not to be just nullity, it must in fact be received in the religious attitude that receives the absolutely other (the holy) in the intimacy of our finite attachments. The emergence of being must conceal a primal source that exceeds the finite in giving it to be.172

4.3 The Possibility of Religious Thinking

I have been setting the stage to discuss the relationship between religion and metaphysics. Following Kierkegaard I defined the religious as the “logic” that holds absurdly in the decision of the moment, having faith that in the moment is expressed something higher and in excess of publicly binding norms. Socrates made the movement of infinite resignation in the sceptical passion that rejects any reflective means by which to arrive at knowledge – by means of the universal – of the eternal or highest source of wisdom. But one who has faith learns from the poet or prophet to envision patterns of ethical continuity that do not have inscribed in them the totemic sacrifice of the existing individual to some hypostasized “absolute,” the logic of death

172 See also William Desmond, Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double? 139.
Kierkegaard thought inscribed in both Greek and modern philosophy.\textsuperscript{173} The person of faith absurdly “repeats” the ethical community without the determination of any universal.

I argued that Heidegger’s response to technological will to power mimics Kierkegaard’s notion of the religious movement. But it must here be asked whether there really is anything resembling religion in Heidegger’s philosophy. I arrive at the deepest but perhaps most contentious point of my interpretive retrieval of Heidegger in the notion of religious thinking, thinking that is deeply rooted in the ontological immediacy of the religious relation. As we have seen, Heidegger follows the poetic guidance of Hölderlin by listening to the way in which Western languages ambiguously point to a primal source in excess of the finite realities they delimit. The poet names this source only in speaking of the holy; yet we are met with the greeting of the holy in the sending of gods and divinities who beckon human beings as mortals to remain on the earth and under the heavens – in the “open” region that enacts possibilities. But in following the poetic vision, does Heidegger bring his own thinking to bear on the religious movement?

Most often the term “religion” refers to some kind of worship. What is worship? Does Heidegger worship? William Desmond importantly differentiates between deep awe and worship. Worship, according to Desmond, is an expression of hyperbolic love. Hyperbolic love is an overreaching embrace, one which affirms its object absolutely without condition. Hyperbolic love therefore cannot be the expression of an absolute being for self or of a self-mediating whole because such love reaches beyond the whole. In Desmond’s words:

\begin{quote}
The agapeic origin is the God beyond the whole, for the whole is the finite creation as given its being for itself. That whole has come to be. What has come to be as the finite whole, and all finite wholes within that whole, are contingent: they happen to be. ‘Beyond’ here is not to be understood dualistically: first it names an origin that communicates beyond itself in giving finite being to be; that communication opens up a beyond, beyond itself, and hence a space of intermediation between the origin and creation; and the creation it gives is itself a between as possibilizing the astonishingly prodigious plurality of beings, each defined doubly, in terms of the intermediation with other-being, and their own self-mediation. This prodigious plurality is a ‘beyond’ in immanence itself, in that no finite creature is on a par with it.\textsuperscript{174}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{173} Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 309.
\textsuperscript{174} Desmond, \textit{Hegel’s God}, 138.
The origin calls into being the contingently finite which points beyond all contingently finite being, all “happening to be.” Worship is the “downward” communication of an origin that gives the finite to be (frees it in being for itself) expressed in the “upward” communication of a reciprocity that repeatedly (because always in an incomplete manner) gives itself back to the absolute. Worship is to be distinguished from awe inspired by the whole, insofar as the latter taken in its own right communicates nothing beyond the whole.\textsuperscript{175}

Is there worship in Heidegger? Heidegger resists thinking the divine in traditional terms of God’s relation to creation, because he thinks this notion threatens to deny the free contingency of beings, chaining them as \textit{ens creatum} to an a priori source or ground. Heidegger thinks that this idea of creation is the precursor to the mathematical grounding of being sought in modernity (WT, 108-11/GA 41, 108-12). But Heidegger affirms something like worship beyond onto-theology and its self-causing, self-determining ground: “This is the right name for the god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the \textit{causa sui}, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god” (ID, 72/140). The passage insinuates that the “divine God” remains open to being worshipped. And yet, if divinity amounts only to the uncanny “passing” of an opening of new possibilities, then we might ask with Richard Polt whether any people could revere such a God, whom “they did not believe to be a being separate from them.”\textsuperscript{176} The expressions of this God could just as easily be the anarchic eruption of primal forces with respect to which human beings could remain in \textit{deep awe} but certainly do not worship. And yet in his \textit{Contributions} Heidegger contends that, while philosophy has its first beginnings in “deep awe” or astonishment (\textit{Er-staunen}) that there is anything at all, the other beginning to which philosophy points is an imagining or “foreboding” (\textit{Er-ahnen}) of what is to come (CP, 15/GA 65, 20). It is a pointing ahead which simultaneously points toward an absolute beginning. Thinking indicates the \textit{impossible}: an absolute beginning that communicates itself \textit{in time}. The task is more than profound awe at the contingent

\textsuperscript{175} Desmond, \textit{Hegel’s God}, 138.
\textsuperscript{176} Polt, \textit{The Emergency of Being}, 213. Polt suggests that the gods (as Heidegger speaks of them in the \textit{Contributions}) are “sources of the import of beings,” which is to say that they “are” not at all. Gods are “present” in our relation to beings only in the uncanny fact that things seem to call us into meaningful relations that remain somehow beyond our control. That anything can be \textit{important at all} indicates (perhaps counter-intuitively) that we inhabit a cosmos whose workings we cannot fully understand. We are not fully in control of that which strikes us as important. Polt makes a good case for the \textit{need} for gods in Heidegger’s philosophy.
“happening” of being, though it is not (as with Schelling and Kierkegaard) the search for divine will as the ground of existing being.

Yet, such thinking remains attuned to the words of the poet who speaks from the hyperbolic excess of an absolute beginning. *Heidegger is in his own way a thinker of transcendence* (in the sense of an origin or source that is “unequivocally unique” and which “cannot be directly experienced”) (EHP, 153/GA 4, 131):

For the origin surpasses itself in letting something spring forth, and is never sufficient unto itself. Taken for itself, the origin can only be poor, because, notwithstanding all that it lets spring forth, it needs to secure itself in its essential ground. Only that which moves backward to secure itself is capable of letting something flow forth out of itself without thereby losing its essence. The origin retains its essence through this securing of itself in its ground, and only thereby does the ground attain to being a ground (168/146-47).

The origin is a gift. It allows beings to emerge in their being. The self-surpassing plenitude can be mistaken for radical nothingness because it hides itself perfectly in that which it gives to be. Thinking must stay near the origin: “Unless what remains stays near the origin, only the nothingness of emptiness is left over. And this emptiness then only hastens the forgetting of the ultimate truth: that even nothingness itself is not present without being” (EHP, 170-71/GA 4, 149-50). Thinking therefore is religious and even *prayerful* in its own way, as I shall now argue.

### 4.3.1 Prayerful Thinking

As I contended in Chapter 3, poetry is the name Heidegger gives for the way in which human beings remain out into the open of unconcealment, “between” beings and being. The holy opens the place of the “between” that the poet names and brings forth in his poetry as world. The work of the poet is thus world-formative. Heidegger contrasts this work with that of the thinker by suggesting that the thinker does not name this “between” in which he dwells but points to the enactment of being itself. Poetry keeps thinking grounded in the horizon of language as the place of humanity’s dwelling, while thinking sharpens our poetic dwelling into an attunement to its deepest origin as that which calls us forth into the open. Thinking begins from a fundamental mood that brings human beings into the moment for a response or “leap” that establishes a transformation in our dwelling (CP, 12, 163/GA 65, 15-16, 231; compare FCM, 132/GA 29/30,
This transformation is the re-awakening of humanity to its “goal” or aim “to become the founder and preserver of the truth of be-ing, to be the ‘t/here’ [Da] as the ground that is used by be-ing’s essential sway” (CP, 12/GA 65, 15-16; author’s italics). To be this ground of being (Seyn) is to be care (12/15-16). The tasks of the thinker and poet are farthest separated because the thinker and poet stand together in the tension of the one interpretive movement that constitutes human be-ing. The poet opens an inhabitable world for historical humanity and the gods through language; in the same horizon of language, the thinker reflects on the phenomenon of coming-to-be in order to bring historical humanity to the place of a “leap” into the world the poet discloses.

If the poet brings forth world in naming the origin, the thinker reflects on this origin in order to keep humanity open to its call. As we have seen, originary thinking for Heidegger remains open to the groundless character of the relation between the human being and beings. This relation, we recall, constitutes the nexus of interrelations that make up the referential contexts of meaning which in his earlier work Heidegger calls being-in-the-world. As we saw, Heidegger rejects attempts to secure an understanding of the relation of human beings to being in knowledge. Not knowledge but the heart is the seat of a more fundamental thinking: thinking originates in the realm of the heart or what Heidegger in his 1951/52 lecture course calls the “thanc” (Dank) (WCT, 144/GA 8, 149). The heart is “the gathering of all that concerns us, all that we care for, all that touches us insofar as we are, as human beings” (144/149). One gives heartfelt thanks to the source of a gift. Analogous to the notion of self in Kierkegaard, Heidegger here envisions the human being as lover, as one whose relation to the world is shaped by desire for intimate touch. That which touches us most intimately is the source, the gift of our freedom to be human. Thinking is most essential the remembering (andenkende Gedenken) of this source (145/150). Remembering or “memory” is akin to what the earlier Heidegger, following Augustine, referred to as the continencia of curare or the concentration of human care on the proper object of enjoyment (PRL, 205-6/GA 60, 272-73). Memory is the gathering of attention to “what is at once present and past and to come” (WCT, 145/146-47). This is not a mere cognitive attention; rather, Heidegger notes that memory is pious in its attitude and “designates the devotion [Andacht] of prayer [Gebete], only because it denotes the all-comprehensive relation of concentration upon the holy and the gracious [das Heile und Huldvolle]” (145/150). The holy and gracious, we recall, is the unknown source that opens the time of world through the poet’s
word. This source is neither comprehended nor merely created; it is enacted through encounter (EHP, 171/GA 4, 150). We see here that the attitude of the thinker is a kind of prayer that holds our attention open to the dimension of the holy. The thinker does not name the holy, which is something only the poet is able to do. Instead, the thinker continues to bring us to the place where we are able make a leap into the most originary. Since the leap into the most originary itself belongs to the open, the latter indeed requires thinking in its own way.

How do we define prayer? Jean-Louis Chrétien helpfully defines it as the act by which the self receives its essential condition for being a self from an invisible other. Prayer is therefore a self-manifestation before the invisible other, a manifestation that becomes a manifestation of self to self through the other, and where the presence of self to the other and of the other to self cannot be separated, as in the invisible poem of respiration evoked by Rilke. This manifestation does not merely bring to light what was there before it; it has its own light: that of an event, the event wherein what is invisible to myself illuminates me in a fashion phenomenologically different from a conversation with myself or an examination of consciousness.  

Such an event is that of an encounter whose intentional form is “heartfelt intimacy.” Chrétien speaks out of the context of Catholic worship. But Heidegger is arguably concerned with a sort of “prayerful” existence by which the gods communicate the greeting of the holy, communicating intimately across ineffable distance.

Heidegger looks to the Greeks rather than the Church Fathers. But for the Greeks, too, responsiveness is built in to the very structure of language. Heidegger argues that legein originally meant for the Greeks the telling of something that lays it out (WCT, 205/208). This “telling” is not necessarily a human telling. For the Greeks, logos is the very condition for the emergence of things into presence: “Sea and mountains, city and island, temple and sky lie before man and emerge into appearance as they lie there” (206/209). Correlatively, presence is related to time because, as telling, presence always has to do with the coming to pass of something that “presences.” It belongs to the temporal horizon of noein (207/211). Heidegger interprets Parmenides’ noein as taking to heart (Acht). Legein is the gathering of presence that is taken to heart in a noein. Noein belongs to legein as the “reading” of its telling (WCT, 208/GA 8, 177)

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Noein, Heidegger’s later interpretation of “care,” thus also belongs to language. We experience the unity of telling and reading in/as the call (124, 242/129, 245-46). Thinking is thus the response that remains open to the experience of the call. Thinking re-calls the call as what it is (244/247). Of course, a call can be recalled only in and through a proper response to it. The proper response to the call is to continue to allow it to strike us as a call. Thinking itself must bring this call into a saying that preserves it (161/165).

Thinking is correspondence (Entsprechen) to the “happening” or coming to be of what is. But the “logic” of this correspondence is nothing that can be grasped beforehand. As we saw, thinking must “sacrifice” every determinate measure of this happening in order to enter into its more primordial “word” as the gathering together of plurality into unity (PM, 235-36/GA 9, 308-11). Thinking is no longer an activity that realizes the ideal, traversing the distance between the changeable and unchangeable, or the actual and the possible, through representation (Vorstellung). For, such an activity remains in the “circle” of self-determining metaphysics (“The Age of the World Picture,” OBT, 74-5n4/GA 5, 98-100). Arising from the movement of gathering in being (Da-sein), thinking is the reflective moment that holds in tension the difference of beings in their actual presence from their possibilities. We have seen that such thinking issues in the Destruktion of both the positivist and transcendentalist projects within metaphysics. But thinking has a positive moment in the passion or pathos of astonishment (thaumazein) at the fact that there is anything at all (EP, 85/GA 7, 70). Astonishment is attunement to that which “speaks” and gathers together in the possibilizing of nature; thinking awakens in astonishment but then must learn to correspond in the right way as belonging to the essence of this gathering together, the possibilizing movement of nature itself (EP, 93/GA 7, 78-9). Thinking must here depend for this correspondence on the gratuitousness of the poet’s naming of a hyperbolic source. Thinking does not ground the relation between actuality and possibility, between beings and their being; nevertheless, it is the activity that negotiates between our habits of being-in-the-world and the possibility projected by the poet. It prepares human beings for the leap into the gathering that conceals itself in opening the dimension for human dwelling (CP, 167/GA 65, 236-37).

Thinking is therefore no mere cognitive activity. It is complete involvement in the essential movement that opens the history of human being (CP, 167/GA 65, 235-36). As such,
thinking originates in/as the entire phenomenon of human being. Strikingly, in his “Zollikon Seminars” from 1960s Heidegger argues that language is intimately bound up in the phenomenon of Da-sein’s “bodying forth” (Leiben) as a corporeal being that makes things present (ZS, 97). In a way that overlaps with Merleau-Ponty’s thought, Heidegger speaks of the gestures and articulations of the body as a kind of “speech” that combines with that which is brought forth in it to constitute its meaning.\(^\text{179}\) As Merleau-Ponty contends, “Aesthetic expression confers on what it expresses an existence in itself, installs it in nature as a thing perceived and accessible to all, or conversely plucks the signs themselves—the person of the actor, or the colours and canvas of the painter—from their empirical existence and bears them off into another world.”\(^\text{180}\) Bodying forth is always the productive activity that lets something be present. It is also, paradoxically, a receptive unfolding the thing itself in its essence (ZS, 96). If thinking as the productive “letting be” of beings emerges most fundamentally in bodying-forth, then it makes sense to say that thinking in the originary sense is akin to medieval contemplatio or to Greek theoria in the sense of articulating a place for observing. But rather than a mere cognitive observing of the same, which remains fixed on objects or categories of thought, thinking is putting one’s entire being up for decision in preparation for truth, for insight that could not otherwise have emerged (CP, 327/GA 65, 464-65).

If thinking belongs to the essential nature of human being as the need to hold the whole of one’s own being up for decision, then can we speak of this movement as a kind of prayer? There is indeed in Heidegger the notion of language that constitutes our being in speaking. Heidegger also contends that thinking is a thanking or the concentration of the whole of one’s being or heart (Gemüt) (Kierkegaard, following Augustine, would say love) into the keeping or preservation of the given as gift (WCT, 150-51/GA 8, 154). That is to say, the thinking being remembers or recollects the origin by giving itself entirely over to it: “The heart, thus giving thought and thus being memory, gives itself in thought to that to which it is held” (141/144). Again, “When we, in thinking, are gathered and concentrated on the most thought-provoking, then we dwell where all recalling thought is gathered” (WCT, 143/GA 8, 146-47). The human being is in this way the “mask” or persona of the emergence of being, insofar as the human

\(^{179}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 182. I address Heidegger’s relation to Merleau-Ponty in slightly more detail in Chapter 5.

\(^{180}\) Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 183.
becomes the place or site where what appears can be gathered and preserved in its essence (62/65). Human being gives a “face” to the self-concealing origin. Insofar as the human being recollects itself in this manner, it is constituted by prayer, i.e. by its abandonment to the source from which it receives itself back.

Granted, it remains open to question whether the self-concealing origin, if it remains an abyss radically other even to every god, could be the source of prayer. In what way could the holy be addressed as holy? The poet risks naming this ineffable abyss, as the holy source that greets human beings. The poet risks the lightning flash of the god. Lightning _lights up_ as the medium of difference which illuminates things. But lightning also threatens to rupture and destroy, to ignite and inflame. We may be able to _receive_ lightning, if the poet’s soul can sustain it; but it breaks forth without return. In this respect, the poet’s work is _prophetic_, but not in the sense of addressing any God:

The poets are, if they stand in their essence, prophetic. They are not, however, ‘prophets’ according to the Judeo-Christian sense of the term. The ‘prophets’ of these religions do not only utter in advance the primordial word of the holy. At the same time they prophesy the God on whom they count for the security of their salvation in celestial blissfulness. Let one not disfigure Hölderlin’s poetry by “the religious element” of a “religion” which expresses the Roman interpretation of the relation between men and gods [...] The holy which is foretold poetically merely opens the time for an appearing of the gods, and points into the location of the dwelling of historical man upon this earth. The being of this poet must not be thought in correspondence to those “prophets”; rather, the “prophetic” element of this poetry must be grasped in terms of the being of the poetic foretelling. Their dream is divine, but they do not dream of a god (EHP, 137/GA 4, 114).

The _religious_ prophets (of which Kierkegaard is one?) disfigure the primal utterance of the origin, the originary event of the opening of time and a place for human dwelling. In their divine longing they search for God or a god who will transport them away from time to the present of an eternal past. But as we have seen, it is not entirely clear that religious longing amounts to anything _in addition_ to the primordial utterance of the mystery. It is not the longing to _escape time_ but the longing for _temporal_ participation in the creative, overflowing power to which language is primordial response. Might then the _naming_ of the holy signify the possibility of a return, of a response akin to religious responsiveness to the absolute?

Conversely, we might ask Heidegger whether the _utter_ transcendence of the abyssal origin sustains the intimacy of human dwelling. “For the beginning is an arising, a bestowal, that
is never lost or ended, but is always only a more magnificent beginning, a more primordial intimacy (Innigkeit). In remaining firm, the holy is to be spoken” (EHP, 96/GA 4, 75; my emphasis). Is prayerful thinking more primordial than any prayer that dares address the origin, because more respectful of its absolute concealment? Would not perfect transcendence be capable of perfect intimacy without the “tragic” element where traces of the divine must continually be overcome – killed – in the attempt to reach the unreachable (as Kierkegaard argues)? I return to these questions in Chapter 5.

4.4 Conclusion: Circling back on Heidegger

I have argued in this chapter that Heidegger’s retrieval of metaphysics takes the direction of religious thinking that prayerfully anticipates intimacy with the originary beginning named by the poet. Heidegger aims to move beyond the nihilism he contends is at the root of the Western (especially modern) notion of self-determining and self-grounding rationality. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche only imperfectly overcomes this nihilism, since his philosophy anticipates only the eternal return of self-determining will in a higher form (and so gives way to the dangers of technological control). I thus argued that, much like Kierkegaard, Heidegger is a thinker of transcendence. If he exposes metaphysical reason to inevitably aporetic conclusions, this is for the sake of disclosing the higher “logic” of the gift which is incommensurable to any universal. Heidegger’s thinking is religious, not merely in the sense of drawing on the prophetic imaginary of the poet, but also such that the reflective activity of philosophy becomes attuned to its matter from the “heart,” or out of concentrated response of the whole self upon the object of its love, which issues in patterned and habituated “leaps.”

Thus, Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion points us into an originary thinking-encounter with the phenomenon of religion that is itself a religious encounter. Phenomenology can only emerge out of an already habituated response to its object and point back toward it. This chapter thus completes the broader sweep of my interpretation of the movement of Heidegger’s thought from the earliest to the latest stages of his career. Heidegger’s “circling back retrieval” of religion, so to speak, ends with the translation of thinking in the element of religion.

Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard,” 305.
the narrower, reflective sense of drawing concepts and inferences emerges as part of the more basic patterns of prayerful response to that which the poet names. No longer referring to a universal norm beyond or behind language, reflective thought bears reference to essence in absurdly pointing forward to the eschatological completion of what is.

I thus conclude that the point of Heidegger’s overcoming of metaphysics is not to deny the principle of an origin or archê in being. Metaphysics questions why there are beings at all rather than nothing and is confronted by the utter contingency of happening or coming to be. To be sure, Heidegger questions (with both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) the metaphysical tradition, subjecting to radical scrutiny and Destruktion the notions of pure reason or thought alone with itself and the sphere of a completely knowable objectivity. Heidegger aims to “step back” from metaphysics as onto-theo-logy and to reawaken the question of the happening of the finite. This question opens human beings to the phenomenon of the “nothing” (Nichts) or the incomprehensible at the limits of intelligibility. In confrontation with this uncanny phenomenon Heidegger seeks to rejuvenate the question of metaphysics as that which seeks the inner ground or essence of the coming to be (i.e. of nature, physis) without grounding this essence in the intelligible or in “logic”. Rather than seeking the ground, questioning is confronted by the Abgrund or abyss. It draws toward a decision for the truth of being. Apart from Nietzsche, however, Heidegger does not reject the question of truth, of the essence of being. Metaphysics, or the reflective search beyond (meta-) the occurrence of being (physis) for its ground, is transformed into more radical involvement in the essence of this occurrence.

For such involvement, Heidegger’s thinking must be attuned beyond “objective” thought to the gratuitous utterance of the poet. The poet names the origin of being’s happening, a task which philosophical thinking cannot perform on its own. The thinker must remain attuned to the poet in order to prepare for the leap beyond onto-theo-logy and technological nihilism into a new beginning for philosophy. Thus, I compared the movement of Heidegger’s thinking with Kierkegaard’s leap of faith, his notion of the paradoxical relation to the absolute. Beyond the secret “logic” of death – the sacrifice of the individual to the whole; the loss of the beginning – the “religious” logic of the leap absurdly prepares for the arrival of the origin beyond the whole. Religious thinking thus looks for the emergence of the holy and gracious beginning, not in the movement of thought beyond time, but in the very temporal occurrence of happening. In
Heidegger’s thinking, the leap brings human beings into their genuine place of dwelling in the particularity of locale. The leap returns to human beings as mortals to the earth, under the skies, in the midst of divinities who give them a sense of place and of time. Only a god or a holy sending can transport human beings into their own. Thinking which prepares for the leap is an involvement of the whole self in the emergence of being (Da-sein). Thinking also prepares for deeper fulfillment of all that has been named “God” in the Western traditions.\(^{182}\)

It is true that Heidegger contrasts his originary thinking with religious faith. He sharply differentiates what we might commonly think of to be religious faith from his own project. Indeed, we saw that as early as the first Freiburg period, Heidegger was claiming that philosophical comportment is not and cannot be religious (PIA, 148/GA 61, 197-98). In the 1930s Heidegger continued to emphasize his view that philosophy and (Christian) faith were radically distinct. Heidegger assigns theology an elevated task in becoming “a thinking and questioning elaboration of the world of Christian experience, i.e. of faith,” but he contends that to philosophize is to do something entirely different (IM, 7/GA 40, 8-9). Metaphysics means questioning the essentially contingent happening of being, whereas faith, Heidegger contends, presupposes an answer (7-8/8-9). Faith cannot remain with the wonder of being because the religionist already answers, “God has created it all.” To philosophize, in Heidegger’s view, is to transport oneself beyond even the response of the faithful into deeper response to the “holy” emergence of being itself, a more primordial form of prayer and prophecy, perhaps even a deeper sense of worship.

However, I have problematized Heidegger’s construal of religion, and his efforts to separate his own thinking from it. I did this not to criticize Heidegger, but to deepen some of the

\(^{182}\) See also David R. Law, “Negative theology in Heidegger’s Beiträge zur Philosophie” International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 48 (2000): 148. Law argues, however, that Heidegger’s God is fundamentally different from that of Meister Eckhart and the negative theologians in that there is no transcendence in Heidegger. While I agree with Law that there is no eternal God beyond time in Heidegger (i.e. that the eternal is not an atemporal actuality) Law’s analysis seems to miss the implications of Heidegger’s notion of the holy, borrowed from Hölderlin. God or the god(s) beckon human beings toward the highest transcendence which cannot adequately be named by the categories of metaphysics. I would argue, thus, that Heidegger’s thought in fact bears deep continuity with that of Meister Eckhart, at least on this score. Though admittedly, unlike Eckhart, Heidegger does not ascribe will to this origin; at times he suggests that the holy is chaotic or an-archic opening without will or persona (EHP, 85 / GA 4, 63).
currents of his own thinking. Indeed, Heidegger insists that any genuine retrieval and appropriation of the European tradition will occur as an *interpretation* that operates in the horizon of poetic disclosure. To be sure, the poetizing in question must itself bring to language an experience of the historical essence of the West. But is not our understanding of what the poet brings to language accomplished in the leap? If that is the case, then Heidegger’s own certainty with respect to the West’s historical destiny is of the sort that belongs to faith. Indeed, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, Heidegger’s thinking of *Ereignis* in the idiom of the German *Geist* (Derrida is here treating Heidegger’s reading of Trakl in *On the Way to Language*), cannot escape its own indebtedness to a much older tradition than the German and even the Greek, the Hebrew speaking (poetizing?) of *ruah* or divine flame. Heidegger’s thinking of *Ereignis* marks another attempt to retrieve the origin (without ground). It is another attempt “thinkingly” to involve oneself in its sending. This attempt stands in a much older tradition which must be held open to thought.

I raise this point in order to bring our discussion to what I view to be another turning point in thinking through Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion. At the close of this chapter it is fitting to ask whether and to what extent Heidegger can be placed in fruitful dialogue with religious traditions that withstand and overcome onto-theology in their own way. What does Heidegger have to contribute to these traditions? What and how can religious traditions “speak” to Heideggerian thinking? In the next chapter I investigate contemporary retrievals of Heidegger in Continental philosophy of religion and propose a fruitful alternative to the the dominant Enlightenment construal of the reason/religion distinction.

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183 Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 99-102; see also OWL, 179
5.1 Introduction: Speculations, or beyond pure phenomenology

The aim of this concluding chapter is to call for something of a revision of contemporary retrievals of Heidegger’s work on religion. In Chapter 4 I argued that Heidegger is in a certain respect a thinker of absolute otherness. This sets his thought apart from “Nietzschean” and materialist currents in post-modern philosophy which hold the death of the “god” of metaphysical substance, the contestation and finally the destruction of the eternal *universal*, to mean that the real amounts only to simulacra, temporarily present but destined to return to nothing. On this reading of the death of god, death “shows up” as really the only universal, the final “possibility” of being. I argued that especially in his later work Heidegger surmises that the event of being discloses *more than* what there “is,” beyond the possibilities presented in any purely logical determination. Thinking this event amounts not to retreat into irrationalism, but preparation for a leap by which is fulfilled and retrieved the *essence* of language and logic in the (unthinkable) moment.

I argued that the thinking which prepares for such a leap is religious insofar as it amounts to the entire involvement of the thinker in anticipation of the impossible “return” of the eternal origin in the very moment or event of being. If from his earliest work Heidegger resists giving the name of “God” to the happening of disclosure, yet following Hölderlin Heidegger anticipates the greeting of the holy, of the absolute other that conceals itself in the sending or “coming to be” of all that is. Such an origin “is” nothing outside of the event of its emergence. Yet it is not *merely* nothing. It is the beginning, but an *impossible* beginning which arrives only in the
moment of its repetition. Heidegger thus thinks the (im)possibility of an origin beyond the death of God.

In this chapter, I address the work of two of Heidegger’s foremost interlocutors, Jean-Luc Marion and John D. Caputo. In my view, these thinkers attempt to radicalize Heidegger’s phenomenological insight with respect to an irreducible origin, beyond the death of God or onto-theology. As I hope to show, Heidegger’s thinking remains more radical than that of either of these authors. Both Marion and Caputo interpret Heidegger’s *Überwindung* of metaphysics to mean that thought can give no recourse to anything beyond what is strictly *given to be thought*, even if the object exceeds finite thinking capacities, whereas in my own view Heidegger undertakes the project of a more radical dismantling of the idea of a universal given, and so also the prospect of a *universal religion*, than either of these thinkers. I must be clear: It is not that I think Heidegger rejects the universalizing aim of religion, i.e. the aim of unity across difference, which I shall argue is the constituting condition of language. It is, rather, that Heidegger more robustly challenges the Enlightenment attempt to secure from philosophy the criterion for “the religious.” Heidegger sees more clearly than these thinkers that, if religion *begins* at the very dawn of language – if language itself is the opening of the distinction of the sign and the thing signified, and if our interpretation is thus always in some respect a *response* to the matter in itself within the opening of this distinction – then language is conversely already the expression of our relation to the whole of being or of “what is” most fundamentally. Such expression is already, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, the *speculative* development of the inexhaustible plenitude of meaning implicit in the matter.  

By “speculative” Gadamer means the reflective relation implicit in language by which “the reflection is nothing but the pure appearance of what is reflected, just as the one is the one of the other, and the other is the other of the one.”  


whole which transcends it, but the assertion of the thing itself. Thus, “Explicating the whole of meaning towards which understanding is directed forces us to make interpretive conjectures and to take them back again. The self-cancellation of the interpretation makes it possible for the thing itself—the meaning of the text—to assert itself [...] [T]he word that interpretatively fits the meaning of the text expresses the whole of this meaning—i.e., allows an infinite of meaning to be represented within it in a finite way.”¹⁸⁶ The totality of meaning, of a “world,” is thus expressed in privileged moments of interpretation or “conjecture,” often through reading a tradition’s canonical texts, which bring this whole into further development and illumination. On this speculative model, language is according at its origin paradoxically structured by the creative and “poetic” development of that which calls human beings forth in the manner of a “response.”

The religious, I have argued, opens up with the phenomenon of language itself. Following Heidegger’s path of thinking, I have characterized the opening of the religious as the opening of an irreducible tension of responsive appropriation and creative articulation that begins with the rift in language between the real and its symbolic expression. Language is the event by which things are disclosed in their being or actualized in their possibilities. Things never have being outside of the whole context of interworldly relations through which they are unfolded. The symbolic or referential character of meaning (articulating something as that ...) belongs to the very being of the thing, such that the thing is a particular “site” for the opening out onto an indeterminate whole of possible relations. Conversely, the referential structure of world cannot be a purely ideal space of signification, but in virtue of itself must bear out some “metaphysics” or some pre-thematic sense of being as such, i.e. what there is and how it is. In human participation in this “play” of things and world, of the real and its referential unfolding, the tension of our response to “what is” and of our creative articulation of this reality remains. It opens the space and time of an excessive speaking or naming of the mystery (Geheimnis) and an articulation of the gods along with the activities of human beings.

To a certain degree, Marion and Caputo share this perspective on language, especially in their attempts to overcome all onto-theo-logical reference to an instance that grounds our relation to being prior to the opening of language. Yet as I shall contend, they also in a certain respect

deny its fullest implications for an interpretation of religion. Part of my argument in this chapter concerns the ways in which Marion and Caputo attempt philosophically to circumvent the “poetic” necessity of language and human being for remaining within the speculative development of the origin (i.e. religion) that evinces itself at the very opening of language. These thinkers close off the (impossible) possibility for the arrival in time of an origin that is not already given according to the terms set by philosophical categories. Instead of repeating Heidegger’s retrieval of religion in an even more radical overcoming of onto-theo-logy, these thinkers rather entrench “metaphysical” grasping of the thing-in-itself through their reinstatement of categorical determination of human relation to the origin.

According to Marion, at least in Being Given and earlier works, this origin is always already “given” according to the strict logic of an excess of donated intuition beyond pragmatic and conceptual limits. Because even the origin must obey this “logic” of excessive donation without remainder, Marion’s phenomenological rationalism falls into the mode of determining the thing in itself, even if this is to point toward an instance of unfettered “givenness” beyond all possible relation. This strategy thus attempts to describe our relation to the sublime boundary of experience without speculatively naming this as something given. Yet Marion’s attempt to remain strictly within the descriptive bounds of a religiously neutral phenomenology does not respect the religious phenomenon Marion seeks to liberate from philosophy. On the contrary, by eliminating from philosophy the speculative role of our active unfolding of the “gift” or donating source of phenomenal appearance, Marion in fact subordinates the mystery of language to the relentless “logic” of the unconditional. The transcendent object of religion must obey the “condition” – of which philosophy is categorically certain – of its being given unconditionally without return.

Rather than pursuing hyperbolic givenness without reserve, Caputo’s phenomenology turns to religion in the “deconstructive” mood that holds open desire for the absolutely other through its relentless questioning and upsetting of claims to have fulfilled this intentional reference in some ostensible presence. Caputo argues that his phenomenology is not devoid of faith or desire for what the Western traditions name “God”; on the contrary, he argues, faith is more perfectly enacted the more it remains open in the horizon of an impossible desire, of a desire that does not know exactly what it desires because its referent is transcendence. Caputo
pursues religion without (determinate) religion. His desire for God, his faith, is the “messianic” desire (following Derrida) for the unthinkable that is always to come. But rather than representing greater fidelity to the “wholly other” Caputo’s philosophy also denies it in a certain respect. Opposite to Marion, Caputo insists that the event of revelation is radically interpretive in character and bears no final reference to anything that is strictly given. But because it allows no speculative recourse to an unfolding gift to which we as human beings respond, Caputo’s philosophy eclipses any sense that meaning arrives to human beings in their projects because he remains dogmatically committed to the impossibility of any sort of disclosure of the divine, to messianic hope without fulfillment. This is ultimately to negate any meaningful hope that our interpretive gestures are more than just arbitrary constructions whose most genuine expression is therefore their self-annihilation.

My broader aim is to follow a current in Heidegger’s thought which I think allows for development in another, more radical direction in the philosophy of religion. The burden of my argument for this chapter is the claim that Heidegger’s thought can, at least in part, be located within a deeper development in the modernity – through the work of the Radical Pietists, Kierkegaard, and the German Idealists – of the thinking of being and language together in the identity of divine logos and embodied human existence. I will thus begin from a critique of Marion and Caputo; but the final section of this chapter will be an attempt positively to move beyond their phenomenology. I argue that Heidegger’s philosophical affirmation of the mystery of language and mythos opens philosophy to the horizon of a creative and speculative naming of the divine as the “site” of identity of the absolute with the finite instance. Perhaps beyond Heidegger – and beyond the imagination of the Greeks – I argue that the presence of the eternal in time is the condition for a more radical retrieval of the religious.

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5.2 Marion’s Phenomenology of Givenness

Jean-Luc Marion understands well that Heidegger’s thought is an exercise in sounding out idols in philosophy. Marion agrees with Heidegger that onto-theology is essentially the obscuring of the ontological difference between the coming-to-presence of beings and the beings themselves. He agrees that classical metaphysics fails to hold open the question of the difference of being from beings, opting instead for a kind of conceptual idolatry that elevates a particular being to the role of the cause of being and the ground of beings.

But Marion aims to push beyond Heidegger by inquiring where the complete and utter transcendence of what the tradition has called “God” fits into the story of being. In order to be God, must God depend upon being? If so, then how can he remain God, i.e. transcendent? Does Heidegger thus submit religion to yet another reduction? Does Heidegger’s thought do justice to the classical distinction of God and (created) being? According Marion, Heidegger still subjects God and the sheer givenness of revelation to terms set by philosophical disclosure of “being”. In his earlier critique, Marion aims to put Heidegger’s questioning of ontological difference out of play, to suspend it in the higher instance of theological difference. Yet in his later works, Marion makes it clear that this project is an exercise in a purportedly pure phenomenology: Philosophical reason must be pushed to its paradoxical limits in order to make room for revelation.

My claim in this section is twofold. First, I contend that Marion fails fully to appreciate the force of Heidegger’s disruption of philosophical reason and of ontology in his location of myth and (what I have called) religious response at the very opening of language. Secondly, what follows is that Marion’s own project for a pure phenomenology of givenness is decidedly less radical than Heidegger’s thought because Marion simply repeats the very problematic assumptions about philosophical reason and being that Heidegger works to upset and overturn.
5.2.1 God without Being? Jean-Luc Marion’s retrieval of Heidegger’s ontology

I will first briefly unpack and critique the limitations of Marion’s interpretation of Heidegger’s notion of being in *God without Being* with attention to the bearing of this discussion on the question concerning the philosophical meaning that can be given to the “divine God.”

In *God without Being* Marion accuses Heidegger of committing a subtler form of conceptual idolatry than that found in traditional onto-theo-logical metaphysics. If the golden standard of phenomenological thinking is indeed to allow that which gives itself to show up on its own terms, then according to Marion Heidegger fails on his own terms to usher the phenomenon into its proper disclosure. Marion accepts Heidegger’s rejection of the onto-theo-logical god of reason and Heidegger’s interpretation of the “death” of this god as the opening of possibility for a new sort of thinking relationship to the divine. But Marion rejects Heidegger’s conclusion that the event of coming into being or the “happening” of being opens up the dimension of God’s disclosure yet cannot itself be identified with God. If thought can refer only to the event of being’s emergence in its utter contingency as a happening “without why,” still there is no exclusively philosophical reason for excluding the theological mood that interprets this event as divine creation. In fact, Marion argues, it is in keeping with the utter contingency of this event and the agnosticism of thinking not to decide in advance that “being” cannot be the occasion by which is disclosed through human beings the higher, incommensurate relation of the infinite God to finite creation.189

Marion defines idolatry as the mode or manner of being-in-the-world where one is characterized by a peculiar sort of aim or disposition that “fixes” and determines the range of possibilities for the sorts of meaningful experiences human beings can have.190 The idolatrous disposition looks for some resting point, some aspect of the world upon which it can fixate so as to attain to knowledge of itself, to find “the privileged fixed point of its own consideration” and of consideration of the full range of meaning of things.191 The resting point upon which the idolatrous gaze fixates becomes an “invisible mirror” by which this disposition can reflexively

190 Marion, *God without Being*, 11.
191 Marion, *God without Being*, 10-12.
survey the scope of its own limitation and delimit the range of meanings of its world.\textsuperscript{192} The idolatrous mode of gazing fixes itself on something visible. Hence it also pre-determines the aim itself as the “measure” of all that can be seen in the finite.\textsuperscript{193} The divine must therefore also show up within the scope of this gaze and on its terms if it is to show up at all.\textsuperscript{194}

Philosophy is idolatrous, on Marion’s account, when it fixates on a concept to find the privileged point of self-knowledge. “God” appears in philosophy as human self-regard writ large (here Marion is in agreement with Feuerbach).\textsuperscript{195} The conceptual idolater fixes his intentional gazing on the concept which defines in advance for him the scope of his possible experience. What the theist and atheist philosophers of modernity share in common, according to Marion, is their mutual conceptual idolatry which fixes God in the onto-theo-logical concept of the divine as ground and cause of being. But atheist philosophers do not escape this idolatry to the extent that they, too, pre-determine “God” to mean the very conceptual idol projected in onto-theo-logy.

Marion thus wishes to subject the conceptual idols of modernity, especially the moral God, to dismantling critique in order to open the way for revelation on its own terms. Marion credits Heidegger for moving part way toward this goal. He acknowledges that Heidegger resists the conceptual idolatry that would bring God into philosophy really in order to ground and justify finite human knowledge\textsuperscript{196} Nevertheless Marion contends that Heidegger’s thought remains entangled in the idolatry of the aim to comprehend “an instance anterior to ‘God,’” and hence fixates itself on “that point from which idolatry could dawn.”\textsuperscript{197} In other words, through his attempt to think “being” as the difference of the coming to be or emergence of beings from every determinable aspect of things Heidegger really rules out any difference the “divine God” – which Heidegger himself intimates – could make at all to the world. Marion rhetorically asks: “How is it that Being finds itself admitted without question as the temple already opened (or closed) to every theophany, past or to come?”\textsuperscript{198} Being opens up and remains open without any

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\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{192}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 12-13.
\item[\textsuperscript{193}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 12.
\item[\textsuperscript{194}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 14.
\item[\textsuperscript{195}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 16.
\item[\textsuperscript{196}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 42.
\item[\textsuperscript{197}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 43.
\item[\textsuperscript{198}] Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 44.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
God; and if something like “God” is to be at all, it must make its appearance in the sending of being.

Following Levinas, Marion treats Heidegger’s thinking of being as a totalizing ontology that finally admits of no “other” beyond the comprehension of being. Thus, “Any access to something like ‘God,’ precisely because of the aim of Being as such, will have to determine him in advance as a being.” In response to this position that he imputes to Heidegger, Marion asks, “does not the search for the ‘more divine god’ oblige one, more than to go beyond onto-theology, to go beyond ontological difference as well, in short no longer to attempt to think God in view of a being, because one will have renounced, to begin with, thinking him on the basis of Being?” Marion indicates the possibility of thinking God as sheer gift without condition. Love is a gift, unconstrained by the conditions of reception or of being received. No human intentionality could ever decide on the possibility or impossibility of the unconditioned self-giving of this gift.

Marion argues that Heidegger fails to remain within the thought of the gift because he refuses a priori to allow that the event of being’s opening may be the trace of a transcendent giver. Instead, the opening of being is merely the play of a “reflexive” gaze: “Ontological difference leads—even in the case of the unthought—being back to Being, unfolds Being in being(s) in order to perfect the reflexive gaze of the one in the other [...] whereby, even and especially in its decided retreat, Being presents itself as the reserved idol, because it is reflexive of itself alone.” There can be no gift in pure reflexivity. [T]he gift, which Being itself thus requires, is accomplished only in allowing the disclosure in it of the gesture of a giving as much imprescribable as indescribable, which receives the name, in praise, of goodness.” Marion thereby indicates the possibility of a mode of speaking which admits the good beyond being,

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200 Marion, God without Being, 43.
201 Marion, God without Being, 44-5.
202 Marion, God without Being, 46-9.
203 Marion, God without Being, 47-8.
204 Marion, God without Being, 85.
205 Marion, God without Being, 75.
liberating being as the open “site” of an infinite distance between beings and the transcendent gaze under which they are called and comprehended.\textsuperscript{206}

Despite the seeming plausibility of Marion’s attempt to suspend and overcome Heidegger, the terms in which Marion frames Heidegger’s discussion of being are problematic. Moreover, in liberating his “God” from all conditions of reflexivity in “being” Marion posits a divine being that makes no difference at all, or at least one of which philosophers can remain justly suspicious. To address my second concern first: Marion effectively asks the question of an instance before or prior to being as the opening of language and world; hence, as Kathryn Tanner with Nietzschean suspicion contends, it is questionable as to whether Marion’s ideal gift without any ties to being is a gift at all, and not rather nothing.\textsuperscript{207} It is arguable that Heidegger’s refusal to think an instance outside or beyond being emerges from his rather more nuanced respect for the irreducible entanglement of disclosure with the event of language.

As for my first concern: As Marion would have it, being withdraws as a “screen” behind the dance of images it displays, as the wall of Plato’s cave behind the movement of shadows. On Marion’s reading, being is the event of disclosure of beings, of the unfolding of world. But this event is idolatrously hypostatized by thinking where it no longer admits the distance of an unconditional donating source, a gift given on its own terms. However, as Laurence Paul Hemming argues, it is Marion, not Heidegger, who hypostatizes the event of being by assuming it to be an instance to be overcome. Heidegger is rather more agnostic concerning the sending of being, the mysterious opening of the “potential horizon within which God might become visible.”\textsuperscript{208} Rather than seeking an instance beyond or outside ontological difference, thinking aims to hold open to view “being” as the irreducible tension of language wherein we human beings “poetically” articulate and thus mediate the divine sending. This perspective on the religious requires, as I will now show, the more radical opening of phenomenology to the speculative structure of language itself, beyond Marion’s purportedly pure phenomenology of givenness (\textit{donation}).

\textsuperscript{206} Marion, \textit{God without Being}, 83-91.
\textsuperscript{208} Laurence Paul Hemming, \textit{Heidegger’s Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 257.
5.2.2 Phenomenology of Givenness: Marion’s reduction of religion

In his later work, Marion again attempts to put Heidegger’s question of being out of play, this time with reference to a rigorous phenomenology of giving or givenness (donation). He develops something like an internal critique of phenomenology itself, opening the way for an exhaustive treatment of the pure form of donation. If phenomenology can name the possibility of revelation from within the “logic” of an unfolding givenness, then it admits a kind of (albeit minimalist) “knowledge” of the basic structure of the gift on a philosophical, rather than a theological, basis. Marion thus claims to find purely phenomenological grounds for admitting revelation. Again, he argues that Heidegger’s thinking obscures rather than brings to light this radical possibility. I argue on the contrary that, while Marion’s phenomenology is an attempt to free religious life and its object from philosophical conditions, instead it marks the subordination of the religious phenomenon to an instance outside language and the appropriation of being, and so in fact returns to the idea of subjective will at the basis of the “giving” of presence. Marion’s philosophy thus remains vulnerable to Heidegger’s Destruktion of metaphysics.

Here Marion builds on his criticism of Heidegger’s lack of phenomenological attentiveness to the unconditional gift. In Being Given Marion criticises Heidegger for his purported failure to follow through on the implications of his own thinking of the “giving” of being (Es gibt). Heidegger is now put out of play, not on theological, but on phenomenological grounds. Marion thus aims to play the phenomenological game on its own terms. The referee is not the “other” of theology, whose voice calls into the game and disrupts it from without. The only standard by which to judge is the phenomenon itself. Marion wagers that such an appeal is enough to allow phenomenology to indicate and anticipate revelation as its highest possibility.

Marion casts Being Given as a phenomenological venture that takes seriously the central claim of phenomenology to treat things solely on the basis and in terms of which they give themselves. It is clear that the driving force of the text is Marion’s concern, once again, to make room in phenomenology for religious revelation which is, by definition, given without condition. Marion thus inquires after the possibility of a phenomenological treatment of an unconditional givenness that unfolds on its own terms as an excess of donation that shocks and overflows all of our horizons of anticipation. Phenomenology would point to the formal possibility of this “saturated phenomenon” without properly naming it, which is the task of theology. Marion can
thus inquire on purely phenomenological terms whether Heidegger can think this possibility within the terms of his philosophy. He argues that Heidegger stops short of the fullest expression of the phenomenological reduction: “so much reduction, so much givenness.” Before addressing Marion’s critique of Heidegger, I will briefly explain this reduction.

The turn to the pure self-manifestation of the phenomenon characterizes Marion’s reduction. The logic is simple and powerful. There is nothing, Marion proposes, that is not subsequent to its own givenness. That is, everything, insofar as it is anything at all, is a given. According to this logic even ideal, irreal, and absent objects are given to some extent, that is, if it is indeed possible to hold them in view as objects in the first place. Something may be given as ideal or given as absent, etc. A non-given x is in this sense an absurdity. If we can think of a particular x, then it is in some sense given. Accordingly, even nonsensical statements like “I hear the colour green” have some (albeit minimal) given content insofar as they are given as nonsensical. Even nothing and death, negation and originary possibility, have their own measure of givenness. The reason that all of these instances fall under a single logic of givenness – Marion surmises – is that the phenomenon is that which “comes forward insofar as it gives itself.” In order for something to come forward or appear as such, even if it fails to appear at all, it must be the case that it gives itself. Marion invokes Heidegger’s claim from *Being and Time* that the phenomenon is that which shows itself from itself (BT, 27-31/SZ, 49-55). Of course, in order for something to show itself it must be given. And since in order to show oneself one must give oneself to be shown, then by default what shows itself does so always only because it gives itself. Hence, for Marion the rigorous reduction is the one that places no restrictions at all on possible experience but simply lets it be given according to its own conditions (neither “subjective” nor “objective”) for being given.

We would be incorrect, however, to think of this “itself” of the phenomenon in terms of the transcendent giver encountered in *God without Being*. The phenomenon, though transcendent in the sense that it cannot be grasped conceptually (i.e. it transcends subjective constitution),

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211 Marion, *Being Given*, 69.
212 Marion, *Being Given*, 69.
belongs to the purely *immanent* unfolding of giving according to which it, the phenomenon, gives itself. In other words, it would be a mistake to equate this phenomenal self-giving in its pure possibility with any actual transcendent agency. The explanation for this goes as follows: In each case there is an ambiguity in the phenomenon between that which appears and the manner in which it appears. In other words, the phenomenon traditionally includes both x and the manner in which x shows itself in experience. For example, the phenomenon of a painting is *both* the visible thing that the observer witnesses *and* the invisible effect that the painting has on the observer. Or, when I look at the pictures of my family sitting on my desk, “what” I see is not merely the visible objects in front of me; I bear witness to the given range of meanings these pictures have for me.

To the “itself” of the phenomenon belongs, then, both an appearance and a manner of appearing. But which has priority over the other? According to Marion, it is the manner of giving that has priority over the given, since we are able to witness in the former something independent of all prior determination. That a particular phenomenon shows up utterly singularly as an event of its being given means that there is something about each appearance that evades the “radar screen,” so to speak, of our conceptualization. We are confronted with an excess of givenness that cannot be grasped conceptually or even experienced all at once in its fullness.²¹³ It is the horizon in which the appearance and our claims about it are made possible. The horizon itself cannot be an object of experience because it is always in the background of our experiences of objects. We do not choose to inhabit this horizon; it is simply in each case co-given along with the emergence of possible and actual givens. Phenomenology must, therefore, bracket all actuality in order to point toward that which, in every given, makes it what it is as such.²¹⁴

The corresponding phenomenological reduction is thus precisely the suspension of all transcendental conditions of knowledge and all “metaphysics”. By their very nature as actual conditions of experience, the principles of metaphysics fail to allow the givenness of the given phenomenon to be indicated precisely in its own givenness. In other words, the reduction reduces the impact of our own categories of thinking on the phenomenon rather than reducing the phenomenon to a particular category of thinking. It is akin to the difference between reducing

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something by cutting it down to size, as, for example, in the reduction of nature to “raw materials” for the capitalist machine, and reducing outside interference so that something can be more clearly given as such, as in displaying a work of art or providing the ideal amplificatory conditions for music. Marion’s reduction is of the latter sort even though there are limits to the metaphor (phenomenological reduction admits no outside conditions for allowing the phenomenon to be given). And in this Marion claims to have captured the spirit of the Husserlian “principle of all principles”, which states that, “every originarily giving intuition is a source of right for cognition—that everything that offers itself originarily to us in intuition (in its fleshly actuality, so to speak) must simply be received for what it gives itself, but without passing beyond the limits in which it gives itself.”215 Marion radicalizes this principle by removing even the conditions of a donating intuition and transcendental constitution from the givenness of the phenomenon. He reinterprets the “without passing beyond the limits” as a restriction against imposing any limit at all on the givenness of being given. In other words, the proper limit of the self-giving phenomenon is the (unbounded) givenness according to which it gives itself. Hence Marion’s reformulation of the reduction: So much reduction, so much givenness.216

Phenomenology is thus an anticipatory pointing whose aim is to enable us to take up the experience whose possibility the phenomenologist points out to us. Marion the phenomenologist is like a modern day Anselm pointing to that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought in order to inspire our imagination, to bring us into an involvement with it.217 If phenomenology traditionally sketches out or prefigures possibilities for experience so that they can be creatively re-articulated, Marion’s phenomenology attempts to show that the most basic condition of the possibility of experience – our being given – is indeed an anticipatory structure but one whose content cannot adequately be anticipated. Marion thus attempts to carry phenomenological description to its paradoxical limit by showing that the most primary structure of experience lies not in what we can sketch out and appropriate but in the occurrence of an overwhelming

215 Marion, Being Given, 12; Citing Husserl, Ideen I, ¶24, Hua. III, 52. Marion’s italicizing removed.
216 Marion, Being Given 14-18; see also Robyn Horner, Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction, 110-11.
donation that saturates our horizons of anticipation. Thus, for example, the ordinary “possible” that is intended in my experience, e.g. the possibility of my taking on this or that identity or carrying out this or that particular action, is never adequate to the givenness of the phenomenon, which saturates all of my horizons. We might think of the way in which, according to the New Testament description, Paul the Apostle received his identity and mission through a saturating event wherein he was blinded by an overwhelming experience of the supernatural. The phenomenon overwhelmed not only Paul’s sight, but all of his anticipatory horizons, and it set him on a path that he could not have foreseen, given his manner of being-in-the-world. Marion’s phenomenological reduction helps us to see the merely formal possibility of this “impossible” phenomenal donation. Hence, it is a heuristic undertaking, a kind of preamble to faith that prepares us for revelation by pointing out its essential possibility.

Presumably, then, anyone who follows the logic of the reduction will “see” the same phenomenal structure from the same formal perspective but will not necessarily name this infinite depth of possibility in the same way and from the same horizons. A phenomenology of religion names only the possibility of divine revelation from the perspective of “the reduced immanence of givenness.” Since presumably, both the theist and the atheist could “see” this immanent possibility, each from his own view, and subsequently name it differently, Marion seems to have shown with recourse to “pure” phenomenology that something like revelation is both possible and is the paradigmatic case of experience. Not only does he thus describe the possibility of revelation on its own terms (i.e. as self-manifestation), but as phenomenologist of religion Marion fleshes out the way in which phenomenal saturation conditions ordinary experience.

It just so happens that the saturated phenomenon, described on the basis of the strictly immanent criterion of givenness, is essentially a revelatory structure which perfectly anticipates the content of theological revelation.

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218 See Acts 9:1-19
219 Marion, Being Given, 235.
220 Marion, Being Given, 236
221 One indeed wonders here whether phenomenological delimitation of the possibility of revelation limits the range of possibility of religious experience, since then (Marion’s) revealed theology becomes the best “fit” for naming this particular possibility in its historical and ontic actuality. See also James K. A. Smith, “Liberating Religion from Theology,” 1999.
However, we might ask here whether Marion has not fallen back into the most classical of distinctions between that which can be discerned purely rationally on the basis of conceptual analysis and that view whose content depends on a particular faith. Indeed, Marion follows Heidegger in attempting to make room for phenomenological description of the religious phenomenon on its own terms, articulating what it might mean to have an experience of God or the divine by turning to the very way in which such an experience is given. But to what extent has Marion himself obscured the religious phenomenon with his insistence on the autonomy of phenomenological analysis? As John D. Caputo notes, “Capitalized Revelation means that God can enter the world unconditionally and on his own terms. So one is either for the saturated phenomenon or against God’s Revelation. (One detects a certain imposition of conditions here in the manner of correlational theology: were there to be a Revelation, it would have to be of just this sort; the condition is that it be unconditionally given.)”222 Caputo argues that Marion’s phenomenology of saturated givenness leaves little room for actual faith because it specifies the conditions of religious experience from a kind of higher-order position of knowledge taken up in phenomenology. But “In faith, the sacred narrative is read or heard and made one’s own in a special way that transcends what is given.”223 If phenomenology claims higher-order access to the content of this experience independent of faith, then it subjects the religious phenomenon to another reduction in the name of an autonomous philosophy. If, on the other hand, Marion admits a kind of faith into phenomenology, then he must concede that there is a mode of intentionality “that ventures out beyond the given to take the given as something that it is not fully given as.”224 That is to say, in this case there would be a way of being-in-the-world that is not completely subject to the strict logic of Marion’s reduction. Under the first move, faith is nullified by phenomenology, contrary to Marion’s intention. Under the second move, phenomenology cannot remain within the conditions of a conceptual analysis of givenness.

It is here that I would return to Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion as a more radical alternative to Marion’s. In Being Given, Marion argues that Heidegger’s event (Ereignis) denies the pure anonymity of givenness, bringing it under the horizon of the disclosure or advent of

being. Heidegger’s appeal to the event obscures the “logic” of givenness, according to which being unfolds. But is not Heidegger’s point in referring to the Ereignis as the figure of the gift to disrupt our attempts to bring disclosure under a unifying logic, however hyperbolic? Heidegger brings metaphysics to its limits, pushing it against the irreducible aporias and perplexities that beset it. The necessity for our active and creative appropriation of the gift of being or presence remains one such perplexity of metaphysics which Marion fails either to resolve or to circumvent in his phenomenology of givenness.

As Kathryn Tanner argues, no matter how much Marion effaces the dynamically expressive role of human creativity in receiving the given – the agent becomes witness to its own receiving of the given – yet the notion of unilateral gift cannot be sustained: “givenness may indeed crash upon the screen of consciousness in a way that gives rise to that screen; but what is that crashing, in turn, without the screen?” The absolutely self-giving phenomenon requires that to which it gives to be as nothing. But this is just the inverse of an interiorly subjective space that arrives to itself secure from inessential otherness. Thus – as John Milbank also contends – Marion repeats and does not really overcome the sacrificial economy of self-possession, even if this takes the form of unilateral gift.

I have argued that Marion does not really move beyond Heidegger’s thought of being because the latter, unlike the former, recognizes that the question of the possibility of religion cannot really be abstracted and disentangled from the question of the irreducible ambiguity of the mythic – of our having metaphorically to affirm some extra-human agency in the unfolding of meaning – that structures language itself.

Another contemporary reader of Heidegger – John D. Caputo – is rather more attentive to this structure of language. Yet Caputo’s “demythologizing” of Heidegger in the name of a “jewgreek” call for justice, and his later “religion without religion,” remains within the “critical”

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225 Marion, Being Given, 37.
226 Marion, Being Given, 37.
227 Kathryn Tanner, “Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology,” 224.
228 Kathryn Tanner, “Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology,” 225.
tradition of a certain construal of Enlightenment modernity, under which religion distances itself from mythic forms in pursuit of purely “rational” expression.\(^{230}\)

Caputo affirms that “religion” structures all of human experience. Experience is structured by passion of the “impossible” or of the “wholly other” (tout autre). This passion opens the horizon of anticipation of “what is always and ever to come.” Religion is the “messianic” structure of longing that characterizes the “infinite” aim of intentionality beyond every possible (present and future) “given”.\(^{231}\) Following Derrida, Caputo aims “to reinscribe phenomenology in a framework of messianic expectation and hope in what is always and structurally to come.”\(^{232}\) There is thus a significant degree of overlap between Caputo’s project and the aim of this study; much of the burden of my argument has been to show that Heidegger’s philosophy belongs on a deep level to this “messianism” that has structured Western thought and shaped Western longing.

Yet Caputo rejects as inherently violent Heidegger’s “mythic” construal of existence imbued with the sacred. Such an admission, on Caputo’s reading, can mark only the denial of the ethical, that is to say, the refusal to anticipate the breaking-in of responsibility to the “wholly other” (which is every other). But as I shall argue, it is Caputo who violently denies the religious longing for transcendence the possibility of its (partial) fulfillment within life.\(^{233}\) This is because Caputo’s equation of religion with ethics in fact remains in the orbit of the self-determining rationality of subjectivity that Heidegger calls into question.

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\(^{233}\) See also Sonia Sikka, “Questioning the Sacred: Heidegger and Levinas on the Locus of Divinity,” Modern Theology 14.3 (July 1998): 317.
5.3 John D. Caputo’s Religion without Religion

In some of his early work, Caputo calls upon the young Heidegger’s project for a hermeneutics of factical life and a *Destruktion* of the ontological tradition in order to liberate the ungraspable flow of life from the strictures of “metaphysics,” by which he means the conceptual abstraction and overdetermination of life. Caputo sees in Heidegger the impulse of a “radical hermeneutics” that aims to hold thinking open to the shock that comes from the extra-philosophical sources of the New Testament call for justice and the Greek sense of pre-theoretical *praxis*. But Caputo also sees in Heidegger’s thought the violent tendency to arrest the flux of life, a retreat into metaphysical nostalgia for lost presence. Thus, Caputo holds the whole Heideggerian discourse open to yet another dismantling. Heidegger must be “demythologized” and “deeschatologized” in order to release the more radically critical element of his thinking and thus to free up alternative discourses that call for justice.²³⁴

Caputo thus proposes to pit the radically deconstructive Heidegger against the nostalgic, “eschatological” Heidegger of Greek beginnings and Western destining. His aim is to free the radical voice of Heidegger’s thought from Heidegger’s own lapses into dogmatic metaphysics. For Caputo, once we have overturned onto-theo-logical desire to locate an absolute necessity in the flow of history, we are left only with the groundless free play of events and endless deferral and disruption of unstable discourses. Caputo posits a sort of either/or between classical hierarchies of being and presence on the one hand, and the “Kantian-Enlightenment” movement of critique in the “direction of universalization,” on the other.²³⁵ Given his interpretive schema, it is not surprising then that Caputo aims to retrieve a radically deconstructive Heidegger, a Heidegger against Heidegger, for whom talk of the circular sending of being and of the repetition of the Word spoken through history are so much metaphysical chaff to be blown away in the flux of difference.²³⁶

²³⁶ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 157-64.
But I contend here that it does not follow that the dismantling of onto-theology in its most radical form is also (necessarily?) the turning away from mythic and eschatological narratives. In my view, Caputo’s deconstructive religion, or religion of deconstruction, is really another version of the ultimately contested universal “reason” of the Enlightenment. I will thus turn to address in more detail the ways in which Caputo attempts to “demythologize” and “de-eschatologize” Heidegger in the name of universal religion before articulating my account of the way in which Heidegger’s thought remains more radical than Caputo’s secularizing discourse.

5.3.1 De-mythologizing/De-eschatologizing Heidegger

In his deconstructive repetition of Heidegger’s philosophy, Caputo does not aim to retrieve anything, at least not in any ordinary sense. This is because in Heidegger there is always a sense in which one makes a sort of return to something that has been. If Heidegger’s Wiederholung is the projection forward of possibilities, the repetition of these possibilities in the future, it is equally the retrieval of these possibilities from that which has been handed down.237 On Caputo’s account, Heidegger is therefore the thinker of the circle par excellence. Even in his later work, where Heidegger speaks rather of the sending (Geschick) of being, he does this in the name of a more deeply entrenched logic of the circle, the gathering (legein) of the new beginning for human dwelling in being, which re-inscribes the radical play of the giving-sending under the rule of an ultimate (though unfathomable) sender.238

To be sure, Heidegger rejects the teleological idea of a necessary historical unfolding under and in the direction of some rationally discernible aim. But on Caputo’s account Heidegger is an eschatological thinker for whom the end of philosophy is the turning point of a new beginning in being. The Gestell of modern technology bears signs of the Geviert of dwelling and it is the task of the thinker to discern the code, to see out of the darkness of our oblivion the coming of a new dawn.239 But according to Caputo, Heidegger’s eschatology merely re-inscribes metaphysical logic more insidiously. Heidegger would bring the “free play of differences” under the rule of a sending destiny. He would arrest the flux of dissemination by an authoritative code

237 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 88-90.
238 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 160-68.
239 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 163-68.
(only the thinker possesses the decoder), and a “deep hermeneutics that knows how to read backward, in reverse, and hence to read the saving message in the words and works of technology, thereby turning it into a saving message.”

But for Caputo, there is another, more radical tendency in Heidegger to think beyond the sending of being and truth into the very an-arhic deployment of the giving of being itself. For every epochal sending of being, for every determinate interpretation of truth, there is the corresponding withdrawal, the opening itself that gives being. This more primal event (Ereignis) of the giving of the epochs of being and truth belongs to no historical age or language in particular; it is neither name nor concept but the play of difference without “why.” Caputo thus does not aim to retrieve some deeper “meaning” in Heidegger as much as he attempts to allow the play of the “giving” itself to resonate in Heidegger’s own works, disrupting even Heidegger’s talk of eschatological beginnings.

Moreover, Caputo embarks on the task of demythologizing Heidegger. In fact, I think that the de-eschatologizing is a move that belongs to the broader sweep of Caputo’s de-mythologizing and re-mythologizing of Heidegger’s texts, putting the latter in the service of a certain deconstructive religion and ethics. The core of Caputo’s critique of Heidegger is the isolation of his tendency to preserve a certain thinking of essence and to valorize the Greek experience of truth and being as the beginning or origin of everything originary. Accordingly, Heidegger must be demythologized to free up the thought of Ereignis and the play of epochal difference from the myth of a great Greek beginning.

For, Caputo surmises, the logic of a Greek beginning is incoherent. Heidegger’s privileging of a primal Greek experience of being as “the historical portal through which thinking passes in order to get to what is antehistorical, the very Wesen or coming to presence of history, which cannot be itself historical,” requires the corresponding claim that certain “clues” or “traces” of this beginning are to be found in the early Greeks. But since, by Heidegger’s own admission, the early Greeks did not experience the open as the open, but only in terms of the

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240 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 169.
241 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 25.
242 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 25, 32, 37.
coming to presence of beings in their being, the traces of this deep structure that Heidegger finds in the Greeks are the product of his own creative reading and repetition. Now Caputo does not deny that Heidegger is on to something genuinely philosophically important in his questioning of the very unconcealment of being. But he resists Heidegger’s mythologizing tendency to ascribe the origin of this structure to a Greek beginning. Caputo resists the exclusionary violence in Heidegger’s inscription of the unconcealment of being, the very happening of truth, in a story that privileges a certain experience or a certain kind of experience. In his view, Heidegger Hellenizes the happening of truth and thus transforms philosophy into a kind of memorial of an originary experience of being.244

But as I noted, Caputo wishes to free the powerful force of Heidegger’s questioning from the problematic (and dangerous, given Heidegger’s political involvements) mythical logic of Greco-German purity. “On this reading,” argues Caputo, “Wiederholung [sic] as a theory of the historical ‘retrieval’ of primordial beginnings is replaced by a more radical ‘repetition’ conceived as the springing up of the different, the emergence of diversity, without hierarchical privilege.” Further, “It is important to see that, more crucially understood, Heidegger would not be construed as engaged in a search for the master name of Being. He would be engaged instead in underlining the historical contingency and dissolubility of all the master names for Being that have been forthcoming in the history of the West—eidos, ousia, esse, res, Geist, Wille zur Macht, etc.”245 Stripped of the myth of purity and essence, Heidegger’s philosophy would be unleashed in its most critical potential in the direction of a more radial call for justice without its preoccupation with Greek temples, jugs, and gods.

Caputo is, of course, aware of the fact that every demythologizing must issue in its own particular re-mythologizing. As he contends, “[i]n my view, demythologizing inevitably turns out to be a matter of mythologizing differently.”246 Caputo thus aims to hold open Heidegger’s discourse to an alternative myth, what he calls (following Derrida) the “jewgreek” myth of justice. The West has been profoundly shaped in its sensibilities, not just by the “Greek” sense of

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244 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 26-7.
245 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 31-2.
246 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 186.
self-determination, but also by the prophetic force of a “Judaic” call to respond ethically out of
“the bond of responsibility to the singularity of the ‘wholly Other.’”

Calling upon Levinas, Caputo argues that our storytelling, mythologizing impulse must
be placed in the service of the demands of justice toward the utterly singular. This is a justice
that is always yet to come, the demand of an absolute singularity that cannot be attached to any
determinate revelation or religion. Caputo acknowledges the simultaneous need and
impossibility to speak of this singularity in terms of the universality of concepts. Heidegger’s
mistake, on his reading, was to re-inscribe the call of the utterly singular – as the possibility of
the impossible – into a metaphysical actuality. “Demythologizing Heidegger,” thus, “amounts to
holding Heidegger’s hand to the fire of *Being and Time*, to the indeterminate structure of the call
of conscience and to the indefinite indeterminateness of the future, to the possible as possible,
which is also the impossible.” Heidegger must be re-mythologized in the direction of a certain
Enlightenment retrieval of religion as the structure of obligation toward the other.

Caputo contents that, stripped of its mythic cosmology, this work then amounts to an
extension of the notion of respect in the face of absolute indeterminacy. Heidegger’s
demythologized religion is a kind of respect and awe in the face of absolute flux and
groundlessness. Thus, for Caputo, *authentic* Heideggerian religion is this twofold structure of
alertness to the utter contingency of meaning and to the groundless play of the event combined
with a kind of attunement to the “other” in an emerging structure of obligation. Non-reductive
religion is thus for Caputo deconstructive. When I am alerted to the utter contingency of the
normative traditions I inhabit, then I am primed to hear and respond to the call of the “other” one
who has been systematically excluded by these traditions. Likewise, in the face of this “other”
who confronts me, I am thrust back in the attitude of critical thought upon the structures of
normativity that shape me. After deconstruction, Heideggerian “religion” would be the awe of
the utter contingency of being chastened and directed by its responsibility to the other (which is
just as “other” as every other one).

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248 Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 188-93.
249 Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 208.
250 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 204-5; 258-64.
In his later work, Caputo compliments (and qualifies) his view in several ways. But his vision of an Enlightenment religion without religion holds on to the basic notion that religion is fundamentally *obligation* in the face of an indeterminate “other” that cannot be known (except as other). As Christopher Ben Simpson points out, “God” for Caputo simply names the impossible passion or “infinity of our desire.” Religion is the structure of *self*-transcendence which moves us out beyond ourselves in passion for the wholly other which cannot ever appear. Caputo’s religion is thus ultimately ethics.\(^{251}\) On Caputo’s schema, Heidegger *must* mean something like this if his philosophy is to be rescued from the bad faith of a religion that closes itself off to the structure of obligation and nullifies the passion of the infinite.

But Heidegger arguably also opens the way for affirmation of the “speculative” aspects of religious practice, those which affirm (however imperfectly) traces of divinity within out relation to the world. Caputo makes a blanket rejection of “metaphysics” as the inherently violent stoppage and forceful ordering of an original anarchy of radical difference. But he thereby excludes the possibility envisioned by Kierkegaard of an originary harmonizing of difference through its teleological ordering by the paradox of a relation (i.e. in time) to the absolute. I argued in Chapter 4 that Heidegger shares to some extent Kierkegaard’s concern for a relation to the origin without the mediation of a supra-temporal universal. As Sonia Sikka contends, that the open region for human being (*Da-sein*) bears an essential reference to being “is what gives human existence the possibility of transcending the ‘natural’, as the sphere of self-seeking utilization, of being established outside the realm of will, in accord with a power which Heidegger, at one point, associates with love.”\(^{252}\) Heidegger at least anticipates the possibility that our ecstatic being towards the other might in fact allow for mutual participation in a community of justice rooted also in common “spiritual” respect for nature, locale, and things. Conversely, “Where the only locus of divinity is found in the desire for justice, and where the desire for justice revolves around the interruption of life by need, is there any room for the idea of a kingdom of heaven (always distant, to be sure) where, within justice, life itself could be holy? [...] Heidegger does help point to a life, a way of being in which the traces of divinity can


be found not only in the negations of being, in distress, abandonment and sacrifice, but also in its affirmation, in wonder, in releasement, in celebration.”

Conversely, Caputo cannot countenance this possibility because he uncritically repeats the dogma that we can know the basis for genuine or authentic religion, i.e. that we can successfully parse out our own contingent response from that “wholly other” to which we are called to respond. One might therefore suspect that Caputo still assumes the shadow of a transcendental vantage point from which to survey the given relation of our finite agency to the infinite. On this reading, the “wholly other” of Caputo’s religion would be merely the return to subjectivity, albeit one realizable only in the violent interruption and displacement of the finite, i.e. only in death. Thus, Caputo’s Enlightenment equation of religion with ethics, in my estimate, does not really point to anything fundamentally transformative beyond the death of God (the death also of the subject and of every finite particularity). My question is whether Heidegger offers any radical alternative. Against Caputo’s postmodern religion without religion I will suggest an alternative reading of Heidegger that integrates his thought more deeply into the messianism to which he owes so much. Here, I will have to say a little more on Caputo’s later construal of religion without religion and his own attempt to think philosophically within the horizon of religious commitment.

5.3.2 Caputo’s Religious Philosophy

What Caputo does not like about eschatology is the false pretense to have gained “insight into the deep essence of what is going on,” historically. It is the hubris of claiming to have some message from the gods delivered straight from the sending of being without interruption. It is the implicit claim to know who is in charge of the sending, which for Caputo is tantamount to claiming access to the law of meaning, of claiming rights over the “postal service” of being and all the messages delivered. But where the play of sending is released from this “essentializing” logic, “[t]hen the legein does not have to labor to gather up the message across the ages and then to deliver it in an Austrag [...] a bringing to birth, to term, to final issue, a final deliverance in

253 Sonia Sikka, “Questioning the Sacred,” 317.
254 Here I follow the logic of John Milbank’s reading of “post-modern” ethics. See especially, “The Midwinter Sacrifice: A Sequel to ‘Can Morality Be Christian?’” 60.
which the message reaches the eschaton and turns itself inside out, in a momentous reversal and parturition which starts a new postal service going.”255 But how are we to address the eschatological hermeneutics of the biblical traditions?

In his later work Caputo returns to the theme of an inherently eschatological meaning to affirm it in a certain respect. Caputo argues that the fact that that John’s Gospel (John 1:1-5) mediates the word of Jesus, who in turn mediates Elohim at the origin, means that there is an originary confusion of “speakers and messages.”256 This gives rise to an eschatological structure of meaning without any determinate eschatology to hang on to. A de-essentialized eschatology leads to a sort of “faith” whereby we are never quite certain who is speaking what to whom. This radical uncertainty and undecidability of who or what “speaks” at the origin ensures that no one tradition is able to adopt this voice in an authoritative manner. No one can “speak” directly for the transcendent origin because this origin hides in the dissemination of voices, which ensures that no one will lord it over others. In the kingdom, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Religion is thus compelled, not to retreat into self-congratulatory huddles, but to remain open in its deconstructive affirmation of the excluded “other” that announces itself within the (inevitably violent insofar as exclusionary) structures of meaning.

But Caputo cannot dismiss Heidegger on the basis of his being in certain respects an eschatological thinker of the origin. Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin in fact echoes John’s Gospel in certain respects. As we saw in Chapter 3, Hölderlin’s “holy ray” of the father is the sending of the holy that is at the origin already entrusted to mediation in/as language in the clearing of being inhabited by the gods and the poets (EHP, 94-5/72-4). Thus, there is also a certain thought of radical dissemination without prior instance already at play in Heidegger’s notion of the holy. The holy ray is already mediated in the word of the poet which ambiguously bespeaks also the gods. That the poet “risks” the word means that “undecidability” as to the origin of meaning remains inscribed in the very structure of our languages. The word could bear greeting from the holy which opens the wedding festival of men and gods. But there could prove to be no word at all, no “firm law” and no “intimacy” of the mediating origin (94-5/72-4). Undecidability with respect to the origin to come is thus not what is at stake here; Heidegger no

255 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 168.
256 Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics, 167.
less than Caputo acknowledges the particularity and contingency of his interpretive retrieval of the poet. What is at stake, rather, is the issue of whether the fact of such undecidability must entail that no particular retrieval of the tradition can be normative in relation to others. To make this inference one must assume the very stance of critical rationality that I think Heidegger has shown to be impossible. As James K. A. Smith convincingly argues, Caputo adopts Jacques Derrida’s (Enlightenment) assumption that contingency and particularity equates to exclusionary violence. But as Smith, Milbank, and others have argued, there is no a priori reason to accept this (mythic) construal of difference over an alternative envisioning of a fundamental identity in the harmonious ordering of difference. I think that the best currents in Heidegger’s thought are those which make room for just such a conception.

Moreover, in his later work on religion Caputo affirms the “absolute anteriority” of the “historical messianisms” to the existential structure of messianic hope for the impossible. Caputo rightly questions the notion that particular religious traditions are inherently separable from the existential structures of experience disclosed in them. No more than the unique subjectivity of a person could be isolated and separated from the bodily existence which instantiates and unfolds it, so determine religious traditions are more than mere vehicles of an extractable universal experience. In all of their historical particularity, these traditions are in some respect the very condition for the disclosure of existential structures. Thus, as Caputo notes, “In just the way a religious sensibility resists the translation of the God of Abraham into the God of philosophy, one ought to resist the translation of Abrahamic messianism into a universal messianic, which would in the end be just more philosophy.”

Abraham’s faith in the impossible cannot be translated into universal terms, into the “rational” faith of Enlightenment modernity.

How then can one speak of religion philosophically? Caputo proposes adopting the young Heidegger’s strategy of formal indication. As he notes, “In a formal indication, the individual, the singularity, is not take as an instance or example of the universal, does not become a subsumable specimen of an unchanging species. Rather, the singular is affirmed in all of its

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258 Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, 137.
singularity, respected in all of the richness of its idiosyncratic *haecceitas*, this-ness.”

Thusly, Caputo claims to point toward the universal at play in the determinate messianisms. Caputo still contends that the formally indicative strategy cannot remain *formally* neutral with respect to religion but must amount to its own sort of existential engagement with the matter at hand. He recognizes that “the Derridean messianic does have certain determinable features, some of which—e.g., its being turned to the *à-venir*—it has borrowed from the prophetic tradition, and some of which are Derrida’s own invention.” Derrida’s (and Caputo’s) messianisms are particular instantiations that have “emerged under determinate historical conditions.” Caputo thus claims that deconstruction is a kind of faith that “takes the form of a certain re-ligious responsibility to what is coming, to what does not exist.” The difference between Caputo’s deconstructive faith and what he calls “fundamentalist religions” is that the former keeps a safe distance from everything determinate and “from ever letting its faith be a faith in a determinate thing or person, from ever contracting the *tout autre* within the horizons of the same.” This is a religious way of thinking, to be sure, but it attempts to keep religion within the bounds of reason, lest it break out in another violent fundamentalism. Philosophy must become religious, but only in order to re-inscribe religion within the terms of (critical) reason.

But if, as I have argued, it is by no means clear that we must accept the terms of critical, secularizing reason into which Caputo inscribes his religion – following Caputo’s own logic, there is no inherent reason to suppose that *this* mode of religion, *this* attitude of rational distancing from determinacy as such bears any privileged access to the essence of the religious – then we return once again to the insurmountable primacy of speculative disclosure of the origin within language and of the need to follow some aesthetic or “poetic” sensibility. Moreover, the attitude of critical reason may in fact prove *uncritically* to deny religious aspiration for an origin that discloses itself in the intimacy of life.

It is here that I propose reading Heidegger in another light, neither that of a pure phenomenology of givenness nor that of a deconstructive religion without religion. While Heidegger’s philosophy can certainly lend itself to these readings (I have no interest in

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preserving an orthodox Heideggerian view), as I have shown, the latter readings miss radical elements of Heidegger’s thought which can be positively construed otherwise. I began this chapter by referring to Gadamer’s appropriation of Heidegger’s thought in the direction of a speculative hermeneutics. In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that this creative and experimental appropriation of Heidegger – another “circling back” so to speak on the fundamental matter of his thought – in fact helps attune us to the resonances of Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion with the theological notion of the incarnation. Heidegger’s thought, it can be shown, importantly rejuvenates the philosophical import of this notion as a way of sharpening the question of “being,” i.e. of the opening of time and language. Conversely, Heidegger’s own reflections on the holiness of life and the opening of a place for the divine can be brought into fruitful dialogue with theology in pursuit of an understanding of the holy.

5.4 Retrievals: Heidegger and Philosophical Theology

I have argued that Heidegger’s thinking is deeply religious. The movement that begins in the earliest works from the “ground-up” retrieval and repetition of religious life in philosophical transformation into questioning awe and wonder at the very event or happening of being, reaches its fulfillment only where the transcendent “otherness” to which religious traditions point is experienced in the moment that transforms the very terms by which we ourselves come to understand the world. If philosophy reflectively “circles back,” so to speak, to think the matter to which religion “poetically” points us, still the transformative movement is completed only in the consummation of the religious. This consummation takes the form of a leap into the origin, into the opening of the possibility for language as simultaneously the speech of mortals and of gods. Without the poetic unfolding of the spaces and times of human dwelling, the gods cannot be gods. Without gods, all our mortal endeavours on the earth and under the sky come to naught, for then all “natural” potencies are but the will to power. Thinking must continually take inspiration from the religious aspiration of the poet and prepare for the transformative leap.

I thus concur with Ben Vedder’s conclusion that after his critique of onto-theo-logy there remains a kind of theological significance of Heidegger’s thinking:
“Heidegger’s interpretation of the poetic word has a theological element in it. He places the theological element of thinking in the poetical work of the poet. Heidegger’s philosophy thus has its own theology within the thinking of being. Theologos, theologia mean at this point the mytho-poetic utterance about the gods / The saying of the poet is only possible when he listens to the word. The poet knows that he or she is called by the gods in order to praise their name. This implies that the poet at first has to be a listener, to know how to receive and to get the word like a gift and an endowment. Theologia in this respect is at first instance a praising that springs from the experience that it is called, without a connection to a dogma or a church. This poetical theologia does not ask for the first cause of the totality of entities. This theologia is the song that is sung by the poet.”

“Theology” refers, neither to scientific grounding and representation of God (onto-theology), nor to reflection on the dogmas and practices of a church for the sake of cultivating common life. It refers here to the word that attunes human beings in response to the divine that calls them. In Heidegger’s philosophy, the poet is the theologian par excellence who “gathers together all the possibilities of the deity” and “shows what it means for God to be God.” The poet helps human beings envision and anticipate the impossible arrival of a word that is not their own, a word that transforms their entire manner of being-in-the-world. This word cannot be controlled, cannot be forced into the aims of instrumental or even higher order self-determining reason.

But though the word that gathers together things and world, the word of a god who alone can save us, cannot be placed in a frame (Gestell), cannot be confined to the finite logos of subjective self-determination, yet one may still ask whether one could countenance something like the speculative unfolding of this word. Is there room for philosophical articulation of the word of the poet? Can philosophy say anything about the divine, about its other? Heidegger himself admits this possibility where he speaks in the language of thinking that which the poet utters theologically.

I argue that Heidegger points to the possibility for philosophical discourse about the divine which is neither simply objective nor simple pre-reflective utterance. I contend that

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Heidegger’s philosophical treatment of the poet is analogous to the way in which older theological traditions develop thought of originary human being with respect to an extra-philosophical “prophetic” utterance. Heidegger’s thought thus in fact admits the possibility of a philosophical theology, though one that must reckon with the thinker’s “identification” of the utter contingency of finite “happening to be” and the irreducible character of language. I argue secondly that a certain speculative development of Heidegger’s own notion of the intimacy of the holy resonates with the traditional notion of the incarnation of divine Logos.

5.4.1 Philosophical Theology and the Thought of Being

Heidegger’s thinking of being contends with the paradox of human being, i.e. that we ourselves creatively unfold the very existence into which we find ourselves inscribed. Heidegger thus identifies no central category of human subjectivity except the paradoxical idea that human beings must respond to the very existence that they most fundamentally are. The response cannot be anything distinct from the existence itself, just as the latter is constituted only in response. In *Being and Time* Heidegger contends that the “call” of being arises in one’s taking over what one has been in the transformative moment where one confronts the radical break in the continuity of self-grasping. Dasein confronts the limit of its grasp of itself in death or the unspeakable nothing that ruptures the finite and holds it in the ecstatic tension of the temporal moment (BT 437/SZ, 385). The later Heidegger contends that human confrontation with the “nothing” of its own existence in fact marks the opening of language and time and of the site for the greeting of the holy origin that opens mortals to the possibility of a repetition that repeatedly grounds the self-grasping transcendence of finitude “beyond” death. But thought of the event-character of this opening prevents philosophy from pointing to anything that grounds the paradoxical contingency of human self-response outside of or beyond this existence itself.

Does philosophical theology obfuscate this paradoxical contingency? Quite the contrary, I have argued that since Heidegger himself must admit some theology into his thinking, there is no restrictive limit of theological thinking as such except the inherent freedom of human being
which the thinker can indicate only in the horizon of its “poetic” utterance.\textsuperscript{266} We might add, with Paul Ricoeur, that the poetic has a \textit{narrative} dimension: human beings articulate (\textit{auslegen}) their lives, temporalize their experience, as a sort of lived narrative that resolves the aporias of existence in the horizon of a creative mimesis.\textsuperscript{267} This “resolution” is possible only where the interpretive unfolding of existence holds itself to be the articulation of something essentially true and binding (i.e. unconditional).

Following Gadamer, I called such resolution of lived aporias the speculative dimension of language. These thinkers unpack Heidegger’s notion that our mode of being \textit{historical} is simultaneously and irreducibly metaphysical in the sense of projecting some understanding of the truth of “what is.” But rather than obscuring the radically ungrounded character of our metaphysical response to the happening of being, philosophical theology might in fact open the way for authentic response to this happening within the speculative unfolding of language itself.

As I argued in this study, Heidegger rejects the idea that the unconditional element in our experience of language can be articulated in any purely formal way outside the horizon of human dwelling opened through poetic utterance. It is the poet, not the thinker, who articulates the condition of experience, the “measure” of human dwelling – thus, an ineliminable theological element in human speculative response to what is (“....Poetically Man Dwells....” PLT 219/GA 7, 198-99). \textit{Philosophical} theology would attempt to develop this element of theological response with attentiveness to the irreducible paradox of the situation of human being and language. I contend that the ancient Christian notion of the incarnation exemplifies just this process, and that the notion itself provides powerful impetus to the project of a phenomenology of religion. I

\textsuperscript{266} Hence, as I argued in Chapter 2, Heidegger’s indebtedness to Schelling is quite evident in his later work.

\textsuperscript{267} However, I think that Ricoeur shrinks back from the fully \textit{speculative} and thus universalizing thrust of mimesis, and as a consequence tends (in the wake of the Frankfurt school) to fall into a quasi-Kantian affirmation of the transcendental limit-concept policing the boundaries of legitimate tradition in the name of an absolute without content. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. 3, 226.

\textsuperscript{268} Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, Vol. 1, 52-75. Ricoeur’s thesis: “[T]ime becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (52).
5.4.2 Towards an incarnational phenomenology

I conclude this study by investigating the way in which Heidegger’s thought might open the way toward phenomenological retrieval of the notion of the incarnation and by asking whether Heidegger himself anticipates this notion in his thought. I begin with some general reflections on Heidegger’s (later) notion of bodily being.

The paradoxical contingency of human existence, the freedom to inscribe ourselves in/as the very bodily and temporal being that we are, is such that we are thrown into the “speculative” necessity of resolving this aporetic identity with reference to the ontically finite. As I argued in Chapter 4, one unique aspect of Heidegger’s interpretation of metaphysics is the insight that a construal of “what is” begins on the level of our bodily being-in-the-world. In an important respect, we live out an implicit understanding of the truth of being through the very ways in which we measure out the places and times of human dwelling. In his important, late Zollikon seminars Heidegger develops the notion of the bodying-forth of Dasein. The human being ecstatically moves out into its involvement with things in the world as an irreducibly embodied existence. Hence the human being articulates itself as an existing identity through the particular bodily rituals that orient it to world (ZS, 231-34). Our understanding of the world is thus rooted in the aesthetic of bodily being. We are constitutively the performance of a particular metaphysical response to being as such. Our understanding of being cannot be separated from the collective rituals that shape our sense of who we are as individual selves and as members of a community.

The encroachment in modern technology of the violent reduction of everything, including human life, to mere resources and objects of use in our now globalized systems of exploitation is thus rooted in the collective rituals that shape our being-in-the-world. Heidegger’s notion of Gelassenheit entails the fully active, embodied response to the coming to be of things without any reactive response against their free rising into being. Gelassenheit is the opposition of unnatural exploitation: It remains in its own freedom in a way analogous to the way in which, for example, “The birch tree never oversteps its possibility. The colony of bees dwells in its possibility” (EP, 109/GA 7, 96). Heidegger’s concern is that the performative ontology bequeathed to us by modernity does not run ‘with the grain,’ so to speak, of the “unnoticeable law of the earth” (109/96). “Technology drives the earth beyond the developed sphere of its
possibility into such things which are no longer a possibility and are thus the impossible” (109/96). An example of this might be the relation to land mediated to us through mechanized agriculture and our ceaseless, year-round demand for non-seasonal goods. Modern humanity fails to work with the rhythms of seasons and climate, not to mention local farming cultures, with the consequence that in the attempt better to secure our own existence, we undermine its very possibility. That which makes possible the “truth” of our being as mortals on the earth is “inviolable” (109). It can be neither grasped nor manipulated.

As I argued, religion plays a central role in Heidegger’s articulation of a way beyond the reactive and nihilistic metaphysics of technological will to power. Human beings anticipate the greeting of the holy as the opening of a world where earth and sky, mortals and divinities find the place of mutual grounding. But Heidegger also speaks of the holy as an overflowing source and of the flash of the god as the sending of an unspeakable origin. The holy intimately arrives to human beings within the fourfold. In 1935 Heidegger speaks of nature (physis) as the “conflict that prevailed prior to everything divine and human” (IM, 62/GA 40, 66-7). Yet physis also bears the sense of “that which emerges into the light” and which comes to stand in and of itself (71/75-6). It is both what emerges as conflict and what endures in standing forth. There is thus a sense in Heidegger in which physis is not sheer flux but an emergent (though inherently unstable) harmony of presence and absence (IM, 72/GA 40, 77). Nature is ecstatic emergence. In what respect, then, can Heidegger speak of an overflowing origin? As William Desmond contends, Heidegger does wish to think the “unthought” emergence of being, but asks whether this amounts to an origin at all: “If we simply say, there is an unthought, then our thought risks incoherence. We mitigate this incoherence if the unthought is the other of thought, to which we are philosophically unfaithful if we conceive of philosophy as exclusively thought thinking itself.”269 If the unthought simply cannot be thought at all, because it is nothing, then in what respect has nihilism been overcome?

Here I submit that Heidegger’s intimation of an intimate origin lends phenomenological weight to important currents of reflection in philosophical theology. This would be amount to thought of the origin as innermost identity of the unconditional source with our own self-

receiving and self-appropriating as finite agents. Here there is no “distance” between the origin and the fully embodied temporal phenomenon of human desire. Yet, erotic, self-transcending longing for the “other” that is characteristic of finite being would be fulfilled, neither in its being crossed out and rendered as nothing to preserve the unconditional gift (as Marion supposes), nor in the ultimate integration of every other into thought thinking itself (onto-the-o-logy). As William Desmond argues, the ecstatic self-transcending of our finite existence would be “possibilized,” i.e. enacted as being for itself, proceeding from the origin as the “giving to be of what is not the origin in itself.”

Desmond argues that this “creational” logic does not defy the philosophical thought of the absolute contingency of being but in fact sharpens this perspective. For the “nothing” may very well name the release of finite “happening” or coming to be in its utter singularity from an “overdeterminate” source, a “superplus power of origination.” Intimate origin may be the name of the absolute, utterly transcendent and yet overflowing as the gift of being into the origination of all that is finite.

How can the idea of the identity of the origin with its temporal unfolding be compatible with the notion that temporal happening is given to be from an origin? Is this not to suggest that we think the impossible? One could say, with Desmond, that what is needed is the sort of thinking that presses itself against its own limits, brings itself to the point of perplexity, in order to allow “witness to what exceeds finiteness.”

We might even say that this sort of thinking at the limits of thinking, pushing into poetic utterance about what it means to be finite in relation to an infinite source, resembles Heidegger’s thinking in relation to Hölderlin. But why press for this sort of thought? Of what philosophical importance is it, especially after Heidegger’s critique of other-wordly metaphysics?

More pointedly, do we arrive back in the metaphysics that posits an instance prior to the opening of being and language? I argue that this is not the case. As John Milbank argues, within phenomenology, we might suppose that human finitude in all of its bodily and temporal being is the “image” of a self-giving origin which hides itself in complete incarnate identity with this instantiation. Furthermore, because there is no getting beyond or outside of the necessarily

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273 I extend my thanks to Andrew J. Mitchell for pushing me on this point.
contextual nature of meaning, and thus because every sign always admits of an excluded
difference, we could further conjecture that incarnate identity of the finite with the origin is
always partially incomplete, always ecstatically receiving the condition of what it has been from
further moments of self-giving plenitude. Phenomenologically, finite freedom must regard
itself as the only absolute. But we have seen that it must also acknowledge an irreducible
“elsewhere”, the infinite that outstrips all of our finite projects and concerns. This paradox is the
very limit or opening of language. Yet, instead of the Enlightenment logic that supposes that any
finite instantiation is bound to failure in virtue of its being finite, we might speculate that every
finite instantiation incarnates the infinite absolute that repeatedly gives itself. This would entail,
as John Milbank eloquently argues, that difference is not necessarily violent opposition and
exclusion but rather mutual invitation for an ecstatic blending together (unity in difference) in
further moments which can first be only received. We have already seen how Kierkegaard
philosophically underwrites the notion of the giving up of oneself and one’s most intimate
relations, not for the sake of a greater whole, but for the sake of receiving this life back in a
greater magnitude of harmony with the whole of existence.

Thus, there is room in phenomenology for speculative discourse about the divine for two
basic reasons. The first is that, as I have shown, the Enlightenment construal of difference is not
without its own particular metaphysical investments, and so it cannot in principle rule out an
alternative construal on the basis of some pretense to being more critical or less prejudiced by
guiding assumptions. Secondly, I have argued that speculative discourse about an incarnate
infinite captures some of Heidegger’s best phenomenological intuitions and offers a unique non-
violent account of difference beyond Western nihilism. Yet, we might still seek clarification of
the notion of divine Logos in relation to human logos. Phenomenologically, how does the idea of
the incarnation help account for human language without collapsing it into formalistic
metaphysics? How does language take shape in actual human life? Maurice Merleau-Ponty
proves a useful ally in helping flesh out this theme implicit in Heidegger.

5.4.3 “Fleshing out” the Incarnation

274 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 212.
I argue here that, while Heidegger partially develops a phenomenology of divine word in his mediations on Hölderlin, we can begin to develop the sense of **bodily being** of the incarnation with reference to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Between these thinkers the point is rather the same: Finite existence is the locus or site for a kind of folding of the infinite into itself. But finite existence is not thereby mere illusion or something less real than absolute form. It is rather the real articulation of infinite being. As real, the articulation is absolute, i.e. it is the free contingency of “being” independent of any determining a priori. Yet this embodied existence necessarily takes shape through its interaction with other articulations of being. We see how phenomenologically a compelling case can be made for the originative embodiment of absolute freedom to be in relational articulations between mutually embodied finite agencies.

Merleau-Ponty is characteristically more attentive than Heidegger to the way in which bodily posturing shapes our particular way of experiencing and relating to the world on a pre-reflective level. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the existential life of the agent, his being-in-the-world, is essentially bound up in aspects of bodily existence – such as sight, hearing, and sexuality – that are “anonymously given,” i.e. are ontologically prior to the existing agent as his conditions of possibility for being, despite the fact that these bodily dimensions are constituted as such only in their manifestation as the personal existence of the agent.\(^\text{276}\) This point comes in the context of Merleau-Ponty’s description of the sexual being of the agent as belonging to that phenomenon of “comprehension” that takes place on a level of bodily existence prior to the understanding (in the Kantian sense of the assimilation of the particular under the general category). Much like Heidegger’s notion of the understanding (*Verstehen*), Merleau-Ponty’s notion of erotic comprehension has to do here with the pre-reflective level of our being-in-the-world.\(^\text{277}\) Before I think about the world, I already find myself reflexively involved in it in such a way that it conditions my very being as a self. Merleau-Ponty stresses the bodily level of this reflexivity, the flesh that touches itself in touching the other, so to speak.

Thus for Merleau-Ponty, existential involvement with the world or “original intentionality” is primarily **embodied**; the body is Merleau-Ponty’s term for the locus of

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\(^\text{276}\) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 160.

perception or pre-reflective understanding. It defines a fundamentally affective way of relating that is neither strictly rooted in biological causation nor strictly psychic in quality. For Merleau-Ponty, experience of the world has an erotic quality rooted in the agent’s desiring aim at another body. The point is that intentionality, rooted in the body, “follows the general flow of existence and yields to its movements.” Merleau-Ponty examines the case of a particular subject – Schneider – who has lost the power of erotic attraction, of “projecting before himself a sexual world, of putting himself in an erotic situation, or, once such a situation is stumbled upon, of maintaining it or following it through to complete satisfaction.” The subject subsequently has lost any capacity to yield to the erotic “movements” of existence. He cannot “throw himself” into a creative pursuit – such as thinking about politics or religion – in an improvising manner that makes original moves. In Heidegger’s language, we might say that this agent is held back from the kind of poetic existence that characterizes human life. Merleau-Ponty’s point is that to be human is to be this “perpetual incarnation” of bodily being in layers of expression that open up possibilities for having meaningful relations. Alternatively, it is to be an expressive body that brings meanings (i.e. possibilities for being) into existence through actual relations. Merleau-Ponty’s version of the hermeneutic circle is thus between the “meaning” and “expression” of embodied existence and existing embodiment.

What is interesting for our purposes is that Merleau-Ponty intimates the way in which religious worship is bound up in the bodily being of the agent and perhaps even the collective being of a community. In the context of his discussion of the phenomenon of the (involuntary) loss of voice, Merleau-Ponty notes that embodied intentionality can lead the agent into a situation that is neither an inevitable outcome or effect of a “cause” nor simply posited or voluntary. He uses the example of sleeping, where the body “transforms ideas into things, and my mimicry of sleep into real sleep.” Sleep is neither an inevitable outcome of the bodily posturing (e.g. lying down on the bed on one’s side in the dark), nor is it simply willed or chosen. Rather, “There is a moment when sleep ‘comes’, settling on this imitation of itself which


278 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 157
282 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166.
I have been offering to it, and I succeed in becoming what I was trying to be.”284 In passing, Merleau-Ponty also makes the provocative suggestion that even religious worship works much in this way, on a level “below” that of the will.

As the faithful, in the Dionysian mysteries, invoke the god by miming scenes from his life, I call up the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper. The god is actually there when the faithful can no longer distinguish themselves from the part they are playing, when their body and their consciousness cease to bring in, as an obstacle, their particular opacity, and when they are totally fused in myth.285

Though Merleau-Ponty does not devote an extended discussion to the theme of religion, we see here the structure of a performative ontology, where the mythic and symbolic content of the story about the god is enacted through the bodily posturing of the worshipper. Indeed, the mode of being of the god is through its enactment in the bodily rituals of the worshipper. The god is seamlessly present in the ritual in the way in which the music is in its performance.

If for Heidegger, it is primarily the words of the poet that embodies the presence of the gods in this way, Merleau-Ponty suggests that there is also ritual basis for the enactment of this presence. Of note is the fact that the community thereby embodies a particular mythic way of relating to the world as to the presence of the divine. The myth, we might say, puts into practice through ritual worship an ontological understanding, an interpretation of being or “what there is” and “what is true.”

It might sound as though I am making a relativist claim with respect to the “reality” of gods. There are as many gods as there are different mythic-ritual enactments. On some level this is true. But to say that the “being” of the god is nothing outside of the ritual enactment is not to say that it is reducible to the pure form of the enactment. Heidegger would concur: The gods in fact need the opening of being (Da-sein) established by human beings in order to be presence. Where, as in much of modernity, entire contexts that support religious life are broken up and dissipated, the gods have fled. But this thought does not by itself entail the further thought that the gods are nothing besides human creations. There is arguably something profoundly “given” in the music of Mozart that cannot be chalked up to Mozart’s creation or the work of some

284 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 163-4.
285 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 163.
particularly talented conductor of an orchestra. Likewise, the god is the referential given in the activity of worship whose reality *discloses itself* (or not) in the transformation of an existential situation, only in this context. The being or reality of the god and of musical meaning is fundamentally relational, incarnated in the mutual ordering of bodies in worship. Divine Logos *requires* the instantiation of finite embodiment in order to “appear” finitely; its reality is caught up in the particular locus of a body, and yet it also transcends this locus as the relational meaning that constitutes every determinacy in its being.

Jay Lampert signals another important problem for how to understand the phenomenon of the divine in the context of his discussion of Jean-Luc Marion’s saturated phenomenon. Lampert phenomenologically affirms the givenness of an excess of possibility over the actual instance of presence. He is ready to accept the idea that revelation of God or of some god might be “the reception of a self-transforming moment, with a call to an ethical future,” analogous to the phenomenon of the decision. In this case, the reality of the god would consist entirely in the modality of possibility, and not in the actual presence of any particular form or figure. When through my active reception of some form of life to which I am called – whether, for example, in my attraction to the loved one; my absorption into some humanitarian cause; or in my conversion to a religion – I am caught up and transformed in the decisive moment, then in some respect we might say that something beyond me has given itself. But in the case of the religious conversion, it is not entirely clear to what the intuitive fulfillment refers, if one holds that God or the god is a possible *actuality*. Lampert thus notes that, “it seems [...] that possibility-as-such leaves no significant room for hope or promise in theology.” Lampert continues: “God will have arrived as much as He is ever going to, which is to say fully, but on a separate but parallel, or staggered, ‘surplus’, temporal track from that of the actual world.”

But then why not treat religious narratives and myths which make reference to divine agency as metaphorical ways of signalling the irreducible givenness that forms part of meaning?

It is not that Lampert rejects phenomenological exploration of theology or of the claims of religious experience. He notes, again in discussing Marion’s ideas, “Hermeneutically, it is unavoidable that saturated phenomena like love or gift be given through religious figures and

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286 Jay Lampert, “Do the Arguments for Saturated Phenomena prove that they are Possible or Necessary? Time to Decide. *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*. The Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, 38-9, 42.
biblical episodes, which stimulate saturated possibilities,” but asks, “why would phenomenology think it is possible to stop for good at one such figure and not pass serially through other saturation-stimulating figures as well, in effect syncretising religions?” If God is exclusive of other gods, then it is an object, which our rejection of onto-theo-logy seems to rule out. On the other hand, if God (or the holy) is simply poetic expression of the neutral phenomenon of givenness, then “we might as well be secular phenomenologists.”

I agree with Lampert that if phenomenology is to make adequate sense of the notion of the divine, then there must be some meaningful way of articulating the form of this experience. If the divine is sheer possibility, then it does not make sense to maintain, as religions do, that gods are in some respect actual presences in the world. On the other hand, if religious figures are in some respect the actual instantiation of the divine whose possibility for manifestation exceeds any particular figure, then why not concede (as with Nietzsche) that these figures belong in a series of analogies and differentiations that rests on no one paradigm case of revelation? Indeed, Heidegger is quite prepared to acknowledge just this, namely that gods are binding normative claims that befall human beings. But particular gods merely attune human beings to the dimension of height, of divinity as simply the arrival of the possibility (of its own accord) of the realization of an historical people. But if such is the case, then the arrival of divinity continues beyond the attunement of and to particular figures of gods. In some respect, the particular gods must flee in order to achieve the sending of their very essence, which is the possibility of mutual dwelling of human beings in their unknown essence.

Yet, Heidegger continues to stress that this essence of godness is not merely nothing but belongs to the positive (though self-concealing) origin of both existential transformation and the opening of possibility as such. The god, then, is not merely existential transformation, but actualizes precisely as the mediation that sustains such transformation in “being”. Simply put, we then “see” the god manifest in the mundane successes of human traditions, e.g. marriage, which require both the continual “decision” of agents involved to continue on in it and the mysterious receiving of a gift or the granting of the possibility of such a reality. I have argued that phenomenology must in fact acknowledge this positive origin as the very essence of

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287 Lampert, 43.
givenness and that, to do so, it must have recourse to another mood beyond of outside that of pure reason. Heidegger shows why this origin cannot simply be an actuality, for it is the hidden “depth” in being that conceals itself in the disclosure of beings. But neither, I argue, can it be pure possibility if it is to be the beginning which repeats itself in the events of disclosure. The possible-as-such cannot be the origin of the actual or of the moment of transition from the possible to the actual, what Heidegger calls *Ermöglichkeit*. The question is not whether there is an actual origin, but of whether the givenness of any transition through actuality from possibility to possibility can stand in its character as positive disclosure. It does not seem to me that the attitude of pure reason can account for the disclosure of any givenness as such since nothing is uncontestably shown to it. The actuality of any given object cannot be fixed upon because it is the moment of transition from given possibilities into act, which immediately passes over again into another given range of possibilities. There therefore “is” only the continued possibility of repeating this ungraspable moment of transition from possibility to act. The possibility already exceeds itself as this particular possibility: It is already the difference of continued future possibilities from the one brought into enactment, the ontological difference. But the sheer difference of an excess of possibility already contained in the first possibility that has been enacted into being cannot itself ground the transition unless it is already also the positive principle of unity.

The given is therefore always includes an excess of possibility beyond the merely inertly given as actual. But reason cannot lay claim to anything beyond the transition which itself vanishes. “Being” for pure reason is finally nothing, “or a series of claims to ‘identity’ which always have to invoke a fictional metaphysical background to secure themselves.” In this respect, it would seem that the gods, however necessary, must endlessly be sacrificed to achieve a glimpse of the whole. Gods certainly point us into the freedom of our *Da-sein* as the very ecstatic transition in the disclosure of being itself. But gods are surpassed in the transition. It makes sense on this reading to argue that the death of God is an essential aspect of any and every god’s disclosure.

Yet in order to salvage Heidegger’s claim to originative thinking as leap into the positive principle of unity, I have argued that the disclosive mood of something like faith is in fact

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required. If it is the case that reason alone cannot prove any positive excess outside of a deeper disclosive mood, then as John Milbank argues, it has no rational grounds for judging positively that reason enjoys “a privileged relation” to the universal over faith. That is “tantamount,” Milbank argues, “to saying that only philosophy objectively ‘sees’ what is involved in mood, thereby bringing irreducible religious attitudes, convictions of desire, of faith, and so forth inappropriately under the sway of knowledge, such that only reason and not mood after all can unravel mood in all its subjectivity to itself.”

Thus, not only does reason have no strict claim over the reception of a neutral given, there is no proof that the “Gnostic” mood of disclosure (i.e. the idea that reason shows the deep structures of phenomena prior to any faith) is any more objective than the mood of faith. And if reception of the real depends on a kind of trust that it will prove benign and wholly appropriate to human beings are as free, creative agencies – like a personal greeting of the holy – then the stance of faith is better suited to this task.

But what of the problem of divine disclosure? Must the manifestness of any God if it is to be named be the endless indeterminacy of possibility as such or else the inevitability of syncretised theology with many gods? Thomas Langan argues that the originative element in Heidegger’s thought cannot be explained finally as nothing if there is to be any non-absurd positive sense of mystery (Geheimnis) in being and consequently any real meaning for human life outside of arbitrary creation in the face of absurdity. For this reason human language must itself bear witness to the promise of an inexplicable source of given meaning. Language itself is the “trust” that this source will arrive to greet human beings as the absolute aim implicit in their doings. Moreover, Heidegger speaks of an originative thinking as belonging to the disclosive event wherein things are brought to show up in their essential possibilities. Heidegger’s reference to the mystery of being as releasement (Gelassenheit) toward things is meant to signal the presence of something not endlessly postponed but in part actually present in beings because already begun. Heidegger in fact struggles with the problem of the arrival of the universal positive in the particular. The poet names the holy, that which is completely unknowable in its otherness to human beings, in poetizing the figure of the divine. The gods to be known must

291 See Lampert, “Do the Arguments for Saturated Phenomena prove that they are Possible or Necessary?” 45n58.
arrive somehow within the sphere of the same, within the temporal horizon opened up as historical Da-sein. The gods are known only in their pointing human beings into the unreachable source. Yet with the endless proliferation of gods, it must be the case that indeterminacy and thus the death of God is the true meaning of the divine. But here (as I argued in Chapter 4) the death of God means also the death of non-arbitrary meaning and identity as such.²⁹³ The last God is precisely the ineliminable trace of concealment in things that hints at human beings, ushering them into the transforming play of world and thing “given” in/as the overflowing origin. The origin remains itself the mystery of the opening of relationality, the “interface of the limited with the beyond,” as Andrew J. Mitchell puts it.²⁹⁴

An alternative is to affirm the positive mystery of a universal identity of relation in all things which remains radically open to completion. There is no more endless series of gods but the one, infinitely repeated origin. This repetition remains radically open to the embrace and arrival of the other in ecstatically emerging continuity and harmony. In a sense, the disclosure of the divine just is this ethical possibility, always partially postponed, but always in part realized in concrete arrival.²⁹⁵ I have argued that a phenomenology which takes seriously the implications of a theological construal of identity in difference is better poised to understand religion than much of the thought in modernity. There is of course much more to unfold in this vein. But I hope to have shown that Heidegger’s philosophy in fact primes phenomenological thought to needed reflection on these themes.

5.5 Conclusion: Directions for Phenomenology of Religion

I have argued in this chapter that Heidegger’s questioning of being is rather a more radical safeguarding of the originary structure of language from dogmatically metaphysical encroachments than what we find in the phenomenological work of Marion and Caputo. Inspired by Gadamer, and following patterns established by William Desmond and John Milbank, I

²⁹⁵ Thus, for all of my reservations about Jean-Luc Marion expressed in this chapter, I am in fundamental agreement with him that genuine naming of givenness is a Eucharistic practice.
sketched out an alternative possibility for a phenomenological interpretation of religion. Of course, much work has yet to be done fully to flesh out the possibilities and implications of this phenomenology. My task was to steer the direction of interpretation of Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion toward its radical potential as a critique of modern philosophy.
Conclusion: Thinking with Heidegger beyond Heidegger

I have argued in this study that Heidegger’s philosophy of religion opens the way for a religious philosophizing. Heidegger is a profound thinker of the un-thought of the philosophical tradition, the *absolute* object of both religion and philosophy. His thinking is an attempt to articulate the mythic root of religion and philosophy, rejuvenating and refreshing both of these human pursuits. I argued that, in keeping with the very matter of Heidegger’s thinking, there is room for an elaboration of the task of phenomenology of religion within the imaginative space opened by the poetic and by speculative accounts of the infinite. Thus, my thinking *with* Heidegger is also, in a certain respect, thinking *beyond* Heidegger in two respects.

First, I follow the thinker’s call to retrieve the essential matter of religion reflectively in a manner appropriate to it. This way of thinking respects the insights of Heidegger’s thought of being into the irreducibility of language as the necessity of human response to the unconditional event of being as such. But this way persistently asks whether Heidegger unfairly rules out the possibility that “Christendom” in the West can develop its own critical and creative response to the problems posed by onto-theo-logical metaphysics and of technological modernity. To the extent to which the possibility of just this sort of response to nihilism remains, I think with Heidegger beyond Heidegger.

Secondly, my interpretation of Heidegger is not without critical edge. I affirm Heidegger’s retrieval of the holy and of the place of the gods in human life as his attempt to recovery the place of the religious in our late modern age driven by the pragmatic bottom line. But I ask how human beings can persistently dwell with a sense of the intimate holiness of life. I have asked whether such intimacy requires the notion of final identity of the divine sending of being with the human. One might conjecture (with Augustine and Kierkegaard) that this intimacy of identity would require that logos embody within it the incarnate *person* of a divine sending, of a holy greeting, which is more than *merely* human. The Christian notion of incarnation fleshes out, so to speak, the notion of a primal, poetic word. Thus, I think beyond Heidegger to the extent that I attempt to retrieve and complete what I take to be his best and most prayerful thought.
Appendix

Figure 1: The Formal Indication of Factical Life

Repetition Forward (Actualization of Possibilities)

Ground-up Retrieval

\textit{Praestruktion:} Sketching out modes of being

Guiding Preconception

\textit{Destruktion:} Dismantling concepts

Circling-back

Content-sense

Relational-sense

Actualization-sense

World

Care

Moment

Fulfillment of Senses (Holding Open Possibilities)


