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Speaking and Thinking about God in Rosenzweig and Heidegger

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Speaking and Thinking about God in Rosenzweig and Heidegger

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In the early twentieth century, many philosophers began to reject Kantian and Hegelian approaches to the question of God and the philosophy of religion. The challenge was then to formulate a new way of talking about God within philosophy without necessarily having to revert to pre-modern accounts. These thinkers saw the importance of retaining the insights of modernity while also taking into account the Romantic and post-Romantic critiques of modernism as a one-sided or overly rationalistic enterprise.

This dissertation seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the approaches of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Heidegger to rethinking the question of how philosophy is to proceed, especially in light of religious phenomena. Placing Rosenzweig and Heidegger in dialogue helps to further our understanding of both figures, particularly insofar as Rosenzweig’s thought might be used as a corrective to possible shortcomings in the later Heidegger. Many scholars have argued that there is something problematic about Heidegger’s religious thought, but Rosenzweig has been almost completely overlooked as an important corrective resource. Both Rosenzweig’s comprehensive account of the basic phenomena of human existence and his grammatical method
for formulating this account share many of Heidegger’s insights, yet surpass them insofar as Rosenzweig is able to address the topic in a more philosophically cogent manner.

Rosenzweig’s approach helps to illustrate that the mature Heidegger’s de-emphasizing of divine revelation in favor of the self-revealing of Being and the “flight of the gods” is ultimately too selective an approach to the phenomena in question, and too narrow in its historical focus on German and pagan Greek thought. Rosenzweig’s articulation of what he takes to be the historically concrete event of divine revelation, and the form of life that ensues therefrom, is thus a position that Heidegger should take seriously. Rosenzweig’s philosophical speech-thinking serves to articulate concretely lived Biblical revelation in a way that provides a particularly helpful example of what Heidegger was grasping towards in his mature attempts to go beyond traditional metaphysical language.
This dissertation by Paul Murphy Higgins fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in philosophy approved by Holger Zaborowski, D.Phil., as Director, and by Michael Rohlf, Ph.D., and John McCarthy, Ph.D., as Readers.

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Holger Zaborowski, D.Phil., Director

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Michael Rohlf, Ph.D., Reader

______________________________
John McCarthy, Ph.D., Reader
To Professor Bruce Foltz
The more we are assailed by the nothing that yawns around us like an abyss or that shapelessly, soullessly, and lovelessly haunts us and disperses us from a thousandfold belonging to society and the activity of men, the more passionate, intense, and violent must be the opposition from our side. Or must it not?

_Friedrich Hölderlin_

No alternative is more fundamental than the alternative: human guidance or divine guidance.

_Leo Strauss_
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................................................. v
List of Abbreviations........................................................................................................................................ vii
Acknowledgements........................................................................................................................................... xv
Introduction........................................................................................................................................................ 1
Chapter 1: Origins.............................................................................................................................................. 8
  Heidegger ................................................................................................................................................... 12
  Rosenzweig ................................................................................................................................................ 24
Chapter 2, Part 1: The *Beiträge* .................................................................................................................. 39
  On the Importance of the *Beiträge* ........................................................................................................... 39
  Defending My Approach to the *Beiträge* ................................................................................................. 45
  Introduction to the *Beiträge* .................................................................................................................... 50
  Heidegger’s Project ................................................................................................................................... 53
  Sheltering and Strife .................................................................................................................................. 59
  Poetry and the Sigetic as Sheltering ........................................................................................................ 64
Chapter 2, Part 2: God and the Gods ............................................................................................................. 73
  Ontotheology ............................................................................................................................................. 77
  The Theological Difference ....................................................................................................................... 88
  Holy, Godhead, and Last God .................................................................................................................. 91
  The Last God ............................................................................................................................................. 96
  Poetic Dialogue with Gods ...................................................................................................................... 101
  Last God as Pascalian Critique? ............................................................................................................. 103
  Last God as Pagan Theos? ...................................................................................................................... 108
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 113
Chapter 3: Speech-Thinking and Everyday Life .......................................................................................... 117
  Rosenzweig’s Project .............................................................................................................................. 119
  Introduction to *Star* ................................................................................................................................ 122
  Outline of *Star* ...................................................................................................................................... 126
  The *Star* ............................................................................................................................................... 131
  Everyday Life in Judaism ......................................................................................................................... 145
  Common Sense and the Johannine Age ................................................................................................. 150
  Conclusion: Towards Orthodoxy ........................................................................................................... 156
Chapter 4: Heidegger and Rosenzweig in Dialogue .................................................................................... 160
  Rosenzweig and Heidegger .................................................................................................................... 163
God and Philosophy ........................................................................................................................................ 165
The Fourfold and the Everyday .................................................................................................................. 179
Athens and Jerusalem ............................................................................................................................... 188
Personhood and Ereignis ........................................................................................................................ 192
Concluding Remarks ............................................................................................................................... 200
Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................... 206
List of Abbreviations

Martin Heidegger

The following list of abbreviations refer to Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975-), hereafter “GA.” When an English translation is available, I shall cite first the relevant page of the text in the GA edition, and then provide, in parentheses, the corresponding page number in the translation.

SS = summer semester
WS = winter semester
KNS = war-emergency semester


GA82 = Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen (soon to be published).


Letters


Other


Franz Rosenzweig


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Introduction

My view, which after all is shared by many others, is that European culture today is on the point of collapse and can only be saved if supra-European, suprahuman powers come to its aid.

*Rosenzweig*¹

Only a god can save us.

*Heidegger*²

The steady loss of traditional religion as the primary normative force in Western institutions over the course of modernity has led to a myriad of reactions and counter-reactions in theology, politics, philosophy, art, and nearly every other domain of human life. A significant proportion of philosophy since the advent of modernity is in some sense a reaction to, furtherance of, or attempt to overcome this transformation. The collapse of Enlightenment optimism in Western Europe (as developed by neo-Kantian culture philosophy) in the wake of World War I led to an intensification of the tensions between tradition and modernity. The hope of the leading lights of German intellectual life of completing the rationalist project had foundered almost entirely by 1917;


accordingly, the younger generation, including Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), could no longer take their teachers’ philosophy and theology seriously.

But how to respond? As Mark Lilla writes in a study of this period, the collapse of the rationalist Enlightenment project led to an astonishing ferment of reactions—in Germany alone, there was an explosion of interest in “eastern religion, Sufi poems, Norse saga, expressionism, the occult, theosophy, yoga, nudism, and vegetarianism.”³ In a purely academic context, the young intellectuals of the time had a variety of responses. Pessimism was common, while others returned to traditional (i.e., pre-Enlightenment) forms of religion or philosophy. Some revived an interest in those philosophers of the previous century who had already been working outside the Enlightenment project (such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who emphasized particularity and the subject), while others attempted to recover the German Romantic and early German Idealist vision of poetry, religion, philosophy, and politics as a holistic cultural unity, which often involved a freeing of God from liberal theology (or a rethinking of the divine altogether). The common idea, shared by many, was that a “new thinking” was needed, in some form or another.

Rosenzweig and Heidegger provide two of the most interesting philosophical reactions to the twilight of modernity in Weimar Germany. Rosenzweig learned of Heidegger’s work late in life, and wrote a short essay (“Transposed Fronts”) pointing toward commonalities in their thought; if he had known Heidegger’s work more thoroughly, he may well have been astonished at the extent of their similarities. It is somewhat surprising, in fact, that they did not meet. Both matriculated at the University of Freiburg at roughly the same time—they even studied under the same neo-Kantian philosopher, Heinrich Rickert, albeit a couple years apart—and they knew many other people in common, such as Leo Strauss.

Both Heidegger and Rosenzweig sought to break through the neo-Kantianism then in fashion in German universities by way of a shared list of influences (Hölderlin, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche), combating the neo-Kantian reduction of philosophy to ‘worldview’ and metaphysical dualism. Both rejected logic (as normally understood) as the organon of philosophy and attempted to rethink reason and logic on a new footing by using language in a new way, incorporating the resources of poetry and theology (as well as a hermeneutic focus on the living subject) into philosophy to formulate a new method of thinking. Both used Ereignis (event) as a new basis for theology and philosophy, and accordingly rethought essence as essencing, as a temporal event rather than static atemporal form.

While Heidegger initially turned to the Christian experience of Pauline communities and then to primal Greek poetry and thinking, Rosenzweig focused on Jewish liturgy and the Hebrew language—yet both were united in their attempt to retrieve ancient traditions while retaining modern insights, and both found themselves unable to have a simple or naïve faith in traditional religion (though Rosenzweig came far closer). Partially in Sein und Zeit and more clearly in his later work, one of Heidegger’s goals in asking the question of being was to recover a space for theology, to allow for a new thinking of faith outside of Christendom, freeing theology from ontotheology. Rosenzweig’s goal in the Star of Redemption was to combine philosophy with an account of the proper name of the believer called by God. The overriding concern of both thinkers, in their mature work, was to find a new way to speak about God and the divine in order to prepare a way to save Western culture, and they shared the conviction that philosophy hitherto had not been adequate to the task.

Alongside these correlations there are also some very striking differences. Although both turned to revelation, they understood the source and content of this revelation in wholly different ways. Similarly, both turn to a recovery of the particular self, but provide very different interpretations of selfhood. Perhaps most importantly, while both Rosenzweig and Heidegger are
bound up in a loosely Romantic project of achieving a holistic post-metaphysical culture to transform Europe and thus save the West from rootlessness and nihilism, their differences regarding how this transformation is to be achieved could not be more stark. Whether this is achieved in Jewish and Christian liturgical communities or a mythic-nationalist Volk; with Jewish or Hellenic sources; with a return to tradition or a hope for an “other beginning”; with a new use of language based in the first and second person, or in impersonals and middle-voiced verbs; by way of revelation from the living God or revelation from Ereignis—these are the issues where the two thinkers diverge. In placing Heidegger and Rosenzweig in dialogue, one of the main points I shall argue is that Heidegger fails to understand the tradition that he attempts to overcome, and does not succeed in transcending the philosophical and political context of debates in the young Schelling and Hölderlin. Rosenzweig also provides a counter-argument to Heidegger’s dismissal of the vast majority of the Judeo-Christian tradition as ontotheological.

There has been a relatively small amount of scholarship on Heidegger and Rosenzweig, which has typically been approached from a position sympathetic to the latter. Most scholars who have written on Heidegger and Rosenzweig have sharply contrasted them (with some exceptions), but the differences between these philosophers (as expressed in the secondary literature) seem to me overstated, and in fact both have more in common than not. Peter Eli Gordon is to be commended for illustrating how much the two thinkers have in common. As the author of the only extant monograph on Heidegger and Rosenzweig, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, Gordon has produced an extremely well-researched and informative work (particularly on Rosenzweig), though he does not delve deeply enough into Heidegger’s thought, focusing primarily on Sein und Zeit—understandably, given the scope of his book—which makes the comparison somewhat limited. While his work has many insights, unfortunately Gordon ultimately argues that
Heidegger was unwittingly “Hebraic,” whereas I contend that Heidegger’s “Christianity without incarnation” is not Hebraic but rather more akin to an exaggerated form of Lutheran or Barthian theology. Heidegger takes the style and mood of radical Protestantism (the gulf between God and the world, etc.) and removes the incarnation of Christ and any positive theological content. This leaves him with a sort of philosophical theology, somewhat conflated with impersonal theos in Presocratic thinkers, and certainly not Judaism. The “principles of worldliness, finitude, and sin” are not exclusively Hebraic. In addition, as Rosenzweig makes clear but Gordon underemphasizes, Judaism is not defined by worldliness and finitude. Rather, these are continually merged with the heavenly and infinite, both in the Hebrew Bible and holistic Jewish life, and Rosenzweig continually emphasizes the real difference between life and afterlife as well as redemption-in-the-world and actual redemption (at the end of time). Gordon has a tendency, in my view, to overstate Rosenzweig’s rethinking of transcendence, and at times seems to imply that Rosenzweig’s vision of Jewish life is Hegel’s “bad infinity,” i.e., endless striving in finitude.

Apart from Gordon, a common theme in the secondary literature involves pointing out the stark differences between the two thinkers and critiquing Heidegger for his ethical shortcomings. The classic in this genre is by Heidegger’s student Karl Löwith, who wrote a polemical essay contrasting Heidegger’s temporality (and entanglement in politics) with Rosenzweig’s eternity. This argument has a grain of truth to it, though in fact (as Löwith could not have known at the time) both thinkers understood eternity in roughly Schelling’s sense (as an “eternal becoming”), both shared a dream of a universalized Germany that would restore the holism of European culture—though Rosenzweig exempted the Jews, as the eternal people, from this political theological project.

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4 Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 314.
5 Ibid., 313.
6 Ibid., 314.
7 See ibid., 204.
and Heidegger’s Germany would have looked rather different—and the writings of both thinkers exhibited a unique combination of elements from traditional and non-traditional theology.

Though there are some important exceptions,⁹ in the past few decades whenever the two thinkers are compared at all it is typically from the perspective of a Rosenzweig scholar, usually influenced by Levinas, who sees Rosenzweig’s “Transposed Fronts” essay as confused or misleading. The idea of Rosenzweig having anything in common with Heidegger except for a few superficial so-called “existential” aspects is strongly rejected. Heidegger is then summarily dismissed on the basis of Sein und Zeit and an exaggerated account of his political involvement.¹⁰ The usual comparisons between the Star of Redemption and Sein und Zeit are not entirely unreasonable, as both texts were written in the same decade and focus on temporality and finitude, but the deeper connections arrive only with Heidegger’s mature work. The Star ultimately has more in common with the notebooks of the 1930s than with Sein und Zeit.

However, I do agree with the general drift of what one could call ‘Levinasian’ Rosenzweig scholarship on Heidegger to an extent, insofar as Rosenzweig’s dialogical thought truly is a cogent way out of problems in Heidegger, though the question is not quite as simple as many make it out to be. The idea that Heidegger has ‘no ethics’ and ‘ignores the other’ is misleading, as we will see in Chapter 4.¹¹ There are deeper issues at play, which I hope to clarify in this dissertation. My approach is unique (for both Heidegger scholarship and Rosenzweig scholarship) in that I am using the 1930s


notebooks of Heidegger as the basis for a dialogue between the two thinkers. Other scholars have questioned Heidegger’s self-understanding and paradoxical ambiguities,12 but the resources of Rosenzweig’s account—using Hebrew to avoid metaphysical dualism, rethinking Ereignis as related to personhood, providing a deeper reading of Hölderlin—have yet to be applied as a response to these ambiguities.

In this dissertation, I will first examine (Chapter 1) the shared biographical and neo-Kantian context of the early work of these two thinkers, focusing in particular on how the development of their early positions regarding philosophy, theology, faith, and language would determine and shape their later views in important ways. I will then analyze (Chapter 2) Heidegger’s mature position, focusing primarily on the Beiträge zur Philosophie (Contributions to Philosophy) in relation to the ‘last god’ as Heidegger’s method for rethinking the divine. In Chapter 3, I will examine Rosenzweig’s mature position, focusing on his masterwork Der Stern der Erlösung (The Star of Redemption), and arguing that he incorporates revelation and grammatical thinking into his thought in a way that transcends the shortcomings of Heidegger’s account. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will place Rosenzweig and Heidegger in dialogue, ultimately illustrating that Heidegger has overlooked resources in the tradition in the service of an inherently flawed project.

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Chapter 1: Origins

What shape life will generally assume after this end, which was inevitably to come and which now is our only salvation, is uncertain. The challenge is certain and unshakable; all truly spiritual persons must not weaken at this moment but instead lead resolutely and educate the nation toward truthfulness and a genuine valuation of the genuine content of existence. To me it is indeed a joy to be alive—even though some outward deprivation and renunciation lie ahead—only internally impoverished aesthetes and those who until now, as ‘spiritual’ people, have merely played with spirit the way that others play with money or pleasure, will now collapse and despair heedlessly—hardly any assistance or useful directives can be expected from them.

Heidegger (November 1918)

It is quite possible that I misjudge—in historical and philosophical terms—the significance of the crisis that we have just passed through; the world in which I was born and raised is so dear to me that I would almost wish to be proved wrong.

Rosenzweig (August 1920)

In this chapter I will examine the early career and influences of Heidegger and Rosenzweig. There are many intersecting points in their earlier work, but I will focus primarily on their shared neo-Kantian beginnings. Both thinkers were indebted to their neo-Kantian teachers in many ways even as they turned to a different way of thinking. Heidegger was strongly influenced by Husserl and Aristotle (among many other figures) in the 1910s and early 1920s, but I will focus primarily on his lectures of 1919-20 on the neo-Kantians, with some reference to his gradual conversion from

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2 GS1.2:678 (94), letter of August 30, 1920, to Meinecke.
3 I will mention biographical context perhaps slightly more than is typical in a philosophy dissertation simply because in this case it is so vital for understanding the respective positions of these two philosophers. It should also be noted that this chapter is primarily introductory, and I make no claims for great originality in my readings of the neo-Kantians.
Catholicism toward a sort of Protestantism, insofar as these issues relate to his later positions in the 1930s regarding speaking and thinking about God and the gods. For Rosenzweig, I will examine his work from 1914 to 1919, which follows a track parallel to that of Heidegger in many respects, as he reacted to neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism and converted to Judaism.

By the end of this chapter, the reader should have a clear idea of the hermeneutical situation of each thinker, as well as an understanding of how and why both thinkers made the transition into a new thinking, which is an essential component and precondition for grasping the issues at play in their mature work. I will focus primarily on two themes, which will be delineated in further detail in later chapters. First, I will argue that Heidegger and Rosenzweig remained partially influenced by their Kantian/Hegelian beginnings despite claiming to transcend this context, an ambiguity which will have implications for their later work. Second, I will focus on the importance of the differences in their reactions to Weimar Germany, i.e., Rosenzweig’s turn to Scripture and liturgy (which he understood somewhat esoterically), and Heidegger’s shift into Protestantism and the “piety of thinking,” an ambiguous philosophical theology which would have decisive implications for how he would later interpret the last god.

Both Heidegger and Rosenzweig spent their early adulthood at the University of Freiburg, which was representative of the general academic environment in Germany at the time. The main schools of thought at Freiburg were neo-Scholasticism and neo-Kantianism, of which the latter would have a stronger influence on both thinkers. The academic world at that time was not especially open to romanticism, radicalism, poetry, mysticism, etc., and the younger generation struggled outside of the mainstream of academic opinion in an attempt to find a way to move from theory into life.

To understand the neo-Kantian context at play in the early years of Heidegger and Rosenzweig, we must briefly turn to the origins of the movement. Hermann Cohen’s Kant’s Theory of
Experience was published in 1871, followed by Wilhelm Windelband’s On the Certainty of Knowledge in 1873, spurred the creation of two schools of neo-Kantianism which constituted the mainstream of academic philosophy in Germany for the next four decades. Cohen’s work led to the creation of a so-called “Marburg school,” which emphasized epistemology and logic, and understood philosophy to be the transcendental foundation of mathematics and the natural sciences. As we will see later in this chapter, by 1910 Cohen had begun to take religion in general and Judaism in particular far more seriously, and upon becoming Rosenzweig’s mentor in 1914 would exert a strong influence on the latter’s turn away from early neo-Kantianism towards a new thinking.

The “Baden school,” rooted in Windelband’s approach, was focused more on Kant’s primacy of the practical, i.e., the autonomy of the practical/moral world, described by the Baden neo-Kantians as the human sciences over and against the natural sciences (Wissenschaft has a wider meaning than “science” in English, and means something more like “area of knowledge”). The Baden school maintains that, as Heidegger put it, the “critical science of universally valid values is the comprehensive execution of Kant’s idea.” While their approach is still quite theoretical, the Baden school revived an interest in Fichte and German Idealism, rehabilitating positions which had


5 Martin Heidegger, Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie (2nd ed.), ed. B. Heimbüchel (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999), translated as Towards the Definition of Philosophy, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 150 (114); hereafter “GA56/57.” In a rare moment of humor from Heidegger, he warns his students: “It is worth mentioning that I cannot make Windelband’s account more intelligible than he has himself” (GA56/57:151 [115]).
been largely discredited.\(^6\) Both Heidegger and Rosenzweig studied under Rickert, a prominent Baden neo-Kantian at Freiburg,\(^7\) though Heidegger worked with him more closely.

Heidegger and Rosenzweig were equally critical of Marburg neo-Kantians such as Georg Simmel, who represented (in their view) the apotheosis of a limited, excessively theoretical approach to philosophy. Due partially to their shared experience of World War I and the subsequent devastation of Germany, Heidegger and Rosenzweig focused on the practical and the factual, on modes of understanding beyond the merely theoretical or scientific, incorporating the insights and language of existence, mysticism, poetry, and theology; in short, striving to encompass the full range of human life, the excess of reality that the Marburg neo-Kantians failed to account for.

Their shared break with neo-Kantian thought ultimately turned upon the question as to how best to read Kant, providing a reading which was (so they claimed) truer to Kant's insights. Against the mainstream of neo-Kantianism, both Heidegger and Rosenzweig advocated for a reading of Kant which was more faithful to the young Schelling's focus on Kant's insight into the irrational groundless abyss of the imagination which (on this reading) lay at the root of the self. Most importantly for our purposes here, both Heidegger and Rosenzweig derided the way in which the neo-Kantians spoke about God and religion, the reduction of God to a value, an abstraction, or idea of reason. With this shared judgment in mind, we turn now to each philosopher in turn.

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\(^6\) GA56/57:146 (112).

\(^7\) Though he dismissed most neo-Kantian philosophy as inadequate, Heidegger was strongly influenced by the Baden school. Despite his partial breakthrough into the post-metaphysical in the 1920s and 1930s, it is instructive to think of Heidegger as a part of the Baden neo-Kantian school in some limited respects insofar as many neo-Kantian distinctions remained formative for him even after he left behind neo-Kantian language. Even *Sein und Zeit*, which made a decisive step beyond neo-Kantianism, retains a strong neo-Kantian flavor perhaps due to the fact that Heidegger was still a relatively young scholar trying to work his way through a neo-Kantian academic world. As he noted many years later, “Even today it is very hard to imagine the scope of the difficulties which stood in the way of asking the question of being, its point of departure and its development. Within the framework of the neo-Kantian philosophy of that time, a philosophy had to fulfill the claim of thinking in a Kantian way, critically, transcendentally, if it was to find an audience” (*Zur Sache des Denkens* [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969], translated as *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], 47 [44]; hereafter “ZSD”). There is some truth to this statement, though I think Heidegger underestimates how much the *substance* of his thought was still entangled in neo-Kantianism in the 1920s (and afterwards, to a degree).
Heidegger was born in 1889 and raised in the conservative Catholic town of Messkirch, where he planned on becoming a priest. In his earliest writings he aligned with Pope Pius X, strongly critiquing Catholic modernism and the Thomism of his day, though he also had a strong interest in Luther, Nietzsche, and Hölderlin. He briefly attended seminary, but ultimately decided to enter academia, taking courses at the University of Freiburg in theology and philosophy (as well as the natural sciences) and writing his inaugural dissertation in philosophy in 1913 and then completing his qualifying dissertation in 1915 under Heinrich Rickert.

Heidegger had expected to be hired as the Catholic chair of philosophy at the University of Freiburg, but when this appointment fell through in June 1916, he added a final and somewhat combative chapter to his dissertation on Thomas of Erfurt which notes that what matters is the “breakthrough into true reality and real truth” as opposed to relying merely on the “Church’s measure of truth”; we need to look also to the “meaningful and meaning-realizing deed.” Heidegger had turned to hermeneutics, history, and finitude against the ahistorical and insufficiently hermeneutic stance of what he called the “system” of Catholicism. Both neo-Scholasticism and neo-

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9 For the character of many of these manuals see Jean-Pierre Torrell, Aquinas’s Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 11: “Imposed in an authoritarian way, Thomas’s doctrine had nothing left of the creative force of the original. The Thomism that was diffused in the manuals no longer referred to Thomas except by the intermediary of second-rate commentators. Rarely sensitive to the biblical and patristic sources (held under suspicion because of anti-Modernism), and imbued with a rationalism of which they were unaware, their authors propagated a repetitious, narrow, and legalistic doctrine that was Thomist only in name.”
Kantianism were taken by Heidegger to be united in the same error, i.e., ignoring the concrete reality of finitude and failing to ask radical or serious questions.\textsuperscript{11}

As he turned away from the Catholicism of his youth, Heidegger grew more familiar with Protestant writers. He began to read Luther, Eckhart, Schleiermacher, and contemporary Protestant theology at length. Luther became extremely important for his thought,\textsuperscript{12} and the young Heidegger’s goal was to complete the early Luther’s project of a science based on the inner Christian life without the interference of pagan (i.e., Greek) philosophical categories. Following both Luther and Dilthey, Heidegger came to understand accounts of Christian experience as (historically speaking) immediately supplanted by a foreign Greek metaphysics. As he writes, “There is the necessity of a fundamental confrontation with Greek philosophy and its disfiguration of Christian existence.”\textsuperscript{13}

This sharp distinction between philosophy as a foreign Greek adulterant and faith as something entirely other than philosophy became a foundation for his later work; any hint of metaphysics,

\begin{itemize}
\item[12] See Heidegger’s letter of September 9, 1919, to his wife, which contains one of the more fateful passages in his \textit{oevre}: “Since I read Luther’s commentary on Romans, much that before was troubling and dark to me has become bright and liberating; I have quite a new understanding of the Middle Ages and the development of Christian religiousness; and wholly new perspectives on the problems of the philosophy of religion have opened up to me” (Martin Heidegger, “Mein liebes Seelchen!”: \textit{Briefe Martin Heideggers an seine Frau Elfride 1915-1970}, ed. Gertrud Heidegger [Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005], translated as \textit{Letters to his Wife}, ed. Gertrud Heidegger, trans. R. D. V. Glasgow [Cambridge: Polity, 2008], 66-67; hereafter “FE”). As John van Buren and Benjamin Crowe have made clear in their groundbreaking work on the topic, it would be difficult to overestimate the influence of Luther on Heidegger. According to Gadamer, Heidegger stated in the 1920s that his life’s goal was “to be a new Luther” (quoted in Charles Guignon, “Introduction,” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger}, ed. Charles Guignon [Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 41n34). Heidegger lectured on Luther at Marburg in 1924 (collected in \textit{Supplements} as “The Problem of Sin in Luther,” 105-10), and Bultmann had reported a few months earlier that Heidegger “not only [has] an excellent grasp of Scholasticism but of Luther as well” (Otto Pöggeler, \textit{The Paths of Heidegger’s Life and Thought}, trans. John Bailiff [Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999], 322). There is also the extremely positive reference to Luther in 1927: “After centuries, theology is only now slowly beginning to understand once more Luther’s insight that its dogmatic system rests on a ‘foundation’ that has not arisen from a questioning in which faith is primary, and whose conceptuality is not only not adequate for the problematic of theology, but rather conceals and distorts it” (\textit{Sein und Zeit} [19th ed.] [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006], translated as \textit{Being and Time}, trans. John Macquarie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 30 [10]; hereafter “SZ”). Heidegger also cited Luther favorably in his 1951 Zürich lecture (\textit{Seminare}, ed. C. Ochwadt [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1986], partially translated as \textit{Four Seminars}, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003], 346; hereafter “GA15”).
\end{itemize}
ontology, value, etc., in theology would be immediately pounced upon as a corruption of primal
Christian faith.\textsuperscript{14}

Heidegger continued to write and think about these issues while serving in the first World
War. He was strongly affected by the war, and the tone of his writing began to take a bleaker turn.
Husserl would attribute Heidegger’s shift in philosophical direction to the “disorienting experience”
of the war and its “ensuing difficulties [which] drive men into mysticism.”\textsuperscript{15} His first lecture course
after this shift in direction began on February 7, 1919—nine days before Rosenzweig (similarly
affected by the war) was to write the final words of the \textit{Star of Redemption}. The KNS 1919 and SS
1920 lecture courses,\textsuperscript{16} both of which focus on the shortcomings of neo-Kantianism and value
philosophy (particularly in regard to language, philosophy, and religion), provide an important
context for Heidegger’s later work. Heidegger’s engagement with neo-Kantianism, and especially his
reaction to the neo-Kantian understanding of religious phenomena, is vitally important for
understanding his later positions. The critique of cultural philosophy and Christianity as worldview
(\textit{Weltbild}) would inform his formulation of the ‘last god’ in the 1930s.

A decade after these 1919-20 lectures, Heidegger engaged in a (now-famous) debate at a
conference in Davos with Ernst Cassirer, a prominent Marburg neo-Kantian. The latter accused
Heidegger and other followers of the “new philosophy” of failing to properly and fairly account for
the diversity of positions within neo-Kantianism, with the result that “neo-Kantianism is the

\textsuperscript{14} For example, in Heidegger’s later years: “[Aquinas’s] ontology suppresses every possibility for a question of being. The
entirety of modern philosophy is burdened by this ontic stamp inherited from the Christian ontology of the Middle
Ages. To restore philosophy to its own essence means to purge it of its Christian element, and to do this out of concern
for the Greek element … insofar as it is the origin of philosophy” (GA15:49 [25]).
\textsuperscript{15} Husserl wrote this in a letter of August 13, 1931, to Dorion Cairns; quoted in Sheehan, \textit{Heidegger}, 8.
\textsuperscript{16} In these lecture courses, Heidegger adopts much of Dilthey’s position but removes the horizon of the infinite; see Ben
Vedder, “The Disappearance of Philosophical Theology in Hermeneutic Philosophy: Historicizing and
Hermeneuticizing the Philosophical Idea of God,” in Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., \textit{Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics}
whipping boy of the newer philosophy.” Heidegger gave a nuanced response, showing that he was aware of the diversity of positions and noting that there was in fact a common concern shared by among most neo-Kantians, i.e., the general guiding principle that human and natural sciences are the standard of knowledge, with the result that philosophy becomes knowledge of science (of system, of values, of norms) and not knowledge of phenomena, of beings themselves. Such an attitude toward philosophy and science is then erroneously imputed by the neo-Kantians to Kant himself, who is misinterpreted (by the Marburg school) as using a mathematico-physical theory of knowledge, whereas it is quite clear (Heidegger argues) that Kant is doing something altogether different. Heidegger’s goal is to restore philosophy to its rightful place as radical questioning, and not an appendage to late 19th-century German culture—which is equated (by the neo-Kantians) merely with the scientific achievements of the age.

Accordingly, in the 1919-20 lectures, Heidegger dispatches the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism in short order. He writes that this school has a single basic defect, i.e., “the one-sided, absolutizing restriction of knowledge and its object, therefore the concept of reality, to mathematical natural science” and the “primacy of the theoretical” with the inevitable effect that “theoreticism [and] … the theoretical a priori, despite all explicit rejection of a possible application of it to other domains, has remained formally guiding.” When looking at living, historical human beings, the Marburg school only provides the tools to grasp them as “transitory occurrences.” This misunderstanding is due to the “general prevalence of the theoretical,” where “we become

18 GA3:274 (193).
19 GA56/57:83 (65).
20 GA56/57:84 (66).
21 GA59:71 (54).
theoretically oriented only in exceptional cases,”

but this overlooks the importance of the practical, of lived experience, which is the real source of meaning; theory always happens only after the fact. The manner in which the Marburg school accounts for historical life, the theoretical construct of Erlebnis (lived experience), happens not to a living “I” but to a reification, to “the I,” and hence is really Ent-lebnis (devivification). For someone who has experienced World War I firsthand, the tepid abstractions of the established neo-Kantian philosophers no longer held any weight, and Heidegger now considers philosophy to be a Kampf (struggle), which will later become the Streit (strife) and polemos of the 1930s.

Heidegger has somewhat more sympathy for the Baden school, of which his advisor Rickert was a representative. Heidegger’s appropriation of themes from the Baden neo-Kantians would have important implications for his later work, as we will see below. In the 1919-20 lectures, Heidegger praises Rickert as an important step past the shortcomings of Windelband insofar as he incorporates the historical more in the sense of Hamann or Herder than of Hegel, where historical reality is now “no longer exclusively [understood] as a schematically regulated rationalist and linear direction of progress,” but instead with “regard for individual, qualitatively original centers and contexts of action. The category of ownness [Eigenheit] becomes meaningful and is related to all formations of life.” Rickert deepens value-philosophy, adding a historical dimension by arguing that to truly understand the human sciences one must examine knowledge as changing over the course of history, an insight which Heidegger would apply more systematically and radically to the tradition.

22 GA56/57:88 (69).
23 GA56/57:88 (69).
25 GA56/57:134 (104).
26 GA56/57:169 (127).
Emil Lask, a student of Rickert, took this further with the insight that there is a value character to the logical/ideal (the domain of the natural sciences) as well as the human sciences, i.e., one cannot simply separate the two, an insight which Heidegger would expand upon in his work. In Heidegger’s view, the claim that the natural sciences are value-free is misleading at best. As he would put it in 1920 (GA60), the problem is that the relational-sense of objectivity is taken to be value-free, scientific—like a scientist in a laboratory refraining from applying his own values or subjectivity to the matter at hand. While this approach may work in the natural sciences to a degree, to take this as a model for philosophy is disastrous, in Heidegger’s view. As Nietzsche emphasized repeatedly, the philosopher’s own subjectivity is always at play in philosophy.

While Rickert posits a clear space for the subject and the individual standpoint, noting that value and the subject must be accounted for prior to science, it is Lask’s position that Heidegger takes as a departure for philosophy as a hermeneutics of facticity. In Heidegger’s view, Rickert does not manage to truly transform Windelband’s project but instead merely expands it; he includes morality, art, and religion as domains of cultural life, yet still thinks of them under Windelband’s metaphysical and theoretical rubric of science and value. Rickert adds the positive insight that factical life forms a basis for philosophy, i.e., a sort of proto-phenomenology which looks as the actual behavior of living historical subjects, but both Windelband and Rickert fail to examine the phenomenon of value closely enough, in Heidegger’s view. Value-taking as psychological process “reifies the experience rather than taking it as such … simple inspection does not discover anything like an ‘I.’”

28 GA56/57:66 (53). Rosenzweig would make a virtually identical point three years later in “The New Thinking”: “My I is only present if it is present; e.g., if I need to emphasize that I see the tree … the usual philosophical assertion of the I’s omnipresence in all knowing distorts the content of this knowledge” (Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften III:).
Heidegger will complete this critique and rethink the meaning of the subject and of philosophy as such.

The difficulty, in Heidegger’s view, is that “inquiry is not thereby directed to historical and human individuality, the personality of the philosopher, but to the latter as expressing a particular type of spirituality, the philosophical type. “Heidegger cites Georg Simmel as an especially egregious example of this type of thinking, which reduces philosophy to a “world picture” as “seen through a personal temperament.”29 Rather, Heidegger wants the focus to be on human being qua our openness to being, before we are conceived theoretically as a subject or object or “rational animal” (a theme that would reappear in the 1930s). Philosophy is not merely a domain of cultural values or one of the human sciences, but rather something far more radical. Heidegger argues that values are not subjective reactions to an objective naturalistic reality, as this is already too theoretical; rather, experience (not the reified abstract concept of Erlebnis but actual lived experience) “gives that which, just on its own, cannot ultimately be understood. This is its proper-sense [Eigensinn], which it cannot explain by itself,”30 which is correlated to the proper name in philosophy.

The proper name is the true ‘I,’ which “belongs to my life,” and which is so “absolutely far from the ‘I,’” i.e., the Fichtean construction. To refer to my ‘I’ as a theoretical object, abstracted from the personal history of the person involved, is a “misleading designation; our language is not adequate to the new basic type of lived experience involved here,” and hence a new philosophizing, a new language, is needed.31 A deeper and more robust language, freed from theoretical language adopted from the natural sciences, makes clear that “linguistic expression does not need to be

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30 GA56/57:69 (54).

31 GA56/57:69 (55).
theoretical or even object-specific, but is primordially living and experiential, whether pre-worldly or worldly.”32 One must step entirely out of the theoretical framework and “come into the open [ins Freie],”33 where the real living self is not merely an object of the natural sciences or a value-creating subject, an afterthought appended to a theoretical framework. Rather, the self is in the “open,” the factual historical world.

Heidegger interprets the I as a Vor-gang, i.e., a process and event; “an appropriation [ein Ereignis] … I myself make it my own [er-eigne es mir] as it comes to pass.”34 Correlated to this appropriation, “the value ‘is’ not, rather it ‘values’ in an intransitive sense … ‘it values’ [es wertet] for me.”35 Value is not an after-the-fact subjective coloration of a neutral objective reality; rather, valuation is a temporal event, something that happens before the later philosophical superstructure of subject and object is applied to facticity. Echoing Lask and Nietzsche, Heidegger writes that “natural science, however ‘value-free’ its concept formation and methodology, presupposes the value of truth and thus makes inevitable the problem of the validity of value and systematics of value.”36 Again, while claiming to be value-free (unlike the value-laden human sciences), Marburg neo-Kantian philosophers assume that their own values are not values at all, but rather purely neutral, objective, scientific—and therefore free of any subjective valuation. Yet this supposedly scientific stance values a theoretical approach over a practical or hermeneutical one.37

32 GA56/57:117 (89).
33 GA59:4 (4).
34 GA56/57:75 (60).
35 GA56/57:46, 49 (37, 39). He continues: “Being-true [a-letheia] does not as such ‘value’ … I simply live in the truth as truth. I do not apprehend being-true in and through a worth-taking … in worth-taking, the ‘it values’ does something to me, it pervades me. Being-true remains so to speak outside, I ‘establish’ it. In value-taking there is nothing theoretical; it has its own ‘light,’ spreads its own illumination.” This theme will recur in relation to other philosophical terms (such as essence) in later texts, e.g., “The substantive wesen does not originally mean what-being [was-sein], quidditas, but rather enduring as present (gegenwart), pre-sencing and ab-sencing … living, emerging, abiding, dwelling … only an ‘abstract’ meaning, ‘to be,’ has survived” (Einführung in die Metaphysik, ed. P. Jaeger [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983], translated as Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000], 55 [76]; hereafter “GA40.”
36 GA56/57:175 (131).
37 Rickert would dismiss this position as mere life-philosophy, biologism, where the properly human culture-value is reduced to a merely animal life-value, but for Heidegger (again echoing Nietzsche), this position is still put in terms of
As Heidegger would later write in *Sein und Zeit*, *Sinn* (sense) is primordially related to *Sorge* (care) and to being-in-the-world; the practical is primary, and the theoretical attitude is secondary. Rather than being easily encapsulated by concepts, “reality is an incalculable multiplicity … everything real is heterogeneous” and “reality is a heterogeneous continuum. This togetherness of continuity and alterity gives reality that character of irrationality before which the concept is quite powerless.”38 Heidegger asks “whether the concept has a central position in philosophy; and then quite in principle, whether it makes sense at all to speak of concepts in philosophy.”39 Despite Heidegger’s sympathy for certain aspects of Rickert, he ultimately concludes that his teacher overreacted to the danger of psychologism and ended up with an untenable metaphysical dualism which remains abstracted from history and the concrete self. In striving for pure *a priori* scientific values, the Baden neo-Kantians have misunderstood what science should be; to be truly scientific (in the sense of *Wissenschaft*) is to accurately describe reality, which includes factical life.40

The shortcomings of the neo-Kantians become most egregious, for Heidegger, in how these figures talk about God and religion, i.e., the reduction of the true, the good, and the beautiful to values, and Christianity to *Weltbild* (worldview). While Heidegger rejects the shallowness of unthinking cultural Christianity, he does not dismiss Christian faith (as he understands it) in the early 1920s, and occasionally implies that his own thought is meant to create a possibility or space for the

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38 GA56/57:170 (128).
39 GA59:5 (5).
40 Just before starting the KNS 1919 course, Heidegger wrote to his wife, “I tried again to work through Rickert … but with the best will in the world I couldn’t go on reading – it was like an inner hostility towards this unparalleled style of constructive and yet unmethodical thought … [it is] increasingly clear to me how weak all this philosophy of worldviews seems with its empty concepts; where philosophy is absolute science, by contrast, it becomes a real experience for the investigator – a type of personal life as such” (FE 94 [61-62])
true religiousness of religion. While preparing for his 1919-20 lectures (GA 56/57 and GA59), Heidegger was also doing work in the phenomenology of religion and medieval mysticism, reading St. Paul, Augustine, Teresa of Avila, Eckhart, Luther, Schleiermacher, and others, as providing resources for an account of the mystical side of Christian tradition in contradistinction to the neo-Kantian vision of the divine. When Heidegger began his studies in the phenomenology of religion, his goal was to find the mystical counterpart to Scholastic categories; by 1920, this becomes more about a factical way to break through neo-Kantian theoreticism.

As Heidegger wrote at the time, “The independence of religious experience and its world is to be seen as an entirely originary intentionality with an entirely originary character of demands. … [H]istorical life as such does not let itself be shattered in a non-authentic thingly manifold which one now exhaustively studies; and in particular the meaning of our special object [i.e., religious life] protests against this.” For example, St. Paul describes the Christian life with middle-voiced event-verbs; *eidenai* as experiential knowledge correlated both to *phronesis* in Aristotle and practical *Verstehen* (understanding), as well as *genesthai* (“to have become”) which emphasizes the continual becoming of the Christian community, the facticity and event-character of having-become as not yet a completed or settled state. It is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to adequately describe these themes with

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41 However, the content of this true religiousness/divinity (a combination of Eckhart, Luther, and German Romanticism) is assumed by Heidegger and never subjected to critique, a theme that we will see repeated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.
42 This falls outside the scope of my argument, but it should be noted that Heidegger undertook his phenomenological studies in this area partially as a response to Husserl and Rudolf Otto. In many ways, Heidegger was enacting a critique of the early Husserl’s conception of phenomenology, which Heidegger thought was too bound up with the general atmosphere of the neo-Kantian theoretical approach and the conception of philosophy according to the model of the natural sciences. Husserl had described an ideal phenomenology of religion as being something like studying the eidetic necessities and possibilities of religious consciousness and of its correlate, and carrying out a systematic eidetic typification of the levels of religious data; see Edmund Husserl, “Letter to Rudolf Otto (1919),” cited in Sheehan, *Heidegger*, 59. Otto carried out his analysis in roughly this spirit, but Heidegger rejects this framework as being insufficiently attentive to the phenomena. This approach is too theoretical; it begins a step too late, as it were, with objects and subjects and various distinctions already taken for granted, and the question has already shifted toward the validity of the knowledge that arises from experience, using a rational/irrational dichotomy that goes unquestioned (see GA60:311 [236]).
43 GA60:322 (244) and 129 (92).
44 GA60:93 (65).
neo-Kantian language. So too, the temporality described in the early Christian experience of time (the Pauline *kairos*, i.e., *Augenblick* or “moment”) is diametrically opposed to the atemporal approach of the neo-Kantians.

Heidegger opposes his understanding of religious life to that of Windelband, where God becomes even less than a Kantian projection of reason, reduced to functioning merely as a way of representing *a priori* rational norms, where all truth/value in religion must be derived from reason. Such an understanding of God and religion would be difficult for anyone but Windelband and a few of his students to hold with any conviction—and as Heidegger’s work in 1919-21 (GA60) makes clear, any original genuine religious experience is *a priori* excluded by this neo-Kantian framework.

Heidegger writes of neo-Kantian philosophers (facetiously):

Due to their broad knowledge of the particular sciences, of artistic-literary and political-social life, the philosophers gain an ultimate understanding of these spiritual worlds. Some solve the ultimate problems by remaining within a dualism of nature and spirit, others trace these two worlds back to one common origin—God—which is itself conceived *extra mundum* or made identical with all being. … [The philosopher] acquires the ‘explanations’ and interpretations of his individual and social life. The meaning and purpose of human existence, and of human creation as culture, are discovered.

However:

[Their] naive critical realism stands decisively in the after-effect or renewal of Kant…. [A]n experientially transcendent knowledge of super-sensible realities, forces, causes, is regarded as impossible. … [Their] scientific worldview … seeks to be nothing other than the interpretation of the meaning of human existence and culture in respect of the system of those absolutely valid norms which in the course of human development have expressed themselves as the values of the true, the good, the beautiful and the holy.*

The difficulty, as we have seen above, is precisely that there are no “absolutely valid norms.”

Heidegger notes that the neo-Kantians tend to import various assumptions regarding God, dualism, metaphysics, etc., which are all ripe for deconstruction. The content of these concepts is wholly contingent, and what these figures describe as ‘culture’ is a normative description of 19th century

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45 See especially GA60:313 (237).
46 GA56/57:8-9 (7-8).
Germany which is falsely taken to be objective, absolute, or the ineluctable outcome of historical
dialectic. As Heidegger writes, this recalls the geometric method in Galileo and Descartes, where
“once again knowledge pushes too far” in Kant’s claim “to be not just science, but the scientific
type theory of theory” and so too in the “Marburg school and in the [Baden] school of value-
philosophy.”47 Modern norms and values are not universal and a priori, and the values of 19th
century liberalism do not provide the ahistorical innermost essence of all rational activity in relation
to the telos of science and the value of truth.

These tendencies in neo-Kantianism are reflected in liberal theology as well, which has
“expected from the sciences of nature and history something it had no right to expect, [and so] has
more than any other science fallen victim to the groundless naturalism and historicism of the
nineteenth century.”48 As one might expect from his reading of St. Paul and Eckhart, Heidegger
dismisses the vast majority of contemporary theology, noting that “in neither Protestant nor
Catholic theology has a methodologically clear concept of this science [of theology] so far been
achieved; indeed, apart from some incomplete attempts in recent Protestant theology, there is not
the slightest awareness that there is a profound problem here.”49 In the case of the neo-Kantians in
particular, “a primordial, pure research into the independent a priori of religion is lacking because
Kant did not recognize the latter as a primordial phenomenon, but rather included it in morality,”50
according to Heidegger. Modern philosophy has “blocked itself off from” the true spiritual world,51
and “everything is predestined to be a complex of relationships, a subject matter-ness or thingly-ness

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47 GA56/57:19 (17).
48 GA56/57:27 (23).
49 GA56/57:26 (22). See also GA60.
50 GA59:4 (3)
51 GA59:95 (75).
in the broadest sense. …‘God’ becomes the absolute universitas of these relationships, which, in principle, is absolutely knowable.”

Like Eckhart, Heidegger avoids treating God as an object present to reason, but rather (following the phrase found in both Luther and Pascal) as Deus absconditus, a mysteriously absent God who is revealed only indirectly and certainly not through philosophical categories (as omnipotent, omniscient, etc.). By 1921 Heidegger reads Eckhart in the light of the theologia crucis of Luther and the wholly other God of Barth, maintaining a sharp division between faith and reason and attempting to think God in a new way. God is now completely distinguished from everything we can name, experience, or worship. In defining himself against the neo-Kantians and liberal theology more generally, Heidegger indirectly points toward his own understanding of God (to be expressed more fully in the 1930s).

Rosenzweig

In contrast to Heidegger’s conservative Catholic upbringing, Rosenzweig was born in Kassel in 1886 into a family of liberal assimilated Jews. Goethe and Nietzsche were strongly influential in his teenage years, as evidenced by his journal entries at the time, but after graduating from the Kassel gymnasium in 1904 he ultimately decided to study medicine (initially in Göttingen, followed by Munich), primarily at the behest of his parents. This did not last, however, and Rosenzweig eventually moved to the University of Freiburg in 1906. His interest in philosophy deepened after taking a course on Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason under Jonas Cohn in the fall of 1906. Despite being drawn to Kant, the dry approach of the neo-Kantians caused Rosenzweig to focus instead on history insofar as it dealt more with the concrete and particular. To this end, he began writing his

52 GA59:142 (110). See also GA59:95 (76): “The highest degree of impertinence and unspiritual lack of dignity we experience today; and the fact that on the official side of the church such spiritual currents are even registered as a welcome approach and are apologetically exploited gives an idea of what one can expect to get out of the so-called Christian philosophy there.”
dissertation on Hegel under Friedrich Meinecke (who was loosely associated with the Baden neo-Kantians) in 1908, though he also continued studying philosophy under Rickert in 1908-09.53 A year later, Rosenzweig joined a neo-Hegelian group, the Baden-Baden Gesellschaft. He was drawn to this group by his cousin Hans Ehrenberg, who exerted a strong influence on his thought. Ehrenberg was a student of Windelband (who Heidegger critiqued in 1919-20, as mentioned above) and drew together the group as a way to deploy hermeneutics and historical consciousness as a response to Marburg neo-Kantianism.54

Throughout this period, Rosenzweig’s interest in philosophy and history was paralleled by a strong interest in German literature. His early interest in Goethe, Kant, and the involvement with Ehrenberg’s group led to the idea of a synthesis of Kant and Goethe.55 Rosenzweig’s presentation of this idea to the Baden-Baden group involved a 17th century thesis, 18th century antithesis, and 19th century synthesis, where a neo-Hegelian movement incorporating subjectivity and the insights of recent philosophy (“1900”) would complete the hoped-for Johannine completion of culture, religion, and politics found in early German Idealism (“1800”). The concept of the Johannine age will be examined more closely in Chapter 4, but some preliminary explanation is in order. In short, this concept is borrowed from Joachim of Floris by way of the young Hegel and Schelling, and involves an account of three ages of the Church (Petrine, Pauline, Johannine), where the Johannine is the full flowering of the esoteric “invisible church,” which in comparison to existing churches is a more spiritual, post-hierarchical, and post-institutional form of religion. Rosenzweig’s conception of the Johannine is drawn largely from the so-called “oldest system fragment” of German Idealism and

54 Pollock, “Franz Rosenzweig.”
the early letters of Hegel and Schelling\textsuperscript{56} which exemplified the hope of a generation of young German intellectuals, fresh with the excitement of the French revolution, but disappointed by its political failure. Their dream was that Germany could carry out the fuller spiritual completion of the French revolutionary movement, transforming all institutions and uniting them aesthetically, morally, theologically, and politically. A substantially altered version of this German Romantic dream is found in Heidegger as well, as we will see in Chapter 4. One important consequence of the Johannine Age is that if Jews and Christians remained non-political, or merely Jewish or Christian, then they would not be properly sublated into this holistic system, which is a theme that we will see repeated below.

The Baden-Baden Gesellschaft first met in January 1910 but quickly fell into disarray. In Rosenzweig’s view the group splintered due to an irreconcilable debate regarding whether or not to maintain a classically Hegelian metaphysical account of history.\textsuperscript{57} Rosenzweig’s disappointment with the meeting caused him to become disillusioned with his former position; he would soon come to reject the Hegelian approach to history (i.e., the direction in which he had attempted to steer the Baden-Baden group) in favor of an emphasis on facticity and particularity.\textsuperscript{58} He later shifted his conception of the denouement of the system from the outcome of Hegelian dialectic in the present to Schelling’s third age of the world, i.e., in a redemptive future outside of history. Despite the breakup of the group, Rosenzweig did gain something out of the experience; he there met Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who would become a lifelong friend and a prominent philosopher in his own right, writing on Christian theology and grammatical philosophy until the 1970s. Rosenstock-Huessy

\textsuperscript{56} See also Schelling’s lectures on the philosophy of revelation, though the concept reaches back to Joachim of Floris, Hamann, and Herder. See Harold Stahmer, “Speak that I may see thee!”: The Religious Significance of Language (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 98-107.
\textsuperscript{57} Morgan and Franks, “From 1914 to 1917,” 29.
\textsuperscript{58} Morgan and Franks, “From 1908 to 1914,” in PTW, 7n2.
would exert a strong influence on Rosenzweig’s work, especially regarding speech-thinking, as we will see in Chapter 3.

In the wake of the Baden-Baden group’s dissolution, Rosenzweig and Rosenstock (along with a small circle of like-minded friends) attempted to move beyond neo-Hegelianism. This shift involved finding an answer to the question of how, from a situated standpoint, one could avoid nihilism and relativism in the wake of rejecting Hegel’s metaphysics of history, which had provided a foundation hitherto.\textsuperscript{59} For each of the thinkers in this group, such a project would involve some combination of modernity and revelation as well as a reconciliation of the proper name with objective philosophy. Rosenstock chose to transcend Hegel’s metaphysics of history by converting to Christianity (rather than Judaism) on the basis of the view, common among German Jews at the time, that traditional Judaism had been sublated into German cultural Christianity, thus making conversion to Christianity the only viable course of action (apart from nihilism).

Rosenzweig was partially convinced but remained resistant to claims of revelation. It was only after moving to Leipzig in early 1913 and spending more time around Rosenstock that he finally decided to convert. Rosenzweig accepted the argument that the only way to avoid relativism and nihilism (after rejecting Hegel) was to accept the revelation of the Christian God as absolute standpoint, and thence to adopt a Christian vision of revelation and redemption instead of the liberal Hegelian vision, with the eternal and living God as foundation. The key here was a long conversation with Rosenstock on July 7, 1913, which Rosenzweig describes a couple months later: “In that night’s conversation Rosenstock pushed me step by step out of the last relativist position which I still occupied and forced me to take an absolute standpoint.”\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{59} Morgan and Franks, “From 1908 to 1914,” 1-2.
\textsuperscript{60} Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften I: Briefe und Tagebücher (vol. 1), eds. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann with Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 133, letter of October 31, 1913, to Rudolf Ehrenberg; hereafter “GS1.1.”
Rosenzweig was thus prepared to convert to a cultural and vaguely Hegelian Christianity, where religious life was understood as a self-conscious “life of religious action,” but then he fatefully decided to attend a Yom Kippur service at a small synagogue at the Potsdamer Brücke in Berlin on October 11, 1913. Rosenzweig was profoundly moved and had a change of heart, and decided to return to the Jewish faith. This experience, while not directly referenced in the Star or his other published works, is clearly at the root of his later work. Two weeks after Yom Kippur, he wrote to his mother: “That ‘connection of the innermost heart with God’ which the heathen can only reach through Jesus is something the Jew already possesses, provided that his Judaism is not withheld from him by force; he possesses it by nature, through having been born one of the chosen people.”

Rosenzweig began seriously studying the sources of Judaism during the fall of 1913, and by December of that year began to formulate a new style of philosophy based on the event of revelation in history, replacing the monologue of so-called idealism with the dialogue of human beings and God in a “new thinking” with a new philosophical language and method based in the religious life of Jewish and Christian liturgy.

It was also soon after the Yom Kippur experience, in November 1913, that Rosenzweig met and was very impressed by Hermann Cohen, who was then in his seventies and undergoing a transition from his youthful neo-Kantianism to a position which included elements of Jewish theology. By 1914 the elderly philosopher had become Rosenzweig’s mentor. Cohen retired as a professor at Marburg in 1912 and devoted himself to his work at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, a school founded in 1872 which focused on Jewish studies.

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62 GS1.1:131 (27), letter of October 23, 1913, to his mother, quoted in Morgan and Franks, “From 1908 to 1914,” 2.
63 Morgan and Franks, “From 1908 to 1914,” 3. Though Rosenzweig decided not to convert to Christianity, partially through the influence of Rosenstock he maintained the idea of Christianity as being in some sense complementary to Judaism (many of the letters between Rosenzweig and Rosenstock from 1914 to 1916 concerned this topic). As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, Rosenzweig will come to see ultimate truth as a dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, where Christianity’s task of redeeming the world is correlated to Judaism’s self-contained ahistorical existence.
primarily for the purpose of adult education.⁶⁴ It was while spending time at the Hochschule that Rosenzweig published his first work after his conversion, the essay “Atheistic Theology,” which argued for God’s real presence in revelation as opposed to the romantic and liberal forms of Christianity and Judaism. In particular, he critiques the reduction of Jesus to a Deist social teacher (in life of Jesus theology) and the reduction of “the godhead of Christ to the product of the spirit of the original community” in accordance with the historical criticisms of Scripture.⁶⁵ Rosenzweig was even more critical of Jews such as Martin Buber who applied this conception to the historical existence of the Jews and understood Judaism merely as a social unity.⁶⁶

In a critique of liberal theology which is quite similar to that of Heidegger (not to mention Barth and Bultmann), Rosenzweig emphasizes the primacy of the event of revelation, i.e., “the divine actually entering into history, distinct from all other actuality,”⁶⁷ which introduces a divine paradox into the community of believers, where common life, common sense, and revelation are inextricably and mysteriously united. “If man is without contradiction, then the thinker and the man of action could do without God,”⁶⁸ but this is not the case; God is truly transcendent and eternal, and yet also truly enters into relation with the faithful. Liberal theology simply does not take the real,
living phenomenon of religious practice seriously enough. As Rosenzweig wrote to Rosenstock:

“The superficiality of these pious people, who are supposed to be learned, offends me.”

It was also in 1913 that Rosenzweig discovered the (now-famous) oldest system fragment of German Idealism, written in roughly 1795 and attributed by Rosenzweig to Schelling. It would be difficult to overstate the influence that this small document had on Rosenzweig, as we will see in later chapters. In particular, the vision of a holistic system of philosophy in conjunction with a new Johannine theology was important for Rosenzweig. He uses this system fragment as a way to move beyond the neo-Hegelian movement with the resources of Schelling’s attempts at a system of existence.

Rosenzweig and Rosenstock both used Schelling’s thought as a way out of both neo-Kantian thought and Hegel’s law of identity between reason and existence. In addition to the oldest system fragment, Schelling’s Weltalter (Ages of the World) was especially important for Rosenzweig. In his “The New Thinking” essay, he explicitly says that his method of narrative philosophy in the second part of the Star was based on the Weltalter, and adds that if Schelling had completed the book, “the Star would not merit anyone caring a fig about it, outside of the Jews.” The Star, as we will see in Chapter 3, can be understood as a completion of the later Schelling’s system by way of the oldest system fragment.

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69 GS1.1:233 (JDC 101), letter of September 1916; he continues, “They move in an atmosphere where the logical and metaphysical salto mortale [decisive leap] is the normal method of progress, and they make use of it (naturally! otherwise how could they go on!), but at the same time they wear such harmless clerical faces [Pastorengesichter] that look as if they were not making salti mortali through empty space, but playing leapfrog in a meadow.” Like Heidegger, Rosenzweig sees some hope in Protestant theology: “Eschatology exists today in Protestantism as a free power and source of possibilities, whereas it really exists in Catholicism only as it is bound up with and built into its structure” (GS1.1:234 [JDC 102]).

70 This claim of Schelling’s authorship (rather than Hegel’s) remains controversial. Heidegger owned Rosenzweig’s edition of the oldest system fragment, though he noted to Pöggeler in conversation that he did not agree with Rosenzweig’s judgment of Schelling as the author (Otto Pöggeler, Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber [Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1991], 265). Rosenzweig discovered the manuscript fragment in 1913 while researching Hegel in the Prussian Royal Library in Berlin.

71 There is a constant tension in Rosenzweig between his adherence to Jewish tradition and his esoteric interpretations of Judaism and Christianity, a complex issue which we return to in Chapter 4.

72 GS3:148 (22).

73 GS1.2:701, letter of March 18, 1921, to Hans Ehrenberg.
In 1916 Rosenzweig left Germany to serve on the Eastern front, and was stationed primarily in the Balkans. It was during this period that he had an encounter which would later inform much of his comments about common sense and holistic Jewish life. While spending a furlough in Yugoslavia in the spring of 1917, Rosenzweig came into contact with eastern European Jews, and wrote on April 6 to his parents: “Their Jewish knowledge is nil, but the Jewish way of life is entirely natural … those were marvelous days, which I should hate to erase from my life.” Just over a year later, he reports a similar experience after spending time with Jews in Poland, writing on May 23, 1918, to his mother:

The average German Jew no longer feels any kinship with these east European Jews; actually, he has very little such kinship left; he has become philistine, bourgeois; but I, and people like me should feel the kinship strongly … even the most intellectual of them are more naïve than the least intellectual Western Jews, whose life-element is tennis, etc.

Soon after meeting the eastern European Jews, in October 1917, Rosenzweig wrote a letter that he would later refer to as the “Urzelle” (germ-cell) of the Star of Redemption—in fact, he began writing the Star just a couple months later (on postcards from the front), bringing the text to completion in early 1919. It was also at roughly this time that Rosenzweig published his dissertation as Hegel and the State. Finally, while on furlough in early 1918, Rosenzweig visited Cohen (the eminent neo-Kantian who had become his mentor in 1914) and procured a manuscript of the latter’s Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism, which he read with enthusiasm. I turn now to briefly survey Rosenzweig’s Urzelle and Hegel and the State as well as his response to Cohen’s manuscript.

We begin with Hegel and the State. Rosenzweig began writing his dissertation on Hegel in 1908 under Meinecke and travelled to Berlin in late 1910 to do archival work and completed the first

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74 GS1.1:381 (51), letter of April 6, 1917.
75 GS1.1:570-71 (77), letter of June 3, 1918, to his mother.
phase of the project in 1912. Subsequent research was interrupted by the war, though he returned to the text afterwards to prepare a revised version for publication.\(^7\) Like many other scholars at the time, Rosenzweig was inspired by Hegel’s recently published early theological essays, which forced a reconsideration of his mature and more well-known political work. The specific details of his argument do not concern us here. In short, Rosenzweig argues that Hegel’s later view of the state (in the *Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of History*), i.e., Hegel’s ambiguous relationship to both German nationalism and universal cosmopolitanism, is bound up with fate in the early theological writings.\(^7\)9

In particular, Rosenzweig contends that Hegel’s original conception of the relationship between the individual and the state was related to his youthful theological struggle regarding how to reconcile his self (as proper name) with the world. Peter Gordon draws perceptive connections between the early Hegel’s Jesus (as not merely a representation of Kantian morality, but the bringer of a new ethical system) and Rosenzweig’s theories of Jewish existence.\(^8\)0 So too, the transition between *Star 1* and *Star 2*, to be examined below, can be analogized to Hegel’s vision of Jesus as an initially isolated individual, opposed to the world, who then overcomes this alienation by sublation into a union of church and state. This union culminates in a redemptive community, which in Rosenzweig’s formulation bears a strong resemblance to the mature Hegel’s theory of the state. Hegel and Rosenzweig also both share the idea that Christianity cannot ultimately remain apolitical, as this would leave something un-sublated, bifurcating the individual into a political self and a religious self, instead of a holistic unity of the two.

Rosenzweig began writing *Hegel and the State* in 1908, at the height of his youthful neo-Hegelian enthusiasm, yet even while serving in the war years later, he wrote an essay entitled “Globus” (written in 1917 and published posthumously) which echoed many themes of the

\(^7\) Pollock, “Franz Rosenzweig.”


\(^8\)0 Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger*, 103-09.
dissertation. The “Globus” essay analyzed the history of war and portrayed Bismarckian Germany in a positive light, as a world empire struggling to achieve an eventual global unity. Yet by the time he finished writing *Star*, in early 1919, Rosenzweig’s perspective was quite different. As his second preface (written after the war) to *Hegel and the State* makes clear, his hope in the Bismarckian nation-state had failed as the flaws of liberal Europe and of nation-states as a whole became starkly obvious. Yet an aspect of this world empire remained in the *Star*. While the Jewish people are now understood as trans-political, ahistorical, and *Unheimlich* (uncanny, literally “not homey,” in a state of “not-at-home-ness”), Rosenzweig would still allow for a sort of political theology and world-empire for Christianity, which is to convert the world both politically and spiritually to universal neighborly love, even while Judaism remains eternally above world history.

*Hegel and the State* would have other lasting effects on Rosenzweig’s work. While Rosenzweig often mentions Schelling as an influence, Pöggeler is correct to point out that Rosenzweig never studied Schelling at length or in great detail, and much of his conceptual apparatus ends up being imported (whether consciously or not) from Hegel. This may explain why (as we will see below) Rosenzweig retained some loosely Hegelian positions even after turning to Schelling’s work in 1914 and claiming to transcend the “old” philosophy. Rosenzweig rejects aspects of Hegel, to be sure, but in many ways remains within a broader Hegelian framework—he retains a system with *Nichts* (nothing) as its basis as well as the union of theology and philosophy and the more general sense that various philosophies/religions dialectically (recast as “dialogically” by Rosenzweig) achieve the whole truth beyond any one perspective, and that a new type of thinker (a “new church father”) can achieve a perspective beyond any single religion. Bienenstock also notes that much of the content that Rosenzweig attributes to Hegel in *Hegel and the State* would later reappear under his own name in

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81 GS3:313-368.

the Star, in particular the conception of the state is an attempt to create eternity in time, as opposed to the Jewish people who are eternal and outside of history.

The young Hegel’s turmoil regarding the idea of self as two selves, alienated from itself and split between individual and universal, would be echoed in the Urzelle, the letter written by Rosenzweig in 1917 which later formed the basis of the Star. The Urzelle is Rosenzweig’s first coherent formulation of a systematic philosophical account that could incorporate philosophy and theology, revelation and reason, language and speech, spirit and history. This letter is especially important as the crystallization of all the insights that Rosenzweig had achieved since accepting revelation as absolute standpoint in 1913, his “philosophical Archimedean point, long sought after.” From 1913 to 1917, Rosenzweig exchanged many hundreds of letters with Rosenstock, Rosenstock’s wife Gritli, the Ehrenbergs, and other close friends, and many of the ideas which slowly developed over the course of that period would contribute to his breakthrough in the Urzelle. The conceptual framework of the letter is somewhat muddled, but as a skeleton key to the Star it is invaluable. Despite its difficulty, many of the underlying principles of the Star are expressed here in a relatively lucid way as opposed to the literary and architectonic pyrotechnics of the Star itself. It would be safe to say that the Star cannot be fully understood apart from the Urzelle, and so we turn to this text to discern the foundations of Rosenzweig’s system before returning to the Star in Chapter 3.

The Urzelle presents a basic distinction which bears a strong resemblance to Kant’s a priori / a posteriori distinction and Schelling’s understanding of negative philosophy and positive philosophy. Rosenzweig analyzes man in relation to God (where God is denoted as A=A). The alphabetic notation, reminiscent of Schelling’s Weltalter, is distracting at first but ultimately helpful in clarifying

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83 Myriam Bienenstock, “Rosenzweig’s Hegel,” The Owl of Minerva 23, no. 2 (1992), 177.
84 GS3:125 (PTW 48).
85 See the extensive discussion in Benjamin Pollock, Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14-118.
what Rosenzweig means. Man as an instance of humanity and as a particular person with a particular name are here denoted by Rosenzweig as B=A and B=B, respectively (B denotes \textit{das Besondere}, a contingent part of the world), and as two ways in which man is related to the Absolute, A=A: “One where it has him, the second where he has it.”\footnote{GS3:127 (PTW 54).}

Man as B=A is correlated with timelessness, essence, and philosophy (as “idealism”), whereas man as B=B is correlated with temporality, particularity, and theology.\footnote{GS3:137 (PTW 69).} In \textit{Star}, Rosenzweig clarifies that each B can choose to be either B=A or B=B, i.e., to be merely a part of the world (the “public”), or to be an authentic self—there are obvious parallels here with Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Man as B=B sees that his existence must depend on the call of A=A as God. The revelatory call of God gives man his proper name, though man is free to reject this call and preserve itself as B=A, a small autonomy. Rosenzweig takes his bearings from Kant, who (on Rosenzweig’s reading) claims that man is both B=A and B=B simultaneously (i.e., part of nature and also autonomous), in two worlds, but Rosenzweig modifies this to say that self is not world. In Rosenzweig’s view, this is “Kant’s entire weakness,”\footnote{Der Stern der Erlösung (2nd ed.) (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), translated as \textit{The Star of Redemption}, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 75 (70); hereafter “\textit{Star}.” See Pollock, \textit{Systematic Task}, 99-103 and 147 for a helpful analysis of the Kant connection.} i.e., the reduction of world to the self. Kant’s focus on universal reason effaces B=B entirely and transforms it into B=A, fitting freedom and the self into a theoretical schema and negating his own breakthrough into radical freedom. The philosophical reduction of B=B to B=A, best typified by Spinoza and Hegel, is the fundamental underlying problem with modernity, for Rosenzweig. In terms of philosophy alone, man can only know himself as concept (as B=A), as part of the category of humanity in the third person.
indicative—rather than “I am” or “you are,” this is non-indexical and abstract, i.e., “humanity is.” Modern systems portray “the world in the form of the third person.”

The most grievous issue for Rosenzweig is the distortion in modern philosophy of the relationship between man and God. For modern philosophy, man relates to God as B=A and not B=B. Man as B=A can have knowledge of God, but only man as B=B can love God. Before modernity (and to an extent within modernity), man naturally lived as B=B. This is common sense: “[T]his is what man does, when he isn’t lost in a depersonalizing thicket of relations.” The world as experienced by most people at most times and places is not a system of relations where any B is interchangeable with any other B (i.e., B as B=A). However—and this is the crucial part of Rosenzweig’s argument—even the B=B of common sense has not fully achieved selfhood until it is called by God in revelation. B=Bs only recognize other B=Bs because A=A has led B=B out of itself, through love. Man recognizes his neighbor as like him, B=B, and not just as another B.

The neighbor is an I/you, not a he/she/it: “my brother not in general, but rather in the Lord.” Such a conception is diametrically opposed to Spinoza’s (or Cohen’s) love for neighbor in the abstract. “Against such love, we have now the most particular form of love. The organizing concept of the world is not the universal, arche or telos, not natural or historical unity, but the particular [das Einzelne], the event, the middle of the world.” Self as B=B no longer follows philosophical or idealistic imperatives but does the will of A=A, recognized as the revealed God: “God’s command is an order, univocally called out to this man and in the situation of this man.” God’s revelation gives orientation to man, but man too often reacts with a will to system, retreating into understanding his self as a third-person object. Neo-Kantianism (i.e., “idealism” in

89 GS3:130 (PTW 60).
90 GS3:131 (PTW 61).
91 GS3:132 (PTW 62).
92 GS3:133 (PTW 63).
93 GS3:134 (PTW 65).
Rosenzweig’s sense) tries to explain away $B=B$, to dismiss it, but this is to dismiss the real community of all particulars.94

The Urzelle goes on to delineate, in a schematic way, a systematic process by which $B=A$ and $B=B$ are united in redemption—Rosenzweig avoids the idealistic reduction of $B=B$ to $B=A$, and projects a trajectory by which $B=B$ becomes both fully universal and fully particular. Rosenzweig’s uniqueness among other thinkers at the time (though he is foreshadowed by Schelling) is his systematic claim. Where Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger take $B=B$ (the particular self) out of the system, Rosenzweig includes $B=B$ in a deeper, more holistic system. As Rosenzweig would later write in the Star, “the philosopher is the bearer of the unity … the unity of the philosopher’s point of view, personal, experienced, philosophized” can now form the midpoint of a system.95

After writing the Urzelle, while visiting Cohen at his home while on furlough in early 1918, Rosenzweig read a manuscript version of the latter’s Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism, which had a strong impact on the Star.96 Rosenzweig was fascinated by Cohen’s turn towards Judaism in the 1910s, and he saw in Cohen’s final manuscript a way to break through the earlier Cohen’s identity of being and thought. While Cohen’s manuscript made some tentative steps outside of Marburg neo-Kantian orthodoxy, Cohen still maintains that the truths of Judaism must align with pure reason. Rosenzweig’s Star adopts a number of themes from this late manuscript, though Rosenzweig often inverts the content of Cohen’s ideas—i.e., the Jew as bearer of a proper name against Cohen’s abstract universal Jew, the living God of revelation against Cohen’s deistic Kantian God, loving other individuals instead of loving humanity in general, the messianic age as real rather than symbolic (a true afterlife rather than infinite Kantian striving), prayer as real speech between man and God rather than an expression through reason of an abstract love for God, etc.

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94 GS3:135 (PTW 66).
95 Star 56 (52).
96 See Stéphane Mosès, System and Revelation, 45-49.
Rosenzweig’s emphasis on creation-revelation-redemption as a three-fold philosophical category (the hallmark of the *Star*) and on the ‘correlation’ between man and God are also drawn from Cohen. We will examine these themes in detail when we return to Rosenzweig in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2, Part 1: The Beiträge

My goal in this chapter is primarily expository and interpretive. I will mention various aspects of my overarching critique\(^1\) of Heidegger in a preliminary way, but my criticisms will be properly treated (in dialogue with Rosenzweig) in Chapter 4. First and foremost, Chapter 2 is a presentation of my reading of Heidegger where I try to delineate his project without an excessive amount of critique.\(^2\) I am primarily approaching the Contributions to Philosophy (hereafter Beiträge or “GA65”) as Heidegger’s attempt to achieve a new discourse about the divine. To this end, after a brief introduction to the Beiträge, I will examine Heidegger’s overall project after 1929, then outline some basic distinctions within the Beiträge as preparation for the second part of the chapter, which examines the last god and the importance of language in bringing the last god to decision.

On the Importance of the Beiträge

Heidegger worked on the Beiträge from 1935 to 1937 and returned to the text in 1938 to write a final concluding section. The Beiträge is the first (and most important) of those volumes which he described as anfängliche Denken or seynsgeschichtlich Denken (inceptive thinking, beyng-historical thinking). These texts were written in a series of private notebooks from 1935 to 1942. Of these writings, I will be dealing with the published volumes GA65-GA67 and GA69-GA71, hereafter referred to as the “beyng-historical notebooks,” which remained unpublished until after

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\(^1\) This dissertation is rather critical of Heidegger at times, but I should be clear that it is precisely because of the great value of his work—his 1919-1925 lecture courses alone have more of philosophical interest than the collected works of most 20th-century philosophers—that I feel compelled to show exactly where he has gone wrong. I note his shortcomings (as the young Heidegger explicitly asked his readers to do) so as to better focus on his strengths. Whatever his faults as a philosopher, Heidegger’s work is deeply important and should be taken seriously.

\(^2\) This chapter will be somewhat longer than the other chapters in this dissertation, for two reasons; 1) Heidegger’s published work comprises roughly twenty times more material than that of Rosenzweig, and unfortunately 2) a great deal of this material applies to the topic at hand. The task of this dissertation would have been made much easier by focusing only on the beyng-historical notebooks (as some scholars have done), but in my view it is not possible to explain what is happening in the Beiträge (particularly with regard to the last god) without looking at ancillary texts written in the 1930s. A good analogy would be Nietzsche’s notebooks, which cannot be properly understood apart from his concurrently published works.
Heidegger’s death. 3 For various reasons, the beyng-historical notebooks have received relatively little attention in Heidegger scholarship, most of which is centered around F.-W. von Herrmann and his students. These scholars publish the journal Heidegger Studies and have collectively edited all of the beyng-historical notebooks and published the only extant English translations (of GA65 and GA66) as well as most secondary scholarship on this material. Another issue may be that the content of his notebooks is presented in a somewhat repetitive (Heidegger calls this “essential repetition”) and obscure style, which may have led to reduced interest on the part of scholars. 4 A final factor may be the relatively recent publication of these volumes, along with the plethora of other volumes within Heidegger’s collected works being published every year (both in German and in translation), which may be forestalling a wider scholarly engagement with these relatively more difficult works of Heidegger.

The Beiträge is Heidegger’s most important work, and its neglect in the scholarship is truly unfortunate. 5 The importance of the Beiträge in particular and the beyng-historical notebooks in general for Heidegger’s thought is relatively clear, but some scholars have argued that this text is merely one way among many of Heidegger’s ways, another Holzweg (woodpath) that may or may not


4 As Schürmann puts it, “At times one might think one were reading a piece of Heideggerian plagiarism, so encumbered is it with ellipses and overwrought phrases,” in Reiner Schürmann, Broken Hegemonies, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 516. Yet Heidegger’s beyng-historical notebooks are reminiscent of Nietzsche’s notebooks or Kierkegaard’s journals in their importance for exhibiting key aspects of his thought. Strictly in terms of content, perhaps the closest analogue is Wittgenstein’s late notebooks. Where Wittgenstein worked in dialogue with the Tractatus in transitioning to a sort of thinking which transcends philosophy as normally done (i.e., within the usual definitions of metaphysics and logic), Heidegger grapples with Sein und Zeit and attempts the same—with the result that neither philosopher could form the results into a fully coherent book.

5 If I agree with the circle around F.-W. von Herrmann on one issue, it is this. See Vallega-Neu: “Beiträge calls for a rethinking and reevaluation of all Heidegger’s work,” in Daniela Vallega-Neu, Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 2.
have reached a *Lichtung* (clearing), and hence should not be given status as more important than his other work. For example, Safranski argues that *Beiträge* is primarily of autobiographical interest and is not especially important for Heidegger’s thought;\(^6\) Kisiel sees the text as a failed thought experiment;\(^7\) Pöggeler (despite noting its importance for Heidegger) notes that we should not take *Beiträge* as the center of Heidegger’s thought but should rather respect “the diversity of the ways” of Heidegger’s thinking,\(^8\) and so on.

While there is certainly something to be said for this interpretation, I think that it is more accurate to understand the beyng-historical notebooks as the most strongly developed version of Heidegger’s mature philosophy. Many scholars have argued that the *Beiträge* as not merely one way among many but (despite its limitations) in some sense the primary way.\(^9\) More importantly, Heidegger points to the importance of the beyng-historical notebooks (and the *Beiträge* itself) in various places.\(^10\) Von Herrmann correctly notes that “Heidegger himself indicates the outstanding

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\(^{6}\) Safranski, 307-17.


\(^{8}\) Pöggeler, *Path of Thinking*, 280.

\(^{9}\) See for example Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 2 (2001): 183-202, which rightly notes the importance of the beyng-historical notebooks for Heidegger’s thought (though Sheehan is critical of the texts themselves). Many scholars have echoed this view of the centrality of the *Beiträge* for Heidegger’s thought: Powell, “it is surely his major work” (Powell, 18); Fred Dallmayr, “the *magnum opus* of Heidegger’s mature years” (*The Other Heidegger* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993], 55); Otto Pöggeler, “[his] second major work after *Sein und Zeit*” (*Neue Wege mit Heidegger* [Freiburg im Breisgau: Karl Alber, 1992], 465); Günter Figal, “*Beiträge* is the center of Heidegger’s thinking after *Sein und Zeit*” (“Forgetfulness of God: Concerning the Center of Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy,” in *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, eds. Charles F. Scott, Susan Schoenbohm, Daniela Vallega-Neu, and Alejandro Vallega [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001], 199); Richard Polt, “private notebooks such as the *Beiträge* … contain his most serious and concentrated thoughts” (“Introduction,” in Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, eds., *Companion to Martin Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001], vii); George Kovacs, “[the] second main work of Heidegger” (“The Leap (der Sprung) for Being in Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis),***” *Man and World: An International Philosophical Review* 25:1 [Jan. 1992], 41); Hans-Helmuth Gander, “his second major work” (“Wege der Seinsfrage, Aus Anlass der 100. Wiederkehr des Geburtstages Martin Heideggers veröffentlichte Texte aus dem Nachlass,” *Heidegger Studies* 6 [1990], 117); etc.

\(^{10}\) See GA71:3 on the centrality of GA65. During a Nietzsche lecture delivered during the period when he was writing *Beiträge*, Heidegger states: “If our knowledge were limited to what Nietzsche himself published, we could never learn what Nietzsche knew perfectly well, what he carefully prepared and continually thought through, yet withheld. Only an investigation of the posthumously published notes in Nietzsche’s own hand will provide a clearer picture” (*Nietzsche I*, ed. B. Schillbach [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996], translated as *Nietzsche I* (2 vols.), trans. David Farrell Krell [New York: Harper, 1979], 235 [2:15]; hereafter “GA6.1.” This seems to apply equally well to Heidegger, who may have had his own notebooks in mind when making this statement.
place that *Beiträge* occupies on this pathway of thinking,” which was to published “only after the lecture courses were published.” Its importance is highlighted by Heidegger’s remark that “knowledge and appropriating study of the lecture texts are a necessary prerequisite for understanding the unpublished writings,” i.e., the beyng-historical notebooks.11

Heidegger stated this even more decisively where he wrote that “all the lecture-courses”—i.e., the majority of volumes published in Heidegger’s collected works—should be considered part of one section (*Zuspiel*, “playing-forth,” to be examined below) of the wider project contained in the beyng-historical notebooks.12 This is borne out by the fact that Heidegger mentions, within these notebooks, nearly every text he had published or written by that time. Additionally, if we examine his lectures and publications from 1935 until his death, almost all of these texts share (in an abbreviated and simplified form) themes with the beyng-historical notebooks.13 Heidegger’s basic themes change very little from *Beiträge* onwards.14 His private notebooks are where we can see his purest and most concentrated thought,15 and are uniquely important insofar as there is no other place in his work where he writes at length about *Ereignis* and beyng-historical thinking. From 1936 until the end of the life, he made clear in his public work that *Ereignis* is of the utmost importance to his thought, yet he only mentioned it in passing. These notebooks contain a deep analysis of *Ereignis* that is unparalleled in Heidegger’s other work.

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12 GA66:421 (372).

13 It is surprising to see how many of Heidegger’s later essays and lectures are in some sense elaborations of or meditations on a single passage or paragraph in the beyng-historical notebooks. The last text that we have in Heidegger’s own hand, written four days before his death—“There is need for contemplation whether and how, in the age of a uniform technological world civilization, there can still be such a thing as home”—concerns themes that were first expressed in the beyng-historical notebooks (letter to Bernhard Welte of May 22, 1976, quoted in Safranski, 432).

14 *Beiträge* is central within the beyng-historical notebooks. GA65 presents the “jointure” or systematic outline, and the text of GA66-GA71 consists of extensions and elaborations of *Beiträge*, where nearly every idea can be traced back to a specific section of GA65.

While there is something to be said for the “diversity” of his ways of thinking, this is ultimately, in my view, a misreading of Heidegger’s motto for his collected works (“ways not works”) and takes Heidegger’s own comments about his work too uncritically. Despite Heidegger’s occasional claims that he is undogmatic and always only on the way to thinking via a diversity of paths, in the light of the beyng-historical notebooks we can see that this is somewhat misleading. All of Heidegger’s ways are in fact part of the same way. As he writes, “I have left an earlier standpoint, not in order to exchange it for another one, but because even the former standpoint was merely a way-station along a way.” All of Heidegger’s ways (especially after 1929, but arguably since 1917) are heading in the same general direction. Heidegger has a very specific understanding of philosophy and the history of the West, particularly in the beyng-historical notebooks and afterwards, which he cannot possibly be dissuaded from.

As we will see, most important for Heidegger in this period are Nietzsche, Schelling, and Hölderlin, who led to a broadening of Heidegger’s project away from the relatively straightforward ontology and phenomenology of his earlier work. Heidegger comes to see the neo-Kantian cultural torpor of his time as not merely a localized phenomenon but rather the culmination of two millennia of a slow descent into nihilism that began with Greek philosophy and early Christian theology. His goal is then to recover the mytho-poetic beginnings of the earliest Presocratic thinkers as a way to reappropriate the entire tradition and point to a futural thinking which is most clearly indicated by Hölderlin, who helped Heidegger to formulate a new way of thinking about God and informed his hope for restoring a holistic Germanic culture, though there are some ambiguities here, as we will see below. Heidegger was also strongly influenced by Nietzsche in the mid-1930s, as is made clear in

16Unterwegs zur Sprache, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), translated as On the Way to Language, trans. Peter Hertz and Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper, 1982), 94 (12); hereafter “GA12.” In my view it is indisputable that these texts contain Heidegger’s deepest and most original thought, which was expressed only in simplified and limited ways in his public work. There is also, I think, inarguably a vitality and depth and pathos in the beyng-historical notebooks that was lost in the 1950s; while his later writings are in a sense more pleasant to read, they often seem like quietistic or incomplete echoes of the writings of the 1930s.
the early beyng-historical notebooks, though this influence had waned by the 1940s and Heidegger’s thought, accordingly, became less turbulent as he became more critical of Nietzsche.

As we will see below, the position that Heidegger evinces in the Beiträge is presented rather starkly. Either you have seen what Heidegger has seen (or more specifically, what he claims that he, Nietzsche, and Hölderlin have seen), or you are—despite your best intentions—lost in nihilism and confusedly operating within ontotheological and metaphysical structures that you have failed to grasp. Heidegger writes: “To the extent that philosophical thinking is still attempted, it manages only to attain an epigonal renaissance.”17 In other words, Heidegger alone, among his contemporaries, is on the way to thinking. The fact that he undertakes a number of slightly different approaches to this way is in a sense immaterial. The argument of some scholars18 regarding the pluralistic or unstructured diversity of his readings of the history of philosophy is misleading insofar as all of these readings single-mindedly serve the end of completing the transition begun by Nietzsche and Hölderlin into a new thinking, and are not truly diverse in any meaningful way—indeed, Heidegger often provides somewhat one-sided readings of Kant, Plato, and many others in his effort to place them into a grand narrative of the history of being.

Though Heidegger harbored some doubts about how much he had achieved with the Beiträge and emphasized its provisional nature, it is vitally important for his thought. This is where he enacts beyng-historical thinking. The text of the Beiträge does not consist merely of aphorisms or working notes, as some critics have claimed. Heidegger carefully reviewed the manuscript in 1939 with his brother, and it is a coherent (though difficult) book.19 Heidegger admits that the “form has not yet been attained, at this point, which I demand for publication [of Beiträge] as a ‘work,’” but adds that

17 ZSD 63 (57). See also GA65:19 (15): “If a thinking question is not so simple and so outstanding as to determine the will and the style of thinking for centuries … then it is best that it not be asked … it only augments the incessant ‘carnival’ of colorful and changing ‘problems.’”
18 For example, see John van Buren, Young Heidegger, 3-26.
“in its new approach, the Beiträge should render manifest the range of the question of being,”\textsuperscript{20} which shows that he felt he had succeeded (insofar as such a tentative project can succeed). Heidegger scholarship is simply incomplete without truly reckoning with the book. Finally, and most importantly for our purposes here, Heidegger’s enigmatic statements in his later philosophy regarding the gods, which are very important to his thought, are properly understood only in the context of the Beiträge.

\textit{Defending My Approach to the Beiträge}

My reading of the content of the Beiträge and of Heidegger in general, it must be noted at the outset, is carried out in a somewhat un-Heideggerian fashion. Heidegger writes: “Any effort at wanting to force what is said in this beginning into a familiar intelligibility is futile and above all against the nature of such thinking.”\textsuperscript{21} Rather, we as readers must be attuned in a certain way in order to grasp what Heidegger is saying. The ordinary language of this dissertation is presumably not in the proper attunement, and hence I am not really thinking along with Heidegger, etc., insofar as I am “translating” Heidegger into non-beyng-historical thinking.

I admit that this is a danger, if Heidegger is correct. Arguably he was only warning against the extreme of turning his philosophy into a public or systematic collection of propositions of a Heideggerian philosophy. It seems possible, judging by his letters and other statements on the matter, that healthy philosophical debate in non-beyng-historical language may have been acceptable, for Heidegger. Whatever the case may be, the issue at hand, as I will show more fully in Chapter 4 and which is indeed one of the central claims of this dissertation, is that we should be critical of the ways in which Heidegger falls victim to myths of soil and nation, the senses in which

\textsuperscript{20} GA66:427 (377).
he fails to escape both his own history and the categories of western philosophy, and finally the extent to which he necessarily imports content into the supposedly formally indicative last god.

It should also be noted that, in addition to reading Heidegger in a somewhat un-Heideggerian way, my interpretation of Heidegger is also a departure from the approach of many scholars of the beyng-historical notebooks (the circle around von Herrmann, mentioned above), though it aligns with scholars such as Polt, Powell, and others.\(^{22}\) In particular, my attempts to engage the *Beiträge* with the texts of another philosopher (such as I am doing with Rosenzweig) are virtually non-existent.\(^{23}\) The position of many scholars of Heidegger’s beyng-historical notebooks is that Heidegger is essentially correct in his claims about the collapse of traditional philosophy (and theology) and the need for it to be replaced by beyng-historical thinking, i.e., Heidegger’s way of doing philosophy in the *Beiträge*. Scholars in this group tend rarely to cite any texts other than Heidegger’s own (or occasionally texts by each other), and generally follow Heidegger’s self-interpretation. Emad, for example, writes that what Heidegger is doing is “without precedent in the history of western philosophy,”\(^{24}\) and that where Heidegger’s critics claim that he should be made more comprehensible (and critique him accordingly), they fail insofar as such scholars “share the fundamental inability to project-open the thinking of being,”\(^{25}\) i.e., to leap into a post-metaphysical discourse along with Heidegger. He also writes that Heidegger’s thinking is of such profundity that


\(^{23}\) The only two examples that come to mind are Bernhard Casper’s work on Heidegger and Rosenzweig, which mentions the *Beiträge* to an extent—see ““Ereignis”: Bemerkungen zu Franz Rosenzweig und Martin Heidegger” and *Rosenzweig e Heidegger: Essere ed evento* (Brescia: Morcelliana Edizioni, 2008)—and Daniela Vallega-Neu’s book on Heidegger and Derrida, *Die Notwendigkeit der Grundung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion: Zur Grundung in Heideggers “Beiträge zur Philosophie” unter Hinzuziehung der Derridascben Dekonstruktion* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997).

\(^{24}\) Emad, *On the Way*, xi.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., xii.
“philosophical doctrines and teachings of the past” merely “offer unique occasions for Heidegger to break through to new insights.”

I reject this approach to Heidegger, though there is also something to be said for it. If one agrees with Heidegger’s claims in the beyng-historical notebooks, then by the nature of his project the position of these scholars is entirely reasonable. If the only thing worth doing in thought is to prepare a transition from old philosophy into new thinking, then naturally one would want to imitate Heidegger’s project, to try to think with Heidegger in a creative way, to leap into a new attunement with him. If Heidegger is right, then putting him into dialogue with contemporary thinkers (or his critics) would be pointless, as these figures are all still confusedly working within an ontotheological metaphysics steeped in nihilism. It is certainly possible that Heidegger’s intuitions about the complete devastation of the West are correct, and there is nothing wrong with a scholar arguing for the truth of this claim as he or she sees fit.

But there are indeed difficulties with this approach to Heidegger. Heidegger saw the Beiträge as in a certain sense incomplete and provisional, and thus writing a text that merely echoes the beyng-historical notebooks inevitably echoes their incompleteness. More troublingly, many of these secondary texts do not effectively explicate or expand upon Heidegger’s thought. At its worst, such scholarship becomes a sort of conflation of Derrida’s turgid so-called “playfulness” and Heidegger’s most spectacular failures in style. (This shortcoming unfortunately also applies to the only extant translation of the Beiträge, by Emad and Maly. If Heidegger himself could barely summon the inner

26 Emad, On the Way, 5.
27 Emad and Maly have published a poor translation. It is not as bad, I think, as many have claimed (Heidegger’s text is difficult and awkward, even in German), but certainly the bits of material from GA65 and GA66 translated by Vallega-Neu, Polt, Dahlstrom, and others (in book reviews and other venues) have been rendered far more effectively. To give one example, Vallega-Neu’s translation of Berückung as “enrapturing” or Polt’s as “captivation” are both far better than Maly/Emad’s “charming-moving-unto.” The fact that both Maly and Emad have taken to print to defend their translation, i.e., that they feel the critiques are so universal as to require a defense—something I cannot offhand recall having happened with any other translation of German philosophy into English—obviously signifies that there is something amiss here. Maly’s defense of the translation, in particular, does him no favors. In a chapter from Heidegger’s Possibility: Language, Emergence-Saying Be-ing (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) entitled “Concentrating Gently
strength to achieve a partial transition toward beyng-historical thinking, it should be self-evidently impossible for lesser philosophers to take a step beyond Heidegger’s own thought, assuming that a transition is necessary. Related to this issue is the problem that Caputo and many others have pointed out, which I will examine more closely in Chapter 4. In following Heidegger’s own self-understanding so resolutely, these scholars tend to ignore important hermeneutical and biographical questions about Heidegger’s life and self-understanding. In understandably rejecting the approach of those who reduce Heidegger to his politics or biography, these scholars unfortunately overreact in the opposite direction.

As I will show, it is a valuable exercise to read Heidegger’s beyng-historical notebooks in dialogue with other thinkers, as opposed to the position of many scholars on this point. It may be possible to slowly “translate” the terminology and insights of Heidegger into more understandable language as his thought is more clearly understood, even on Heidegger’s own terms, which would...
justify this approach. One should combine the Heidegger of the 1930s with the hermeneutic insights of the younger Heidegger, who consistently asked his readers and students to approach his texts deconstructively, to question his premises, and to think for themselves. In the 1930s, this admirable principle is effaced in the face of the far more important task of saving the West from nihilism. One is not supposed to question Heidegger’s premises, or to argue that he is just a philosopher like any other philosopher, if only in the sense that he has an inevitable relation to his cultural milieu and to an implicit system of ends, who is not in fact part of a hidden or higher history, despite his claims to the contrary.

There is a curiously adamantine moral certainty at work in the beyng-historical notebooks, an urgent and desperate tone; there is no place here for arguments or disagreement. The very existence of the West is at stake, and there is either the decision to take this leap into a wholly new thinking with Heidegger or to destroy one’s self in nihilism. Yet Heidegger’s lack of hermeneutic depth about his own life and thought, to be examined below, shows that he has perhaps not found a new thinking at all, and has not transcended philosophy or his own background. It may be that Heidegger has misunderstood (and simplified) the history of the West and the nature of the death of the ontotheological God.

Perhaps surprisingly, after the second World War, Heidegger engaged in dialogue with those who were still (according to his position in the 1930s) mired in metaphysics. Heidegger was not hermetic or quietist in his later years, and had no qualms about translating the insights of the beyng-historical notebooks into everyday public language. In fact, Heidegger spent the rest of his life in dialogue—in seminars, lectures, and conversations with a wide variety of poets, artists, and philosophers. If Heidegger did not want to be questioned, or did not want to engage in dialogue with those who might strongly disagree with him, then arguably he would not have continued to publish and lecture until the end of his life. Therefore I think that my reading of Heidegger is
perhaps acceptable even on his own terms. What I am doing in this chapter (and in Chapter 4) is analogous to how Heidegger described his own reading of Kant, in 1929: “An attempt to question what has not been said, instead of writing in a fixed way about what Kant said.”

I will attempt to question what Heidegger has not said, what he has overstated, what he has ignored, and what he has misunderstood about the West, and I will also question whether he has really achieved a new way of talking about god or a new way of doing philosophy.

Introduction to the Beiträge

I turn now to the Beiträge itself, which consists of six sections; Anklang (echo or resonance), Das Zuspiel (interplay), Der Sprung (the leap), Gründung (grounding), Zukünftigen (the ones to come, “futural ones”), and Der letzte Gott (the last god, where “last” signifies “ultimate”). Heidegger summarizes the book thusly: “What is said is inquired after and thought in the ‘interplay’ with each other of the first and the other beginning, according to the ‘echo’ of beyng in the distress of being’s abandonment, for the ‘leap’ into beyng, in order to ‘ground’ its truth, as a preparation for ‘the ones to come’ and for ‘the last god.’” This is a rather mystifying sentence, to be sure, and we will try to unpack what Heidegger means in what follows. I begin with a brief summary of the book as a whole.

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28 GA3:250 (175).
29 There is also a preliminary introductory section, and an eighth concluding section written in 1938.
30 GA65/7 (6).
31 It should also be noted that, in translating these ideas into English, we primarily lose the resonances of various root-words in German, as well as Heidegger’s wordplay. Ereignis is left in German, though when necessary I translate it as “appropriating,” which is closer to the German than Maly/Emad’s “en-ownment” (which also has the shortcoming of not being an English word). The key is eigen, the English “propr-” in the sense of proper to me, owned by me, appropriated by me, to come into my own; the Er- prefix implies the transitive event-character of the owning. I leave Da-sein untranslated, though I approve of Prufer’s paraphrase: “the availability (in withdrawnness) of the interplay of presence to … / absence from …” (Thomas Prufer, Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993], 79). I translate Seyn as “beyng,” as opposed to Maly/Emad, who added an unnecessary hyphen, rendering it “be-ing.” One of the most important words in Beiträge is Wesung, which I translate as “essencing” to emphasize its difference from a static metaphysical “essence”; “essential swaying” is Maly/Emad’s choice. Wesung is derived from wesen, an infinitive form of “to be” which is no longer used in everyday German, though gewesen (the perfect passive participle) is still in use, as are anwesen and abwesen. Wesen does not mean metaphysical was-sein
The first section, “Echo,” describes the “faint echo of the truth of beyng itself” in the midst of the abandonment of being. This abandonment is the devastation wrought by the first beginning (i.e., the history of metaphysics from Plato to Nietzsche) which culminated in technology. Drawing heavily on the work of Ernst Jünger, Heidegger speaks here of various problematic aspects of late modernity. The difficulty is that the gigantic has overwhelmed man, and “man is so fully blinded by what is objective and machinational that beings already withdraw from him,” but even more so, “beyng and its truth withdraws.” Man is blind to the predicament that he is in, lost in technology and the shallowness of lived-experience, and hence is not aware of the flight of the gods.

The second section, “Interplay,” portrays the first foray from the first beginning (of the West) into the other beginning. There is only one beginning, but Heidegger wants to recapitulate it in a new way, to go “behind” the first beginning by deconstructing the ontotheological and metaphysical edifice built upon it. In this section, Heidegger attempts to introduce a turning in our own thought, a new way of appropriating the history of philosophy. Interplay prepares the way for the third section, “The Leap,” a transition into the other beginning. This so-called leap from the old thinking to the new thinking happens when we have recognized what Heidegger has recognized (the nihilism of the West), and have grasped the necessity for leaping into the new thinking against our usual representational relation to the world.

32 GA65:109 (76).
34 Heidegger attacks modern natural science in particular (GA65:149-63 [100-13]) as falling prey to this tendency.
The fourth section, “Grounding,” is the longest in the Beiträge, and draws largely on Heidegger’s essays from the late 1920s and early 1930s, though it places them in a new context. This section does the elaborate work of deconstructing and rethinking truth, ground, and the human person on the basis of Ereignis.\(^{35}\) The fifth section, “The Ones to Come,” refers to the founders of the other beginning, much like Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, who will restore wholeness to the West through poetry, deed, and word. Heidegger refers to himself as an anfänglich (inceptual) thinker, though also at times as the mere forerunner of a future thinker who will complete the project of the Beiträge. The poet Hölderlin, whose importance for Heidegger can hardly be overstated,\(^{36}\) is included among the ones to come. Despite his having lived in the late 18\(^{th}\) and early 19\(^{th}\) centuries, he is still a

\(^{35}\) This section also attempts to forge a link between Sein und Zeit and Beiträge. Heidegger provides a strained reading which attempts (and fails) to argue that his later ideas were in fact already formulated by him in the 1920s (e.g., GA65:381 [266] and 283 [199]), and this section of GA65 is probably the least philosophically worthwhile. Heidegger would revisit Sein und Zeit repeatedly during the 1930s (for example in Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen, hereafter “GA82,” soon to be published). There are interesting parallels between the texts which Heidegger tellingly fails to mention, however. For example, the Zaraf (call) of Sein und Zeit is transferred from Sein to the last god as correlated with Seyn, and individual Dasein is projected into world-historical dimensions, with Germany taking the place of the individual. Retrieving and projecting an authentic history shifts from the individual to the mythical-national level, which will have important implications (we return to this issue in Chapter 4).

\(^{36}\) Indeed, it would be almost impossible to overstate the importance of Hölderlin for Heidegger. In his later years, Heidegger mentioned the importance of Hölderlin for him even at a young age; regarding the 1910 publication of Hölderlin’s Pindar translations followed by the 1914 publication of his late hymns, Heidegger writes: “These two books hit us students like an earthquake” (GA12:172 [78]). This impact only increased for Heidegger in the 1930s. Hölderlin is mentioned relatively rarely in GA65, though always at critical junctures and in the most glowing possible terms; in the later beyng-historical notebooks, he is mentioned more consistently. See, for example: “Hölderlin … the one who poeticized furthest ahead … what hidden history of the much invoked nineteenth century happened here? … Must we not turn in our thinking to totally different domains and standards and ways of being, in order to become ones who still belong to the necessities that are breaking open here?” (GA65:204 [142-43]), “To what extent does the poet Hölderlin, who has already gone ahead of us, become now our necessity, in his most unique poetic experience [Dichtertum] and work?” (GA65:353 [247]), and perhaps the most mind-boggling passage in this vein: “Philosophy is now primarily preparation for philosophy in the manner of building the nearest forecourts in whose spatial configuration Hölderlin’s word becomes hearable and is replied to by Da-sein and in such a reply becomes grounded as the language of future man … the historical destiny of philosophy culminates in the recognition of making Hölderlin’s word be heard” (GA65:421 [297]). This remained the case for Heidegger up through the 1960s. In the 1966 Der Spiegel interview he states: “My thought stands in an unavoidable [unumgänglichen] relationship to the poetry of Hölderlin. … I do not take Hölderlin to be just any poet … Hölderlin is the poet who points to the future, who awaits the god” (GA16:678 [330]) and again in 1963 (Zollikoner Seminare, ed. Medard Boss [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987], translated as Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001], 332-33 [265-67]; hereafter “GA89”). Heidegger also selected verses by Hölderlin to be read aloud at his burial (see GA16:749-51).
futural thinker\footnote{GA65:204 (142), “the one who poeticized furthest ahead”; GA65:401 (281), “the most futural of the ones to come.” See also Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik,” ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostmerann, 1984), translated as Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic,” trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 134 (117); hereafter “GA45”: “Hölderlin, although further from us reckoned historiographically, is the more futural.”} who reached far ahead, and hence is one to come.\footnote{Despite all the mention of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and Hegel, Heidegger’s real interlocutors in the Beiträge are Jünger, Nietzsche, and Hölderlin (and to a lesser extent Kant and Schelling).} In general, however, the ones to come are future creators, statesmen, and poets who will create a future history for the West, with the help of the last god.\footnote{Until 1935, these three categories referred most eminently to Heidegger, Hitler, and Hölderlin (respectively); by the post-war period, Heidegger left out the “statesman.” Heidegger describes the ones to come as “strangers of like mind who are equally decided for gifting and refusing … stillest witness to the stillest stillness” (GA65:394 [277]). As always, Hölderlin is of central importance here: “Hölderlin is their poet who comes from afar and therefore the poet most futural of the ones to come. Hölderlin is the most futural of the ones to come because he comes from the farthest away; and coming from so far away, he traverses and transforms what is the greatest” (this is the last line of the book; GA65:401 [281]).} The final section, “The Last God,” is the shortest and most enigmatic section of the Beiträge. The entire project of an other beginning depends on whether or not man can recover the holy, the site for the decision of the last god regarding whether or not to “pass by” (i.e., restore divinity to the world and rescue the West from nihilism), thus granting beyng and history to the West once again. Beiträge serves primarily as preparation for the advent of this god (to be examined below).

The Beiträge is a complex work, and the current study is not intended to provide a complete or exhaustive reading. However, in order to understand the context of the last god, one needs 1) a general explanation of what Heidegger means by Seyn and Ereignis, as well as an explanation of a central theme of the Beiträge 2) the sheltering of beyng in a being as the Zwischen (between) in strife, and 3) the silent (what Heidegger calls “sigetic”) nature of this sheltering.

Heidegger’s Project

As we recall from Chapter 1, Heidegger had made his first steps toward rejecting neo-Kantianism, liberal theology, and cultural Christianity in the early 1920s, but it was in the 1930s
that he formulated the conception of the last god, which he hoped could serve as a response to the crisis of nihilism in the West. I have mentioned some of the basic tendencies of Heidegger’s early thought in Chapter 1, but his project alters somewhat with a series of essays beginning in late 1928, and this will provide us with the necessary context to understand what Heidegger means by the last god.40

The shift in Heidegger’s project involves an attempt to transcend philosophy as usually carried out, which asks about \textit{das Sein als seiendheit des Seienden} (being as the being-ness of beings), i.e., “what is the being of beings?” This is what Heidegger calls the \textit{Leitfrage} or guiding-question of the history of philosophy, which remains mired in metaphysics and seeks essences with theoretical language.41 \textit{Sein und Zeit} had made a first tentative step out of this position, but with the \textit{Beiträge}, Heidegger decisively transitions into the \textit{Grundfrage} or foundational question that he now wants to address: \textit{das Sein als Seyn}, the question of the truth of beyng,42 where beyng is thought as \textit{Ereignis} (appropriating event), \textit{Ereignis} is what brings beings into being, though not in a causal sense.

Heidegger does not claim to be the first to have thought \textit{Ereignis} in this way but finds precursors in Herakleitos, Hölderlin, and others. He describes beyng/\textit{Ereignis} thus:

\begin{quote}
One can name it an origin, assuming that all ontic-causal overtones are excluded; it is the \textit{Ereignis} of being as condition for the arrival of beings; beyng lets beings presence. It is a matter here of understanding that the deepest meaning of being is letting … presence is no
\end{quote}

41 He refers to this in GA67 and elsewhere as the \textit{Überwindung} (overcoming) of metaphysics; metaphysics has reached completion (\textit{Vollendung}), and must now be overcome, though (he claims) not in a Hegelian or dialectical sense. See GA66:181-83 (159-61); GA67:10-19, esp. 16; and GA67:34.
42 “\textit{Seyn}” is, in short, Heidegger’s attempt to avoid metaphysical connotations of the word \textit{Sein} by using an archaic spelling. Heidegger notes that “in my attempt up to now,” i.e., up to roughly 1929, “I was always primarily concerned with elucidating the ways of clearing and the modifications of sheltering-concealing and their essential belonging together” (GA65:351 [246]), but now he goes deeper, to \textit{Ereignis}. In this transition, \textit{Dasein} is transformed: “\textit{Dasein} in the thinking of the other beginning is completely different, so different that there is no mediating transition from that first usage to this other one. \textit{Dasein} is not the mode of actuality for every type of being, but is itself the being of the \textit{Da} … \textit{Da-sein} is a way of being which, in that it ‘is’ the \textit{Da} (actively and transitively, as it were), is a unique being” (GA65:296 [209]).}
longer emphasized, but rather the letting itself. It is no longer the presence of a being which draws one’s attention, but the ground which that being covers over.45

There is nothing else from which Ereignis itself could be derived, even less in whose terms it could be explained. Ereignis is not the outcome of something else, but the letting whose reach alone is what gives us such things as a ‘there is,’ a ‘there is’ of which even being itself stands in need to come into its own as presence.44

It is noteworthy that Heidegger calls Ereignis the “condition for the arrival of beings.” Indeed, as we will see below, while Heidegger claims to be recovering the primal Greek experience of being as Ereignis, in fact this seems to function rather as a sort of Kantian super-category, a transcendental condition for the possibility of all forms of knowing/cognition, and has far more in common with Kant, Fichte, and Husserl than Herakleitos or Parmenides. As Heidegger writes, Ereignis is “the letting itself,”45 that which allows beings to appear, the ‘ground’ but not the cause of the interplay of the presence and absence of entities. Ereignis points to that ‘before’ which there ‘is’ ‘nothing.’ It is the originary differentiating event of something and nothing, which withdraws into a primal absence as it gives the presencing/absencing of the world to our understanding. Heidegger emphasizes that this is not a causal origin, and that our taking it in this way is only due to our usual ways of thinking. Ereignis does not create beings in the sense that a Creator God creates beings (an “ontic-causal origin”). From the mere “perspective of correctness, the open is indicated only as condition and is

43 GA15:101-03 (59-60).
44 GA12:247 (127-28). The khora in Plato’s Timaeus is a helpful analogy. The best description of Ereignis from the secondary literature is found in Prufer, 84: “The primal presencing and absencing, the primal showing together with retention and protention, cannot be gained or lost by us, cannot be begun or ended by us. Inexorably and gratuitously it presences and absences the whole network of presencing and absencing acts or achievings and their presenced and absenced objects or themes, and out of it comes about what we call ‘I’ as the center of responsibility which initiates and as the recipient of objectifications which are displayed. We cannot represent or manipulate the bringing about of us, we who can represent or manipulate beings only because we are caught up in the web woven by the interplay of primal presencing/absencing happily beyond our control.” Heidegger also gives the example of a jug on a table: “The open … is in fact something like a hollow medium, e.g., that of a jug … not a random emptiness that is merely enclosed by the walls, [but rather] … the hollow medium is the determining framing that sustains the walling of the walls and their edges. These are merely the efflux of that originary open” (GA65:339 [237]). This idea would reappear in the later essay, “Das Ding,” in Vorträge und Aufsätze, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), translated as “The Thing,” in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971); hereafter “GA7” and “PLT,” respectively.
45 GA15:103 (60).
thus not sprung in itself,” but rather, the Da “defies every question concerning the relation to the other, to thinking,” and is “every kind of comportment and stance,” but “not a state,” not a static ever-present ground, “but rather an occurrence.”\footnote{GA65:329 (230).} Being is the way that we relate to entities, our as-relations to things in the world. Ontology and being are, as Sheehan puts it, an “index of finitude.”\footnote{GA65:330 (231).} Crucially, as we will see below, God does not have “being,” because God is not finite. Man, on the other hand, is essentially the relationship to being. Man allows as-relations (being) to fall into mere is-relations, taking an as-relation to be static constant presence, and forgetting this hermeneutical “as.”

Heidegger emphasizes that man does not choose to be the Da, and we do not cause the Da to happen, but rather (in the language of both Sein und Zeit and the beyng-historical notebooks) we are “thrown” open. We are opened, and thus are the Da, the site where beyng happens insofar as we bergen (shelter) beyng in a being, i.e., in artwork, poetry, or deed (this will be explained in detail below). A helpful analogy for the Da is psuche in Aristotle, i.e., potential intellect in the De Anima, which as Heidegger mentions “points to something that man himself is and that nevertheless exceeds and surpasses him and always comes into play for determining beings as such in the whole,”\footnote{GA65:312 (220); he also mentions psuche in Plato.} i.e., possibility, openness to being.\footnote{This is also related to Heidegger’s reading of freedom in Kant, a complex issue which falls outside the scope of my argument.} The Da that we are is not a physical location (Maly/Emad’s translation of Da as “t/here” is misleading), not a “here and there that is somehow each time determinable,” but instead “the clearing of beyng itself, whose openness first of all opens up the space for every possible here and there and for arranging beings in historical work and deed.

\footnote{GA65:329 (230).}
\footnote{GA65:330 (231). He adds: “The standing-open-ness as which the human being exists must not be misunderstood as something present-at-hand, as a kind of empty, mental sack into which something could fall on occasion. Rather, the human being as this standing-open-ness is a being-open for the receiving-perceiving of presence [being] and of what is present [beings]. It is the openness for the thingness of things … freedom is to be free and open for being claimed by something” (GA89:272 [216]).}
\footnote{Sheehan, “Paradigm Shift,” 194.}
and sacrifice,” in which “beyng is sheltered and concealed.”Rather than beings, _ta onta_ should be understood as “what is revealed in un-concealment, what postpone concealment for a time.”The complex interplay of presence and absence is the normal state of the world, and truth (in deed, word, action) is a transitory moment of stability in this primal flux.

_Ereignis_, unlike being, is an _Abgrund_ (abyss, literally the “staying away of ground”) and cannot be thought as an explanatory metaphysical ground. The truth of beyng as _Ereignis_ goes strongly against our everyday understanding of the being of beings as presence. In understanding beyng as concealed or absent, we tend to view absence as a mere deficient mode of a primary actuality, and Heidegger notes that it is tempting to think of beyng’s abyssal nature as merely potential or somehow still within our metaphysical categories (becoming as the privation of being), whereas in fact it falls outside of this dichotomy.

Heidegger is rather vague in how he describes _Ereignis_ terminologically. Due to the ineffability and simplicity of this event, it is difficult to capture in concepts, none of which fully encompass its meaning. The basic event that Heidegger describes with _Ereignis_ (and related terms such as _Da_, _Lichtung_, _Seyn_, and _Aletheia_) is an answer to the question: “What ‘gives’ givenness?” What is responsible for intentionality in the first place, for the correlation between man as _Da-sein_ (being-the-open) and entities? That there _is_ this correlation at all, is due to the presencing/absencing of _Ereignis_. We do not normally notice the hidden source of presence and absence. Rather, _Ereignis_ draws attention to what is given, i.e., beings. The complex interplay at work here is forgotten by the West, according to Heidegger. Metaphysics looks only at givenness, and not the hidden source of this givenness, thus turning to one side of the difference.

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51 GA65:297 (210).
52 GA15:65 (36); emphasis added.
53 This is a play on words; the German _Abgrund_ is usually translated as simply “abyss,” but the etymology of _Abgrund_ (in English, ab-ground), implies the staying away of ground in the sense of representation, calculation, and our usual ways of knowing. Heidegger gives a related reading of the German _es gibt_ (colloquially, ‘there is’, like the French _il y a_), which he reads literally as “it gives,” the pre-subject/object giving of being/beings by _Ereignis_.

The *Beiträge* argues that for contemporary culture things are not treated as ways to shelter beyng. Rather, western culture is distracted by the present thing and treats it as a standing-reserve of material with which to master the earth in nihilistic *Machenschaft* (machination), described in terms of *Gestell* (enframing) and *Technik* (technology) in later essays. For Heidegger, there is a root cause to our difficulty of taking things as technological, or as a utilizable standing-reserve. Our inability to appreciate things in their simplicity and givenness is, in Heidegger’s view, due to ancient Greek philosophy. Though early Greek thought is of paramount importance for his thought, Heidegger claims that already by Plato there was a tendency for Greek philosophy to tend toward objectivity and constant presence, not to think *Ereignis* explicitly and thus to turn to that which is illuminated instead of that which gives illumination. Heidegger writes: “The first and decisive understanding of *aletheia* as the *aletheia* of the *logos* barred the Greeks from the possibility of thinking *aletheia* as *a-letheia* (as unconcealment); that is, as *Lichtung*” (*Lichtung*, “clearing,” is yet another word for the *Da*).

Greek thinking was fated to have this tendency towards objectivity. The first beginning of western thought, which Heidegger is trying to recapitulate in the *Beiträge* with an other beginning (one that is founded in *Ereignis*, succeeding where Greek philosophy failed), begins in Plato and inexorably ends in machination. While many have critiqued this aspect of Heidegger, it is difficult to argue against the fact that there is indeed something about our Greek origins (of understanding the being of beings as *phusis*, *logos*, *techne*, etc.) that is constitutive for how we understand beings today. Heidegger calls this *Geschick* (fate), which is to say that we cannot explain *why* the Greeks understood being in this way and not another. This is simply the history that we have been given. It

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54 “*Gestell* is, as it were, the photographic negative of *Ereignis*” (GA15:103 [60]); see also GA66:16-29 (12-22) and GA66:173-78 (151-55). “Machination” is related to Heidegger’s understanding of Nietzsche’s will to power; see GA69:186-214. Rosenzweig has many similar passages regarding technology and capitalism; see GS3:413-21.


56 GA15:41.

57 See GA70:131-32 and GA66:230 (204). As we will see below, Heidegger’s placing of everyone from Plato to the Baden Neo-Kantians on a single continuum is problematic insofar as it overlooks many nuanced differences in the history of the West.
ended in nihilism, and this is why (in Heidegger’s view) we need to found a new history where the being of beings is understood in terms of Ereignis rather than Gestell.

Sheltering and Strife

What would it mean to experience the world in the light of Ereignis, expressed in the other beginning as rising from unconcealment without becoming an object of representation? For Heidegger, this is achieved by die Bergung (the sheltering) of beyng (i.e., Ereignis) in a being, which protects against Vorstellung (representation), Gestell (enframing), and Gegenständlichkeit (objectness), i.e., all of the ways that beings are reduced to bare presence in a technological framework. Though Ereignis is an event, it “cannot be represented as an ‘event.’” Rather, it withdraws from calculation and “its truth, i.e., the truth itself, holds sway only as sheltered in art, thinking, poetizing, deed … clearing needs that which keeps it in openness, and that is in each case a different being (thing - tool - work).” The sheltering of beyng in a being, as opposed to representing it with metaphysical concepts, allows Da-sein to occur “within the ways of sheltering truth.” In dwelling poetically, by being poet, creator, and preserver, man is Da-sein. Through man’s care, the open (Da) is able “to be” (sein) in the fullest sense. In care, the interplay of presence/absence can occur (in the open) without the metaphysical fixation on atemporal concepts.

Heidegger gives many examples, but language is typically held up as the preeminent way of sheltering, and poetry is preeminent within language. In fact, the Beiträge itself is one of many possible “pathways and manners of sheltering,” a way in which humanity “sustains Da-sein” by taking over the Da “into ‘care.’” Beings can be in a vulgar sense even when abandoned by beyng

58 GA65:256 (180), 389 (271).
59 GA65:30-31 (22).
60 GA65:28 (20).
61 GA65:248 (157).
(beings are, obviously, still ‘present’ in machination), but when beyng is sheltered in a being through language or art, “a being no longer is but beyng arises unto ‘a being,’” and this “transforms all relations to ‘what is.’” For example, Heidegger’s sheltering discourse in the Beiträge attempts to indicate beings and allow them simply to be without predetermining them. In various essays and lectures, Heidegger gives the examples of a hearth in a home, a jug of water on a table, a Greek temple, a peasant’s shoes (in a Van Gogh painting), a field-path, the Danube River, etc. In each case, the thing in question is not treated as an object to be represented, but rather sets forth a world. Truth as Ereignis happens in these things.

This sheltering of beyng in a being, preeminently in language, sets forth a historical world and prepares a site for mankind to await the passing-by of the last god, i.e., the event-like restoration of the divinity of God after nihilism (to be explained in more detail, below). This occurs through what Heidegger calls at various points khorismos, polemos, Erklärtung (cleaving), and Streit (strife), which is bridged by the Zwischen (between, midpoint) of Da-sein. As described above, our finitude (i.e., our potentiality, our historical and underway nature) opens us up, and we become “the character of a midpoint that is open and thus sheltering.” The Zwischen overcomes strife not “by building a bridge between beyng (beingness) and beings—as if there were two riverbanks needing to

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62 GA65:30-31 (22).
63 GA65:31 (23).
64 This is the strifing of strife, “Die Bestreitung des Streites” (GA65:14 [11]). A key source for strife/polemos in the 1930s is Herakleitos. Heidegger’s translation of fragment 53 (usually rendered in English as “war is the father of all…”) is translated (in GA40:47 [64]) as “confrontation is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the sire (who lets emerge), but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway. For it lets some appear as gods, others as human beings, some it produces (sets forth) as slaves, but others as the free.” Like the strife of the Beiträge, this polemos “is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human” (GA40:48 [65]). “As Herakleitos thinks it, struggle first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, efts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up … world comes to be … the struggle is then sustained by the creators, by the poets, thinkers, and statesmen. … Beings as such now first come into being. This becoming-a-world is authentic history” (GA40:48 [65]). Heidegger’s account of strife in Herakleitos as the original unity of all oppositions is thus essentially identical to ‘strife’ in the Beiträge. Heidegger would later expand on this in 1943 Herakleitos lectures, Heraklit (3rd ed.), ed. M. S. Frings (Frankfurt a.M.; Vittorio Klostermann, 1994); hereafter “GA55.” Heidegger will also sometimes use the word strife (or struggle, Kampf) to mean simply that the “truth is never ‘in itself,’ available by itself, but instead must be gained by struggle; unconcealedness is wrested from concealment” (GA54:23 [17]).
65 GA65:31 (23).
be bridged—but by simultaneously transforming beyng and beings in their simultaneity."66 How
does this happen? Heidegger writes that beyng appropriates in two pairs, later combined in the
1940s into das Geviert (a single “four-fold”). On the site of Da-sein as Zwischen, beyng appropriates 1)
world and earth to each other, and more importantly for our purposes in this chapter, 2)
appropriates man and the gods to each other.

First we look at the strife of world and earth. Da-sein as Zwischen occurs in what Heidegger
calls the “strifing of the strife of earth and world.”67 World here (in a manner reminiscent of Sein und
Zeit) signifies the place of history, of being, and of human relations. Earth is the concealed
counterpart to world, which world wrests into unconcealment. This is not to imply that earth already
exists.68 Rather, earth and world occur through each other, are owned or appropriated by each other.
Earth is already ‘there,’ concealed within a world, and world needs earth as a concealed ground for
its setting-forth of history, similar to world as described by Rosenzweig in Star 1. World shelters
truth and lets “worlding of a world occur,”69 upon which the various historical interpretations of
being are built. World and earth are the most basic unconcealing-concealing (given by self-
concealing Ereignis), the foundational (yet “abyssal”) presence-absence.70 These ways of sheltering
guide Da-sein and “make up being-a-people.”71 The difficulty with the culmination of the first

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66 GA65:14 (11).
67 GA65:96 (66).
68 Heidegger uses the word “earth” in a very specific sense. The physical earth on which we live obviously does not
require human involvement to exist in the colloquial sense of the word, though it is only brought into being by man.
69 GA65:391 (273).
70 See GA65:275 (193). He continues: “In one respect earth is more originary than nature, because it is related to history.
World is higher than what is merely ‘created’ because world is history-forming and thus closest to enowning.”
71 GA65:390 (273). Heidegger describes this with more precision in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in
Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); hereafter “GA5.” He writes that a
Greek temple, e.g., as artwork grants “the all-governing expanse of open relations,” which “is the world of this historical
people. … [S]tanding there, the temple work opens up a world while, at the same time, setting this world back onto the
earth which itself first comes forth as homeland [heimatliche Grund] … [T]he temple work, in setting up a world, does not
let the material disappear; rather, it allows it to come forth for the very first time, to come forth, that is, into the open of
the world of the work” (GA5:28, 33 [21, 24]). He concludes: “The truly poeticizing projection is the opening up of that
in which Dasein, as historical, is already projected. This is the earth (and, for a historical people, its earth), the self-
closing ground on which it rests, along with everything which, though hidden from itself, it already is” (GA5:63 [47]).
beginning in the gigantic and machination is that “the earth is not allowed the strife with a world, because earth is not allowed the truth of beyng.” For a world to be founded by sheltering beyng in poetry, thought, and deed, Da-sein needs to create the strife that can bring the earth into the open and reverse the process of machination.

The second strife is that between man and the gods. According to Heidegger, both the divine and the human are misunderstood in the first beginning as entities which are easily understandable and simply present to reason, and hence we need a new sense of humanness and of divinity. Da-sein will no longer be held “in the perspectives of the hitherto existing ways of thinking and saying in western history,” but instead as looking towards a “future humanness.” This new higher man—strongly reminiscent of Zarathustra’s teaching about the Übermensch—is an “intimator of beyng,” an achieved self. Future man will achieve the open by being appropriated by Ereignis, which simultaneously appropriates the gods. The “history of man” requires the “passing-by of god,” as both are appropriated to each other and necessary for each other.

As expressed in the Beiträge, the specifics of two strifes are somewhat unclear, but thankfully this topic is treated again by Heidegger in the following years, where he develops these two strifes as the fourfold. The fourfold is drawn from Hölderlin, and is presented in a preliminary way in the Beiträge. It is in this text that he sketches the first diagram of the four in their relation, where the two

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72 GA65:277 (195). See also GA66:7 (5).
73 GA65:300 (211).
74 GA65:300 (212).
75 GA65:245 (173). This is also reminiscent of the taking over of one’s Dasein (in authenticity and resoluteness) in Sein und Zeit; we will also see a parallel in Rosenzweig’s Star, in Chapter 3.
76 GA65:26 (20). Heidegger adds: “‘Man’ and ‘god’ are word-hulls without history if the truth of beyng in them is not brought to language. Beyng holds sway as the Zwischen for god and man, but in such a way that this between-space [Zwischenraum] first grants essential possibility for god and man, a Zwischen that surges over its shore and from this surging-over allows shore to stand as shore, a shore that always belongs to the stream of appropriating” (GA65:476 [335]). As described above, when the truth of beyng is brought to language, beyng holds sway as the “between” for both strifes (god/man, world/earth), setting forth an unconcealed historical world in relation to a concealed earth.
strifes of man/god and earth/world comprise horizontal and vertical axes, respectively, centered around Ereignis, with Da denoting the entire diagram. Ereignis is the source, though not understood as ground or in any metaphysical-causal sense, of the fourfold, and this unfolded whole takes place ‘within’ the Da.

Heidegger later expands on the fourfold in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the “Letter on Humanism,” “The Thing,” and various writings on Hölderlin. The fourfold is, most importantly for our purposes here, prior to the usual forms of theology or philosophy, and indicates a basic mytho-poetic world-forming experience that precedes discourse in our usual sense of the word. This is a basic experience that is deeper than any doctrine, prior to the human self, and also prior to any dialogue between selves (or between man and God). Heidegger writes: “Being face-to-face with one another has a more distant origin; it originates in that distance where earth and sky, the god and man reach one another.” His goal is to describe (and enact, to an extent) the Da or space where this “reaching” could happen, and “in order to experience this face-to-face of things

78 GA65:310 (218).
79 This text serves as a clear summary of the themes of the beyng-historical notebooks, similar in function to the Nietzsche’s Wort essay in GA5 summarizing a decade of Nietzsche lectures/essays.
80 Here Heidegger adds that the fourfold (divinities, humans, earth, sky) happens as Ereignis; each of the four “is expropriated, within their mutual appropration, into its own being” which is “the mirror-play of the fourfold,” out of which emerges “the simple onefold of the four”; the mirror-play of this simple onefold is “world” (GA7:179 [PLT 177]).
81 It should be noted that the four are not exactly identical in the 1930s and 1940s-50s. Heidegger refines the doctrine, partially under the influence of Hölderlin’s hymns (“Andenken” in particular) such that “sky” replaces “world,” “world” is now strictly synonymous with “Da” (in the original sketched diagram of the Beiträge), and less emphasis is placed on the ‘strife.’
82 To look forward to Chapter 4 briefly, even the dialogue of God and man must be preceded for Heidegger by the dialogue between the gods (formally indicated) and man, as a sort of ur-phenomenological (and not, strictly speaking, philosophical or theological in the usual sense) condition for the possibility for, e.g., the dialogue between Rosenzweig and the revealed God. On Heidegger’s reading, the call of Ereignis is older than the call of God. As I will argue in more detail below, Heidegger is certainly right that in the order of knowing, insofar as Da-sein is finite, there must be a basic phenomenon of being receptive to revelation or a space for the religious before any deity can fill that space; but this gives primacy to philosophy in a disingenuous way, for if we look at how Heidegger describes it, any revealed God is merely one possibility of many ontic possibilities, and philosophy can never be superceded by revelation. Heidegger is not taking a merely philosophical position, but in fact an implicit theological position which he assumes throughout his work.
83 GA12:199 (103).
with one another in this way, we must, of course, first rid ourselves of the calculative frame of mind,” i.e., the first beginning and its attendant philosophy and theology.84

Yet how exactly does the sheltering of beyng in a being—primarily in language—“allow” the fourfold’s strife of world and earth, man and god?

**Poetry and the Sigetic as Sheltering**

Language is of the utmost importance for Heidegger, particularly in regard to the sheltering of the last god. We have mentioned in a preliminary way that language (and poetry in particular) is the preeminent way of sheltering beyng in a being, the preeminent ‘site’ of the fourfold which allows strife to occur. *Dichtung* (poetry) and Heidegger’s own *Denken* (thinking) is, in part, how the last god will possibly save the West. The difficulty with our usual language is that it is sedimented with Greek ontology and tends towards metaphysics and culminates in nihilism, of which neo-Kantianism is (for Heidegger) the most recent manifestation. As we recall from Chapter 1, Heidegger’s 1919-21 lecture courses were in part an attempt to re-vivify language in the face of this theoretization. Similarly, formal indication (which leaves content in abeyance), developed in 1920-21 and of paramount importance until the very end of his career, was intended to recover *logos* and truth on the basis of a deeper grasp of language.85

After 1929, Heidegger’s understanding of language shifts into a different attunement. He tells us that *die Sprache spricht*, language speaks. It is not man that invents language, but language that speaks through man. This may sound paradoxical or fantastical, but Heidegger is pointing to a basic

84 Heidegger notes that the Greek sense of earth (as part of the fourfold), *gaia* as the “the concealment of the subterranean” as opposed to “the luminosity, the disclosiveness, of the supraterranean (the span of heaven, ouranos)” is lost in the Latin translation, where earth is *terra*, the dry, “land as distinct from the sea,” “upon which construction, settlement, and installation are possible … *terra* becomes *territorium*, land of settlement” (GA54:88 [60]). In a similar vein, Heidegger argues that world in the Greek sense was corrupted by Christian theology. He means world “not [as] the Christian *saeculum,*” but rather as “experienced from within the essencing of truth and of the *Da*” (GA65:295 [208]), underneath the sediment of Christian dogma.

85 See GA60:55-65 (38-45).
human experience, our fundamental sense that we exist within language, and are inexorably shaped by language. Though we can use language merely as a tool, there is something mysterious about it, an irreducible givenness that transcends our self. As Heidegger famously put it: “Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell.”86 Heidegger emphasizes that we must listen to the call of beyng/Ereignis and respond with appropriate language. We should listen to language, experience the phenomena of the world in reticence, and speak out of this attunement.

The appropriating of Ereignis happens through language. Without language there could not be man or gods, for Heidegger. It is language which allows phenomena to “show themselves in what they are.”87 Language is the “clearing-concealing advent of being itself,” how Ereignis happens; it “yields the opening of the clearing.”88 Saying creates the Da, allows the ‘is’ to be said.89 For Ereignis to occur at all, it has to happen in Da-sein, in man’s being the open, and holding the Da open in language (and other forms of sheltering). Beyng “needs and uses man’s appropriations”90 in order to “bring beings as beings, for the first time, into the open.”91 Heidegger writes that language is “the relation of all relations,” the “saying of the world’s fourfold.”92 He notes that the word “saying” (in German as well as English) is drawn from the Norse saga, to show, to set free, to light and conceal a world.93 This is a clear reversal of the modern understanding of language as a calculative-representational tool.

An important aspect of this inceptual saying is its formally indicative and non-objectifying character. This saying should not be conveyed meaning by way of a proposition, but rather as

86 GA9:145 (239). See also GA5:310 (232): “Language is the precinct (templum), i.e., the house of being. The essence of language is neither exhausted in reference, nor is it only a matter of signs and ciphers. Since language is the house of being, we therefore arrive at beings by constantly going through this house.”
87 GA12:247 (127).
88 GA9:159 (249).
89 See GA69:153: “The word is the clearing of the silence of beyng.”
90 GA12:249 (129).
91 GA5:62 (46).
92 GA12:203 (107).
93 GA12:188 (93). The saga he has most clearly in mind here may be Parmenides’ didactic poem (see GA54:169 [114]).
something paradoxical to our usual understanding. In the Beiträge the idea is to avoid the “uniform accessibility of everything to everyone,” where language is merely in “the service of expediting communication.” Examples of this inaccessible and uncanny saying include Beiträge itself, but Heidegger also mentions Christian Scripture and poetry as models. This sort of saying, he emphasizes, would be ideal for theology, as it “purely lets godly presence be said [reines Sich sagen lassen die Gegenwart des Gottes]” without objectifying, rather allowing the phenomena to show themselves.

As we have seen above, it names the last god as absent, without bringing it to presence. Heidegger writes: “There were no concepts for the Greeks. Indeed, in be greifen, there is the gesture of taking possession. The Greek horismos on the contrary surrounds firmly and delicately that which sight takes into view; it does not conceive.” This is not always referred to in paradoxical or poetic terms. Heidegger also refers us back to simple everyday existence:

When we sit in the garden and take delight in a blossoming rose, we do not make an object of the rose … in saying we are enthralled with the lucid red of the rose and muse on the redness of the rose, then this redness is neither an object nor a thing nor something standing over against us like the blossoming rose.

Heidegger does not intend that the other beginning should involve speaking in poetic paradoxes at all times. The idea is that, in our transitional time where everyday language is hopelessly corrupted by metaphysics, inceptive and uncanny language is necessary in order to wake the West out of forgetfulness and nihilism. Ultimately, however, the uncanny (das Unheimlich, “not homey”) will be

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94 GA9:149 (242). The best contemporary example of this would be computer programming languages, the ultimate reduction of language to calculability, where each word and symbol has precisely one meaning—as opposed to the indeterminacy of everyday or poetic language.
95 GA9:149 (242).
96 GA12:18 (PLT 196).
97 GA15:81.
98 GA9:73 (58).
translated into the at-home-ness (in a Heimat) of everyday language,\textsuperscript{99} and will help to establish a world in the same sense that a Greek temple establishes the fourfold.

The Beiträge emphasizes that the old way of using philosophical language to express truth in propositions (the adequation of the content to an expression to an ‘external’ worldly reality) is false because it “presupposes that the one who understands … remains unchanged as he enacts,”\textsuperscript{100} a theme that we recall from Chapter 1. In Ereignis, we ourselves are caught up in the appropriation and do not relate to things as objects of representation. Rather, “truth itself” is “always exposed to displacement and thus no immediate representation of anything extant is ever possible.”\textsuperscript{101}

Heidegger is emphatic in the Beiträge about the necessity for difficult and paradoxical language. In stark contrast to Rosenzweig, as we will see below, Heidegger writes: “All fundamental words have been used up and the genuine relation to the word has been destroyed … the word fails, not as an occasional event, but originally. The word does not even come to word.”\textsuperscript{102} The entire book revolves around this problem; Heidegger is trying to use words to say something that is ultimately ineffable. The way forward is to trope and twist language, to where it will be “no longer a case of talking ’about’ something and representing something objective, but rather of being appropriated over into appropriation.”\textsuperscript{103} The language of the Beiträge itself will enact the change that it describes. Heidegger emphasizes the radicality of this break with old language in writing that he has “neither precedent nor support,”\textsuperscript{104} though to his credit he notes the obvious difficulty, that (to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{99} See Martin Heidegger, \textit{Hölderlins Hymne “Der Ister”} (2nd ed.), ed. W. Biemel (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993), translated as \textit{Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”} trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 84 (69); hereafter “GA53”: “The homely always remains related to the unhomely in such a way that the latter is present in the former.” This is paradoxical, as Polt points out (\textit{Emergency of Being}, 148), insofar as our appropriation, our very ownness, involves \textit{Ent-eignung} (dis-owning), but as he notes, “we can never be at home with appropriation precisely because it provides ownness.”
\item \textsuperscript{100} GA65:14 (10).
\item \textsuperscript{101} GA65:14 (11).
\item \textsuperscript{102} GA65:3 (3), 36 (26).
\item \textsuperscript{103} GA65:3 (3).
\item \textsuperscript{104} GA65:4 (4).
\end{itemize}
say the least) “relapses into the hardened ways and claims of metaphysics will continue to disturb and to block the clarity of the way.”

Heidegger’s goal is a type of language that goes back to the first (Greek) beginning but takes it up in such a way that language comes into its own. To this end, Heidegger spends the entirety of the beyng-historical notebooks in an experiment which attempts to trope metaphysical language to say something completely new and post-metaphysical. It is no wonder that Heidegger writes, in frustration, that he “envies” the poets. Hölderlin is able to transition into post-metaphysical poetic thinking far more easily, given his medium. Heidegger can tell beforehand that his own words will probably fail, which is due to our transitional nihilistic time. He looks forward to the time when “the word could once again work,” and does not presume that he himself will do this. Rather, he points the way to a transition. Heidegger’s new language comes between the first beginning and the other beginning, for while “the time of systems is over,” the time of “the truth of beyng has not yet arrived.” The task of the beyng-historical notebooks is to project open, with new language, a space for a future truth.

To this end, Heidegger deconstructs Aristotle’s classic definition of man as the zoon logon echon, and reads this against the usual translation as “rational animal,” which assumes metaphysical definitions of rational and animal, and is hence bound up with a scientific and taxonomic

105 GA65:12 (9). He addresses this difficulty in a few places. He notes that instead of reading “beyng as Ereignis” as becoming, this merely “makes assertions about Ereignis as an object, instead of letting this essencing—and only it—speak” (GA65:472 [332]); see also GA65:331 (232): “Truth for us is also not what is fixed, that suspicious descendant of validities in themselves. But it is also not mere opposition, the crude and continued flux of all opinions.”

106 For Heidegger the only language that can manage this task is German, and so presumably future thinking will be in German. See GA40:43 (60): “Along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages” and Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit: Einleitung in die Philosophie (2nd ed.), ed. H. Tietjen (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), translated as The Essence of Human Freedom, trans. Ted Sadler (London: Continuum, 2002), 50 (35); hereafter “GA31”: “[It is] not that Greek is loaded with philosophical terminology, but that it philosophizes in its basic structure and formation. The same applies to every genuine language, in different degrees to be sure. The extent to which this is so depends on the depth and power of the people who speak the language and exist within it. Only our German language has a deep and creative philosophical character to compare with the Greek.”

107 GA65:60 (42).

108 GA65:36 (26).

understanding of humanity. The usual definition also turns language into a mere property of the substance “man,” a tool for communication. In deconstructing language in the beyng-historical notebooks, Heidegger rethinks logos as legein, “gathering” in the sense of sheltering beyng in a being without concepts and representations. Rather than a rational animal, “man is a living being possessed of language, i.e., which holds itself within the manifestation of beings in and through language … language is the primordial revelation of the beings in whose midst man exists” insofar as language is how we take entities as entities in the first place.

His most substantive reflections on language in the Beiträge, from sections 276 to 281, carry out this deconstruction of metaphysical language. In the first beginning, the inceptual saying of the Greeks, there was a brief but fleeting saying of beyng from Ereignis, but this rapidly devolved into metaphysics. Most important here is the idea that man is still in some sense a zoon logon echon even though this has been corrupted. As Heidegger says of the metaphysical determination of language, “one cannot simply say that it is entirely untrue.” Just as machination is still a way of revealing beings and still sets forth a world (though a very “poor” world), in the idea of language as the tool of man, or of language as merely mental or neurological, language is rightly still treated as central—even when it is misunderstood. Man and language are intimately related, and this is precisely why language must be rethought. It is only in beyng-historical thinking that “what is ownmost to language” can “arise in the essential swaying of beyng.” Only by stepping back from metaphysics can language “arise from beyng and therefore belongs to it.”

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110 Heidegger also equates this with the fixed Christian understanding of man as an “extant essence,” i.e., as “ens creatum - homo - the ‘pilgrim on earth’” (GA66:163 [141]).
111 See also SZ, GA40, GA85, and GA12.
112 GA31:54 (38).
113 GA65:501 (353).
114 GA65:500 (352).
This new language that arises from beyng speaks in the Grundstimmung (basic attunement) of Verhaltenheit (reservedness, reticence),\(^{115}\) in the style of die Sigetik (sigetic), from the Greek sigan, to be silent.\(^ {116}\) The Beiträge is itself sigetic saying: “Inceptive thinking is itself sigetic, in the most enunciated mindfulness [Besinnung], precisely reticent.”\(^ {117}\) This is the proper style of saying in the other beginning, particularly regarding how to speak of the last god. Heidegger borrows this terminology of the unspoken from Eckhart and Hölderlin, though he also mentions the Greeks as a source, writing that “the Greek man could ‘have’ and retain the word in that preeminent way we call silence.”\(^ {118}\) He suggests that Plato’s notion that the idea of the good is not sayable like other things falls under the sigetic in this sense.\(^ {119}\) While Heidegger mentions the sigetic obliquely at various points in his published work, the beyng-historical notebooks are the only place where he talks at length about this phenomenon.

What is the sigetic? Heidegger writes: “Language is grounded in silence. Silence is the most sheltered measure-holding. It holds the measure, in that it first sets up measures.”\(^ {120}\) This is a silence that, as Schürmann puts it, “would render all speech possible just as being renders possible all beings.”\(^ {121}\) The sigetic naming of the last god is reticent in exactly the same way as the naming of beyng is reticent. Silence is to speech as Ereignis is to being/beings. There is a clear parallel between the withdrawal of the event of being (and subsequent falling into a fixation on the being of beings), and the withdrawal of the divine as to theion (and subsequent falling into ontotheology). Just as the passing-by (in an Augenblick, “moment”) of the last god precedes time-space, which precedes time

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\(^{115}\) Verhaltenheit (restraint) is the “basic disposition of futural philosophy” (GA65:4 [2]).

\(^{116}\) In the post-GA65 beyng-historical notebooks, Heidegger tends to favor the words Stille and Erlechweigen over Sigetik, but the meaning remains roughly the same.

\(^{117}\) GA65:58 (41).

\(^{118}\) GA54:116 (79).


\(^{120}\) GA65:510 (359).

\(^{121}\) Schürmann, 34.
and space (to be explained below), the sigetic precedes language as legein, which is the basis of the later reduced sense of language as mere tool.

The sigetic is necessary insofar as what Heidegger is trying to say (particularly with regard to the last god) is inherently difficult. What he is trying to describe precedes the usual subject/object dichotomy, withdraws from calculation, and must rather be experienced. This “manifold” matter is in fact a “onefold,” which is the difficulty. The repetition of the beyng-historical notebooks is a consequence of Heidegger’s various ways of trying to say the same thing (beyng as Ereignis) from every possible perspective—machination, truth, ground, being, the last god, and so on. In speaking of this onefold, Heidegger often mentions the tautology of Parmenides (esti gar einai) as a “genuine tautology” and hence a model. He notes that this looks as if he is just valorizing a lack of content, “as if ‘knowing’ is drawn out into a stagnant reflection.” He acknowledges the difficulty, but emphasizes that the Beiträge is transitional. Thinkers of the future will be able to do this new thinking.

Only very rarely does Heidegger indicate what this future thinking or future speaking of the gods might look like, i.e., if the other beginning will ever move beyond a sigetic experiencing of things in their simplicity. In a crucial passage, he writes: “It may be that the other beginning, too, is capable of holding and sheltering Ereignis in a singular lighting and as clearing—just as in the first

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122 See GA65:81 (57): “Each of the six joinings of the jointure stands for itself, but only in order to make the essential onefold more pressing … attempt is made always to say the same of the same, but in each case from within another essential domain … seen externally … one easily finds ‘repetitions’ everywhere.”

123 Esti gar einai is translated by Heidegger as anwest nämlich Anwesen, presencing namely presences. See GA9:362 (306): “Does a tautology speak here? Indeed. However, it is tautology in that highest sense, which says not nothing but everything.”

124 GA65:10 (8).

125 In GA66 Heidegger presents a hint of the manner of this future thinking, at least; Besinnung (mindfulness), a new way of doing philosophy which will “overcome ‘reason’ as mere receiving of what is pre-given (nous), as calculating and explaining (ratio), and as planning and securing” (GA66:49 [40]), yet there is no sense of what this new thinking will actually look like when it says anything other than Ereignis.
beginning only *phusis* was gathered (*logos*), even if barely and only for an instant.”¹²⁶ Thus there may be some sort of non-metaphysical way—beyond Heidegger’s own thought—of actually addressing entities with a new language instead of formally indicating them in a transitional way. As the other beginning is supposed to eventually found a history, it must eventually “make itself common,” and the essential word needs to “become the common possession of all”¹²⁷ in order to really found a *Heimat*. Yet Heidegger wonders, later in his career, whether this new language is possible—it may be that western language cannot avoid metaphysics.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ GA65:236 (167). As we will see in Chapter 4, one of the difficulties with Heidegger is that the formal indications must be filled with content at some point, and this content must be somehow related to the history of thought, i.e., the categories of old philosophy and theology. Yet even if there could be common content for all, beyng itself is never going to be communicable in propositional form, nor should it be: “Beyng must above all remain unreadable [deutunglos]” (GA65:476 [335]).

¹²⁷ GA4:35 (55). We will see a similar idea in Rosenzweig, below.

¹²⁸ ID 73: “It must remain an open question whether the nature of western languages is in itself marked with the exclusive brand of metaphysics, and thus marked permanently by the ontotheologic.” Heidegger’s ambivalence and questioning attitude regarding the sigetic and the content of the last god and future philosophy has been critiqued by commentators such as Rosen and Gonzalez. Rosen writes that the sigetic is “what one can only call prophetic,” that in *Ereignis* “there seems to be nothing here to think ‘about.’ No wonder Heidegger always insists that he is ‘on the way toward speech’” (Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969], 36; *Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993], xvii). Gonzalez asks: “What exactly would [the sigetic] be? Simply an utterance of the word Seyn? … Seyn, Ereignis, and Da-sein; can even these words really pretend to be anything more than rather awkward and embarrassing ciphers for what must remain unsaid?” (Francisco Gonzalez, “And the Rest is Sigetic: Silencing Logic and Dialectic in Heidegger’s Beiträge zur Philosophie,” *Research in Phenomenology* 38 [2008], 360 and 373). Passages like “What remains to be said? Only this; appropriation appropriates [das Ereignis er-signet]” [ZSD 45 (24)] might give rise to the suspicion that these are not genuine tautologies in a Parmenidean sense, but rather merely empty. While I certainly have some sympathy with this position, this is not quite fair to Heidegger. These critics do not really “go along” with Heidegger in this case, and are attacking him as if he was presenting a clear-cut “sigetic philosophy” which was self-contradictory. The sigetic does not mean literal silence, as evidenced by the beyng-historical notebooks. Despite the difficulty of saying this onefold tautological thought, the topic is in fact fecund enough to fill thousands of pages. Sigetic saying does not say nothing; what Heidegger means is that such thinking is reticent in relation to ordinary thinking, and that its content cannot be parsed out or systematized in an easily understandable manner. See, e.g., GA65:485 (341): “Every saying of beyng must name *Ereignis* … this saying is never unequivocal in the sense of an apparently linear unequivocality of the ordinary way of speaking; but it is no less than this [ordinary way of thinking] merely equivocal and ambiguous.” Even if he did not present concrete examples, Heidegger gives hints of this future content in the poetic simple naming of “things” in the fourfold. Caputo offers the best defense here, noting that “Heidegger does not call for utter silence, but for a new language; one tempered by silence and originating from silence. While Eckhart praises a genuinely mystical silence, Heidegger praises the singing of the poet who has, in his view, overcome the extreme rationalism of technological language, on the one hand, and the superficiality of ordinary language on the other” (John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* [New York: Fordham University Press, 1986], 172). See also GA4:189 (216): “Silence; does this merely mean to say nothing, to remain speechless? Or can only he who has something to say be truly silent? If this were the case, then he who would be capable of letting the unsaid appear in his speech, of letting it appear as unsaid, would precisely through this alone be capable of silence in the highest degree.” Heidegger also gives the example of a line in Hölderlin’s poetry, “over all the peaks / is peace,” where the word ‘is’ escapes metaphysics in the way that he is trying to achieve (GA40:68 [94]).
Chapter 2, Part 2: God and the Gods

We turn now to the *Der Letzte Gott* section of GA65. Though Heidegger’s description of the last god consists of a total of ten pages, this section is vitally important for understanding his thought. In Part 1 of this chapter, we examined the general conceptual structure of the *Beiträge* (*Ereignis*, the fourfold, and the sigetic), and the last god is an important component within each of these themes, as we will see below. First, I will examine the preconditions for the last god: Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology (as cultural Christianity and metaphysical theology) and his conception of the theological difference, where Heidegger demands that God be thought without being. Then I will examine the last god and the poetic dialogue that calls this god forth, placing it in the context of Heidegger’s overarching account of the divine in the 1930s and 1940s.

These two sections lead into the most important part of the chapter, where I argue that there are two possible interpretations of the last god: 1) as Pascalian critique, a rethinking of the Christian God where the last god is the culmination of a hidden tradition\(^1\) in Eckhart and other figures which points towards the precondition for a possible post-ontotheological recovery of the divinity of the Christian God (not necessarily to be achieved by Heidegger), and/or 2) as a rethinking and recovery of mytho-poetic pagan Greek *theos* as sheer finite impersonal uncanniness, a temporal event without positive content, which would found a cultural religion of nation, soil, and finitude.\(^2\) Given the importance of Hölderlin for Heidegger’s thought, we should conclude with Pöggeler that the question is really “whether Hölderlin’s poetic-mythical theology preserves what is Christian or

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1 See GA66:244 (215): “The last god completes above all a rich prehistory of the grounding of its godhood. In its sway this prehistory is different and profounder than any history of ‘religion’ up to now … at first all this happens unrecognized and still entirely overlaid by the domination of modernity.”

2 Though this may also be somehow involved in rethinking the Christian God, Heidegger writes that the naming of the last god will not “inadvertently introduce new gods or even inaugurate a religion,” and also should not “be equated with a churchless and cultless yet by no means an ‘atheistic’ piety in the sense of an enlightened pantheism and the like” (GA66:249 [220]). He is quite right that his thinking does not set up a new ‘religion’ in such a simplistic way, but there certainly is a Pascalian element to his critique.
whether it takes a counter-position.”3 This is not a question with a clear answer. Throughout
Heidegger’s later writings, both of these interpretations of Hölderlin are present to varying degrees.4
However, as we will see most clearly in Chapter 4, within the limitations of his project as expressed
in these writings, it is difficult to see how Heidegger could achieve anything beyond 2), at most, as
even the most inchoate of his ideas appear to undermine any possibility of achieving 1), insofar as he
unwittingly gives primacy to philosophy over revelation.

Heidegger’s writings on the last god are experimental and exploratory, and these two
competing pagan and quasi-Christian impulses appear at different times, or occasionally
simultaneously—the 1936 Schelling lectures and Beiträge (1935-37) each emphasize a different pole
of this dichotomy. While the last god as described by Heidegger is opposed to the Christian God,
this refers primarily (or possibly only) to the deformation or corruption of God as the mere God of
Christendom, the false idol of metaphysics. Heidegger’s description of the last god is related to a
marginalized non-metaphysical hidden Christian tradition that he traces through Eckhart, Luther,
Schelling, and others. Indeed, the Christian God as described by Schelling (thought as Augenblick,
eternal becoming, beyond usual metaphysics and theology, etc.) in Heidegger’s 1936 lectures aligns
precisely with the Beiträge’s description of the last god, which is not surprising insofar as Heidegger
states that Schelling “thinks God still more primordially” than all theology hitherto.5 Yet the last god
also has an ontotheological character insofar as it appears at times to be a philosophical
construction, equated by Heidegger with an abstract essence of divinity (Gottwesen) and with nature
(rethought as the fourfold), correlated with impersonal Greek theos in the Presocratics and the

3 Pöggeler, Path of Thinking, 255n52. Pöggeler concludes that this remains ambiguous in Heidegger.
4 I think that Crowe overstates the case when he writes: “Rather than rejecting the Christian heritage of European
culture in the name of a new mythology of blood and soil, as Van Buren and Caputo allege, Heidegger viewed himself as
a kind of provocateur,” i.e., purely as an internal critic of Christianity (41). In fact, both positions are present in
Heidegger’s work, as I will show below.
5 See Martin Heidegger, Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809), ed. I. Schüessler (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio
Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984), 195 (112), hereafter “GA42,” where he writes that for ordinary
thinking, “a becoming God is no God at all, but something finite.”
“local” deities of Hölderlin’s poetry, functioning as the mysterious and hidden source and ultimate (“last”) source of divinity, whether Christian or otherwise. The difficulty in Heidegger’s thought is that both of these conceptions of the last god are present in an entangled and confused way.

At this point a number of distinctions should be made regarding how Heidegger defines philosophy, theology, and faith. There is some ambiguity here, particularly insofar as Heidegger’s views change as he shifts into beyng-historical thinking. Heidegger usually avoids the term “philosophy” when referring to his own work, and in the 1930s notebooks he refers to beyng-historical thought as Besinnung (mindfulness) or simply Denken (thinking), without the metaphysical/conceptual connotations of philosophy. Frustratingly, Heidegger also occasionally refers to his own thought as “philosophy” in the general, colloquial sense of the word. There is also a sense in which Ereignis is, in Heidegger’s estimation, a recapitulation of the Greek beginning of philosophy which stays truer to the origin than historical philosophy, and hence should rightly take over the title.

“Theology” is simply equated by Heidegger with ontotheology, for the most part. In his early career, Luther and St. Paul were mentioned as resources with which to renew Christian theology, but he later rejects theology as mere “Christian philosophy,” i.e., a corruption of faith by philosophy. Just as philosophy needs to be thought from Ereignis, so too for theology. For Heidegger, true “theology” should be thought in terms of Greek theos (impersonal event) as well as the understanding of God found in Schelling and Eckhart (among others), and where logos is interpreted as a sigetic gathering (legein) rather than a conceptual grasping. As Heidegger put it: “Were I to write a theology, the word ‘being’ would not appear in it,” i.e., it would be thought from Ereignis and hence would constitute a truer way of speaking about God than the usual philosophical categories

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6 Heidegger rejects the Christian logos of ‘spoken order,’ from the Bible, with logos as legein, the authentic Greek meaning (GA40:103 [143]).
7 GA15:436.
(final cause, *summum ens*, etc.). The last god in GA65 is arguably a first attempt at this new sense of theology, though, to be sure, when Heidegger refers to philosophy or theology it is almost always in a derogatory sense, i.e., he sees both as part of a nihilistic ontotheological continuum where each discipline is lost in metaphysics and fails to adequately describe reality or the divine, respectively.

As for “faith,” perhaps the most startling statement that Heidegger made on the matter was in conversation with Pöggeler in 1953, when he stated that “philosophy carries on only the sort of thinking that man is capable of on his own; where man is addressed by revelation, thinking ceases.”

From roughly 1922 until his death, Heidegger’s definition of faith is drawn almost entirely from Luther. Faith is defined by Heidegger as the acceptance of dogmatic claims related to a historical revelation of the Christian God which was most clearly expressed by early Pauline communities. It was under the influence of Luther (and also Overbeck and Nietzsche) that the young Heidegger began to favor what he perceived to be a “pre-theological” primal Christianity which after roughly 50 CE was hopelessly corrupted by Greek philosophy, a corruption which reached its apotheosis in the early 20th century. Philosophy (as metaphysics), in other words, is a foreign irritant which found its way into simple Christian faith. Heidegger often hints that a theology thought in terms of *Ereignis* would be the proper way to speak of the God of faith (*Ereignis* aligns neatly with the hiddenness of God in Luther’s *theologia crucis* and *Deus absconditus*) and would in fact be a continuation of a marginalized non-metaphysical Christian tradition that Heidegger traces through Eckhart, Luther, and Schelling (among others).

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8 Pöggeler, *Denkweg*, 156. See also GA15:437: “When faith has recourse to thought, it is no longer faith; this is what Luther understood.”

9 See “Nietzsche’s Word,” where Heidegger sympathetically describes Nietzsche’s views: “By ‘Christianity’ Nietzsche does not mean the Christian life that existed once for a short time before the Gospels were set down in writing and before Paul disseminated his missionary propaganda. For Nietzsche, Christianity is the historical, secular-political phenomenon of the church and its claim to power within the formation of western humanity and its modern culture. Christianity in this sense and the Christian life of the New Testament are not the same. … [A] confrontation with Christianity is by no means an absolute battle against what is Christian, no more than a critique of theology is a critique of the faith for which theology is supposed to be the interpretation” (GA5:219-20 [164]).
With these distinctions in mind, it is clear that Heidegger’s hidden theological position is problematic insofar as he claims that he has broken free from theology (i.e., Christian philosophy, which is bound up with ontotheology) with his leap into *Ereignis*. The last god is an attempt to think God without the resources of philosophy/metaphysics/theology hitherto, to do a new “thinking” (not philosophizing) about the divine. However, on the basis of his provisional ideas expressed in the 1930s, it appears that Heidegger has failed in this attempt, or at the very least has failed to provide a compelling account that addresses this issue.

**Ontotheology**

The last god in *Beiträge* functions in many ways as a critique of what Heidegger calls an ontotheological God.\(^{10}\) What does Heidegger mean by this term? As a philosophical concept, ontotheology was coined by Kant in his critique of dogmatic metaphysics and cosmotheology,\(^{11}\) but Heidegger is the first to extensively use the term. Kant discusses what comes to be called “onto-theology” as the attempt to prove the existence of God through mere concepts, without the help of any experience whatsoever. Heidegger holds that the ontotheological God enters the scene only insofar as philosophy requires and determines how the deity enters into it; the neo-Kantian God is a prime example of this tendency (recall Chapter 1). As I will argue below, the last god paradoxically ends up being ontotheological in this sense (though it certainly avoids the metaphysics of presence).

In perhaps his clearest essay on the topic,\(^{12}\) “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” Heidegger writes that western metaphysics has “since its beginning with the Greeks

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\(^{10}\) On ontotheology, see also GA67:95, on the metaphysical God as highest being; and GA67:155, where Heidegger writes that in ontotheology, theology becomes *Diabologie*, or “diabology.”


\(^{12}\) See also GA32:145 (100): “The expression ‘onto-theo-logy’ should not point to a connection with a discipline called theology, but should indicate to us the most central thrust of the problem of being” and *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975), translated as *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 38 (29); hereafter “GA24”. “Kant
… been both ontology and theology,” insofar as metaphysics is “the question about beings as such and as a whole,” and “the wholeness of this whole is the unity of all beings that unifies as the generative ground,” e.g., in Aristotle’s sense of deity, and “this means: metaphysics is onto-theology.” Metaphysics is inevitably theological, because when it makes “a statement about God”—as it must do, qua philosophy, insofar as it must talk about being as such and as a whole—“the deity enters into philosophy,” and in the wrong way. In the other beginning, with a rethinking of theology, God, language, and being itself, this will be done (Heidegger hopes) in a more appropriate way.

For Heidegger, the first inklings of ontotheology can be found in Plato. In a key 1931 essay that serves as precursor to the “Grounding” section of the Beiträge, he writes that Plato caused the first shift away from Ereignis towards “that which is illuminated,” beings in their being as graspable by reason, as opposed to allowing beyng to be sheltered in a being (e.g., in the mytho-poetic discourse of Herakleitos). The shift initiated by Plato was worsened by academic schools in ancient Greece and medieval Christian thought, reaches its apotheosis in Hegel, and is best diagnosed by Nietzsche. The first beginning is entirely captive to this conception of God, and this ontotheological god, in Nietzsche’s formulation, is dead.

stands in the great tradition of ancient and scholastic ontology. God is the supreme being, summum ens, the most perfect being, ens perfectissimum … God is not merely the basic ontological example of the being of a being; he is at the same time the primal ground of all beings.”

13 ID 54.

14 For now, unfortunately, with God as “first cause, the causa prima that corresponds to the reason-giving path back to the ultima ratio … the being of beings is represented fundamentally, in the sense of the ground, only as causa sui … This is the right name for the god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this God. Before the causa sui, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this God. The godless thinking which must abandon the God of philosophy, God as causa sui, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only; godless thinking is more open to him than ontotheology would like to admit. This remark may throw a little light on the path to which thinking is on its way” (ID 60 and 72), where this last sentence refers to Heidegger’s own project, which attempts to “accomplish the step back” (ID 73).

15 He later states that ‘dialectic’ begins with Herakleitos, which would leave Parmenides as the only properly inceptual thinker (GA15:81).

16 See “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” (GA9:109-44 [155-82])
The insight into the death of God is not unique to Nietzsche or to Heidegger, of course. That the West has (to a greater or lesser extent) lost the sacred/numinous as a normative force for culture has been pointed out by many philosophers and theologians—perhaps most famously expressed by Weber as Entzauberung (disenchantment). Heidegger emphasizes that this does not mean that people stop believing, or that divinity is entirely absent (the ontotheological critique is perhaps in some sense an attempt to recover God from ontotheology). Rather, it is only the denuded God of Christendom that is repudiated, i.e., a modern Deist construction used to justify bourgeois morality. Heidegger’s precise way of putting it (following Nietzsche) is that Judeo-Christianity has lost its wirkende Kraft, or effective power. He also refers to this in GA65 as Entgötterung, the loss of the “godding” of God. Heidegger puts this in the strongest possible terms:

There is culture and cultural tendencies, church and society … some individuals might cling to them in personal honesty [Ehrlichkeit] and remain satisfied, but from all of this as a totality nothing any longer arises, no criteria and creative impulses any longer come from it, everything just continues to be carried on [es wird nur alles weiter betrieben]. Inner devastation and lostness increase beyond measure.

Though he rejects certain aspects of Nietzsche, Heidegger repeatedly echoes Nietzsche’s lament that we have gone two thousand years without a single new god, which is especially tragic insofar as clinging to the dead ontotheological God is the very cause of nihilism. The ontotheological god, for Heidegger, is a mistake committed by humanity, and we should wrest divinity from ontotheology by rethinking theos. Theos as typically used in Christian theology, as we will see in more detail below, is deconstructed by Heidegger and recovered in its Greek beginning (in

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17 Heidegger said this in conversation to Pöggeler (quoted in Path of Thinking, 212)
18 See GA6.1:23 (1:26): “Whatever realities and laws set the standard in Christendom, in morality since Hellenistic times, and in philosophy since Plato, lose their binding force, and for Nietzsche that always means creative force.” See also GA5:269 (200): “The default of God which Hölderlin experienced does not contradict the fact that a Christian relationship to God continues among individuals and in the churches, and it certainly does not disparage this relationship to God. The default of God means that a God no longer gathers men and things to himself visibly and unmistakably and from this gathering ordinates world-history and man’s stay with it.”
19 GA42:39-40 (23). See also GA45:90 (80): “The approach and distantiation of the gods in relation to beings [is] … an event which lies far beyond and well on this side of the facticities of religions and churches and cults,” all of which fail from man’s “lack of strength with regard to history.”
20 This is the epigraph to the published version of his Nietzsche lectures.
Parmenides and Herakleitos, most prominently). Heidegger is attempting to “de-hellenize” faith, as Luther did, and free it from any sense of ontology or of being understood metaphysically.\(^{21}\) By the 1930s, his overriding concerns are somewhat different (he is not attempting to recover primal Christianity), but he maintains much of the spirit of his earlier critique and carries out an attack on ontotheology in two ways: in the *Beiträge* he examines 1) the ontotheological God’s devastating effects on culture,\(^{22}\) and then deepens the analysis by showing 2) why and how the ontotheological God falls short.

I begin with 1). In Chapter 1, we examined the young Heidegger’s reaction against the shallowness of neo-Kantian and liberal theological views prevalent in Weimar Germany. In *Beiträge*, this critique has become all-encompassing, going beyond the academic debates of the day and into the history of the West. Heidegger intensifies his earlier views into a more general attack on *Weltbilder* (worldviews) and *Kirchen* (churches) as the culmination of nihilism.\(^{23}\) Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche before him, Heidegger decries the “easiness and accessibility” of Christianity as reduced to mere Christendom. Christianity as worldview does not risk the question of being, does not question its own degraded understanding of truth, and hence “keeps philosophy as creative co-grounding of *Da-sein* at a distance.”\(^{24}\) The focus on religious clubs and popular spirituality serves only to occlude the “death of the moral, Christian God,”\(^{25}\) insofar as such religiosity is a cultural project that does not throw people into the mysterious or numinous. The supposedly post-religious worldviews of utilitarianism, ethical societies, life-philosophy, etc., are all ontotheological in nature; that which replaces God (happiness, the greatest good for the greatest number, etc.) is ultimately all

\(^{21}\) Just as Luther de-hellenized Christian theology, Heidegger ‘de-hellenizes’ the ‘Hellenes’ themselves, the Greeks. Instead of returning (as Overbeck and others have done) to Pauline communities in 50 CE, Heidegger is returning (analogously) to the very first Presocratics in 500 BCE.

\(^{22}\) It should be noted, however, that Heidegger would claim he is not doing mere ‘cultural critique’ in the sense of Spengler.

\(^{23}\) See also GA5:76 (58), where Heidegger attacks Christendom for interpreting its Christianess as a mere worldview.

\(^{24}\) GA65:39 (28).

\(^{25}\) GA65:118 (85).
too similar to God understood as highest value. Heidegger notes that there is something tricky at work here:

The greatest nihilism is precisely where one believes in goals again…. [I]n this drunken stupor of ‘lived-experience,’ precisely there is the greatest nihilism. … The most disastrous nihilism consists in passing oneself off as protector of Christianity and even claiming for oneself the most Christian Christianity on the basis of social accomplishments, [and is] completely hidden in distinguishing itself … from what one could call crude nihilism.26

To avoid this “greatest nihilism” and achieve the proper relationship to the divine, these cultural Christians need to ask the question of being, in order to rethink theos from the ground up. Instead, Christendom engages with thinking “only ‘as if,’” because “anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth already has the answer to the question ‘why are there beings at all instead of nothing?’” The answer is God as highest value, as creator of beings.27 Heidegger thus rejects all liberal theology and neo-Kantian philosophy of religion; any theology other than Heidegger’s own ‘godless’ thought is described as “built into a cultural operation, where the highest decisions … are evaded,” and has a “total insensitivity to what is ambiguous in that which is held to be essential.”28 For those of deeper religious understanding, such as Heidegger perceives himself to be, such theology fails really to question its own foundation and also entraps faith within ontotheology. For true faith, “what is really asked in this question is foolishness,” in St. Paul’s sense.29

The Beiträge as a whole expresses Heidegger’s urgent need to shock complacent liberal bourgeois Christians out of their stupor of lived-experience, to raise them into history out of the false cultural eternity of endless progress and “happiness.” Echoing Nietzsche and Jünger, Heidegger constantly emphasizes in GA65 the need for the German people to leave soporific culture and embrace Kampf (struggle), to have the courage and endurance to withstand the storm, to

26 GA65:139-40 (97). He adds, interestingly, that even “nihilism” can be a temptation in the sense that one can take nihilism itself to be a doctrine, as popular culture might talk about nihilism as an “interesting cultural psychology.”
27 GA40:5 (7). God thought as the “source of being … cannot be God” (GA69:132)
28 GA65:117 (82).
courageously master the strife that will raise Germany to greatness.\textsuperscript{30} Heidegger continually emphasizes that “the flight of gods must be experienced and endured,”\textsuperscript{31} that “it belongs to the most unbending rigor of the inner resonance of \textit{Dasein} that it does not count gods and also does not count on them and does not even reckon with an individual god.”\textsuperscript{32} Like Nietzsche, the creator of the \textit{Beiträge} is “necessarily a nonbeliever”\textsuperscript{33} in the sense that he transcends so-called Christian metaphysics or ontotheology and is falsely considered a non-believer by those who remain trapped within merely cultural Christianity.

In lectures on Nietzsche delivered while he was writing the beyng-historical notebooks, Heidegger notes that Christians seek to “introduce a sense of permanence in their own lives,” where “belief is self-entrenchment in fixation.” Those who cannot think “this most difficult thought” of Nietzsche, the death of the ontotheological God, instead “flee into the ‘religious.”\textsuperscript{34} Again, recalling Chapter 1, he attacks “the Christian apologetics of history,” culminating in the neo-Kantian liberal project, which makes history safe by “merely rescuing what has been up to now” and hindering essential decisions.\textsuperscript{35} Heidegger’s goal is for the West, and Germany in particular, to experience the \textit{Not} ("emergency" or "distress") of nihilism. The refusal of the West to countenance this decision is “all the more uncanny the longer and seemingly persistently churches and forms of worship of a God are still maintained, without having the strength to ground an originary truth,”\textsuperscript{36} and hence part of Heidegger’s project is to hasten the demise of existing religious institutions, which have become nihilistic.

\textsuperscript{30} Though, to be sure, Heidegger’s views on this issue were already softening by 1935, in comparison to his strident tone in 1933-34. The greatness of Germany is (by the mid-1930s) more of a spiritual/poetic greatness, rather than a this-worldly or political one, and by the 1940s Heidegger emphasized a Western (and even planetary) perspective.
\textsuperscript{31} GA65:27 (20).
\textsuperscript{32} GA65:293 (207).
\textsuperscript{33} GA6.1:347 (2:126).
\textsuperscript{34} GA6.1:347 (2:126).
\textsuperscript{35} GA65:155 (107).
\textsuperscript{36} GA65:237 (168).
I turn now from cultural critique to Heidegger’s deeper philosophical diagnosis of the ontotheological God, which relies on a reading of Christian doctrine that treats the Christian God as merely a creator in the sense of being a first efficient cause, God as the “manufacturing cause of all beings.” In Heidegger’s view this leads in fairly short order to the view of each being as an artifact, ens creatum, in relation to which God is the highest and first cause, of which beings are the effects. By late modernity this devolves into present beings understood only in terms of “human making, insofar as beings are taken and controlled only in their objectness,” as tools for machination. Humanity and divinity are caught up in the same machinational relation as everything else. Both man and God are reduced to objects at hand, a tendency which comes to fruition in neo-Kantian and liberal theology.

A substantial portion of the Beiträge traces this tendency from Plato to neo-Platonism, Christian theology (in particular, God as summum ens and the Thomistic analogia entis), and carried forward into modernity. God as creator culminates in man as manufacturer of representations. Heidegger is striving to avoid the “relationship of beings (ens) that is built entirely on truth as correctness of representing (intellectus) with being re-presented in the intellectus divinus, a relationship that continues to be correct only under the assumption that, deus creator excepted, omne ens is ens creatum,” which is “still everywhere in modern metaphysics,” i.e., in the representation relationship. Heidegger avoids the path of taking God as an ontic object, and hence (he would claim) thinks God more truly.

37 GA65:244 (172).
38 GA65:110 (77).
39 See GA40:147 (207): “Christianity reinterprets the being of beings as being-created … this does not hinder the rise of rationalism and irrationalism but rather first prepares it and strengthens it. Because beings have been created by God—that is, have been thought out rationally in advance,” then this leads inexorably to “human reason” positing itself “as absolute.”
40 GA65:350 (245).
Heidegger’s rejection of almost all theology as ontotheological leads to a perhaps inevitable, though still surprising, result. The *Beiträge* systematically deconstructs Christian transcendence, which Heidegger takes to be (following Nietzsche) a harmful falsehood, a non-existent beyond. Heidegger emphasizes rather the “greatness of finitude,” which has been “downgraded through a false and deceptive infinity.”41 The usual understanding of God as transcendent, infinite, eternal, etc., is for Heidegger entirely “the image of a God conceived in the sense of the absolutely bourgeois,” which is “the ungenuine creation of man,” captive to Greek ontological categories.42 Any sense of God as transcending the world in Christian theology is, for Heidegger, taken from Platonism and is always only an ontotheological corruption of a more primal pre-theological experience. Again, following Nietzsche, Heidegger collapses the rich history of distinctions within Platonism and Christianity into the “will to supersensuousness,” the metaphysical category of “the supersensible.”43

Heidegger holds that the “question of the ‘beyond’” is the fault of “Christianity, from early on, following the path of Judeo-hellenic teachings [and] seizing upon the philosophy of Plato.” Transcendence understood in Platonic terms is falsely “held out as the high point of Christian faith,” thereby misunderstanding both Plato and faith in the process. Both man and God are misunderstood in this worldview. The humanity of man is understood in relation to the dogmatic

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41 GA31:136 (94).
42 Heidegger’s rethinking of these categories has a Schellingian feel, though he is still critical of Schelling overall, who merely “escapes into Christian dogmatics” (GA66:263 [233]); see GA67:161. In GA42:234-35 (135), Heidegger writes that one must think God “differently from the way that the common representing understands … not as an old papa with a white beard who manufactures things, but as the becoming God [der werdende Gott] to whose essence the ground belongs, uncreated nature which is not He himself. Created nature is not to be understood as nature as it is now, as we see it, but as becoming, creating nature, as something creating which is itself created, the *natura naturans* as *natura naturata* of Scotus Eriugena. Man is not to be understood as that familiar living being gifted with reason who lives on a planet and can be dissected into his components, but as the being who is in himself the ‘deepest abyss’ of being and at the same time ‘the highest heaven’ … this becoming is the essence of being. Thus being also cannot be understood as the brute existence of something manufactured, but must be understood as the jointure of ground and existence.” Even as early as the 1920s, Heidegger wrote (approvingly) of Scheler: “With enormous boldness he saw the idea of the weak God, one who cannot be God without man, so that man himself is thought as ‘God’s co-worker’” (*Metaphysische Anfänge der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, ed. K. Held [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978], translated as *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984], 63 [51]; hereafter “GA26”).
43 See GA65:503 (354): “[T]he horizon of perspectives that arise in metaphysics, i.e. in the perspectives of sensible, nonsensible, and supersensible …”
44 GA54:139 (93).
ontotheological definition of God (trapped in metaphysical categories), and this is why finitude is unjustly rejected. “The human being is not of this world, since the world, thought in terms of Platonic theory, is only a temporary passage to the beyond.” Heidegger tries to rethink transcendence not as ground, but as abyss, a ground that is not the highest being or the most-being but rather not-being—a ground which immediately withdraws as ground, self-concealing, “nothing” in that it cannot be captured in concepts. Heidegger continually claims that this is not a mere rejection or inversion of transcendence (as in Nietzsche), but instead an attempt to rethink or deconstruct the concept entirely.

In addition to rethinking transcendence, Heidegger tries to point toward an understanding of the temporality of God in a way other than nunc stans or static eternity, which is trapped in metaphysics (eternity as constant presence) and not thought from Ereignis. To recount the way in which he does this requires a brief explanation of what Heidegger refers to as Zeit-Spiel-Raum (also shortened to Zeit-Raum), the play of time and space which is the site or “arena” for the strife of the strife in the fourfold. Just as Heidegger deconstructs the metaphysics of the first beginning to reach a deeper understanding of truth as Ereignis and deconstructs our usual concepts of world to reach the fourfold, with Zeit-raum he deconstructs our usual understanding of time and space to arrive at time-space, a similarly abyssal ground. While Heidegger would obviously resist this language to an extent, time-space appears to be the condition for the possibility of our objectified everyday space and time, which are now re-thought as Zeitigung (temporalizing) and Räumung (spatializing). Both

45 GA9:153 (244).
46 Throughout his reflections on the topic, Heidegger plays with the German word Zeitraum (in colloquial German, simply “a span of time”). Heidegger hyphenates this to Zeit-Raum, a deeper combination of time and space ‘hidden’ behind the word, as it were. This may remind the reader of Einsteinian space-time, but Heidegger notes that in relativistic physics this connection is “merely strung together” (GA65:377 [263]).
47 See GA65:379 (264): “Abyss is the originary onefold of space and time, that unifying onefold that above all lets them go apart in their separateness.”
48 Heidegger’s incorporation of space into Zeit-spiel-raum is somewhat bewildering. As with much of the Beiträge, this is provisional and not fully worked out. Heidegger’s statements on how space is conjoined to create “time-space,” which is “not a coupling of time and space but what is more originary in their belonging together” (GA65:189 [132]), are vague
taken together are the “somewhere” and “when” which “let the Da… first emerge as the site for the moment.”\textsuperscript{49} Time-space is founded in \textit{Ereignis}, and functions as the way in which the Da is determined. It is “the abyss that is so enjoined and correspondingly attuned” which “becomes historical in the grounding of the Da through Da-sein.”\textsuperscript{50} In relation to the fourfold, this is in some sense the precursor or site for the strife of world and earth; just as \textit{Ereignis} gives being/beings and immediately withdraws, time-space gives our normal time/space and immediately withdraws.

The difficulty is that this withdrawal leaves us with concepts of space and time which are ultimately drawn from Aristotle’s \textit{Physics}, and are hence “already a consequence of the previous established essence of beings as \textit{ousia} and of truth as correctness,”\textsuperscript{51} i.e., trapped in the first beginning. In the metaphysics of the first beginning, and especially in modern natural science, time is thought of as a mere extension of “now-moments,” and not primarily as ecstatic temporality.\textsuperscript{52} Analogously, and more importantly for our purposes here, the divine is thought (ontotheologically) as constantly present, as eternal in the sense of the philosophical \textit{aeon} of Plato’s forms, a static essence which is outside of time understood as now-moments. Heidegger rethinks the temporality of the last god according to temporalizing, \textit{Augenblick}, “passing-by,” the event-character of the

\begin{itemize}
\item and elliptical. This is perhaps necessary, though, in that time-space is removed from calculation (much like \textit{Ereignis} and the last god) “In their essential sway space and time remain hidden” (GA65:193 [135]).
\item GA65:236 (167). The temporalization of time-space involves three \textit{Entrückungen} (removals), a complex issue in the \textit{Beiträge} that is not essential for my argument here. Very roughly, these removals are analogous to the three ecdastes of temporality in \textit{Sein und Zeit} (though now “de-transcendentalized,” as it were). Similar to the discussion in \textit{Sein und Zeit}, these three removals are brought to a head in the \textit{Augenblick}, the moment, the site of the decision regarding the passing-by of the last god (i.e., whether the West will be lost in nihilism or refounded in the other beginning).\textsuperscript{50}
\item GA65:386 (270).
\item GA65:72 (49). Kant, who Heidegger sees as his precursor on this issue, only managed a “weak attempt to rescue what is ownmost to space and time,” but failed because he, unlike Heidegger (and through no fault of his own), “had no access to the essencing of space and time (GA65:72 [49]) and remained mired in subjectivity and metaphysics.
\item In the first beginning, beings are understood in their being as present, and potentiality/absence or future/past are merely derivative modes of this presence (GA65:189 [132]). As Heidegger argued in \textit{Sein und Zeit}, time is the horizon of being, and hence Heidegger’s goal in \textit{Beiträge} is to give a deeper or renewed horizon, a new ecstatic temporality centered on the \textit{Augenblick}. Heidegger claims that at the origin of western thought, before metaphysics had fully entrapped the ancient Greeks, “high Greek time” (GA65:507 [357]) was not endless continuity but rather the “steadfastness of inexhaustible essencing”; i.e., not constant presence. Heidegger seeks to recover this sense of time, a presence which is “towards ‘having-been’ [\textit{Gewesenheit}] and the future,” versus the “illusion of the timelessness of what actually ‘is,’ “ in relation to both man and the divine (GA65:507 [357]).
\end{itemize}
divine that we recall from Chapter 1. Eternity in ontotheology and Greek thought is rethought by
Heidegger as not that which “ceaselessly lasts [Fort-währende], but rather that which can withdraw in
the moment, in order to return once again.”53 The usual Christian understanding of eternal life with
God is misunderstood insofar as it imagines a sort of eternally constant presence; rather Heidegger
emphasizes Ver-ewigung, eternalization, as opposed to “the Christian belief in eternity.”54

Thus an important theme of Heidegger’s critique of the ontotheological God involves a
deconstruction of its temporality as aeion which would later influence Augustine’s understanding of
God (as nunc stans) as well as Scholastic and modern thought. The last god as Augenblick, momentous
event, rethinkets eternity without this history of Christian metaphysics. Heidegger’s deepening of this
conception in the 1930s has a number of sources: the gateway moment of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra55;
Hölderlin’s “god who is only time”56; and finally Schelling, both for Heidegger’s understanding of
God and also for the new temporality of God, where God’s becoming as “true temporality,
Augenblick, ‘is’ the essence of eternity.”57 Similarly, all Christian theological distinctions of

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53 GA65:370 (259).
54 GA65:372 (260).
55 Heidegger had examined the Augenblick in St. Paul, Kierkegaard, and others in the 1920s, but in the 1930s he refers
primarily to Nietzsche and Schelling. The beyng-historical notebooks echo many passages in the Nietzsche lectures. See
GA6.1:262-63 (2:43), which speaks of Zarathustra’s gateway, the Augenblick: “From this gateway moment a long avenue
runs eternally rearward; behind us lies an eternity,” i.e., ontotheological Christian eternity. Under “these new conditions …
such questioning requires that one adopt a stance of his own within the ‘moment’ itself, that is, in time and its
temporality … [and] whoever stands in the moment is turned in two ways, for him past and future run up against one
another. Whoever stands in the moment lets what runs counter to itself comes to collision, […] cultivating and
sustaining the strife between what is assigned him as a task and what has been given to him as his endowment. …
[E]ternity is in the moment … [and is] the collision of future and past” (GA6.1:277 [2:57]); eternity “can be grasped
solely in terms of the moment” (GA6.1:288 [2:68]). See also GA6.1:318 [2:98]: “The temporality of the time of that
eternity which Nietzsche requires us to think in the eternal return of the same is the temporality in which humanity
stands.”
56 Martin Heidegger, Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” and “Der Rhein,” ed. S. Ziegler (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann,
1980), 54; hereafter “GA39.” This divine time is rethought as eternity, a second type of Ewigkeit; see GA39:50-60.
57 Heidegger describes the becoming of God in GA42:196-97 [113]: “[God is] not the mere precursor of being which is
put aside afterward. … [T]he becoming of the God as ground to the God himself as existing cannot be understood as
‘temporal’ in the everyday sense. … [I]n this becoming everything ‘is’ ‘simultaneous’ … Augenblick [is] not the present
which has merely stopped and remains that way, the nunc stans. Eternity can only be thought truly, that is, poetically, if we
understand it as the most primordial temporality, but never in the manner of common sense which says to itself;
eternity, that is the opposite of temporality. … [This] is a contradiction for common sense [das gemeine Denken]. That is
quite as it should be, for this contradiction characterizes the prevailing of a more primordial being in which the earlier
and the later of clock time has no meaning.” Heidegger goes on to describe this as “only the continuation of an attitude
sempternitas, aeternitas, etc., are for Heidegger corruptions of Greek philosophy, i.e., the metaphysics of presence. Heidegger wants something deeper, God as dynamic event, which alone can really capture the essence of the divine. Heidegger’s anti-ontotheological God will be what he calls “passing-by,” a sheer event, not a static person or highest being to which we relate as subjects, or at least not in any sense that we can currently understand.

The Theological Difference

The first step in understanding Heidegger’s response to ontotheology involves looking at a foundational distinction found within Beiträge (and other texts) regarding how to think divinity without being—the theological difference. Heidegger writes in the Beiträge that it is “question-worthy whether anything at all like being dare be attributed to gods without destroying everything that is divine,” and that his own discourse will avoid “all assertion about ‘being’ and ‘essence’ of gods.”

This points to arguably the most important distinction in all of Heidegger’s work, which is of such import to understanding his thought that I often wonder how it is not mentioned more often—i.e., the “theological difference,” which was going to be fully explained in the projected (but unpublished) final volume of Sein und Zeit. This theological difference is an explicit theological position that Heidegger has taken from non-beyng-historical thought which underlies his position in the beyng-historical notebooks and explains how he understands the last god.

This theological difference, adumbrated to an extent in 1919-21 (GA60), is mentioned perhaps most prominently in Heidegger’s 1927 “Phenomenology and Theology” essay. While he...
would later reject some of the terminology here, aspects of his basic position remain identical throughout the 1930s—although, to be sure, by 1936 he no longer refers to his way of thinking as “phenomenology,” and would certainly reject the idea of theology as an ontic science within an arche-science, etc. In any event, in this essay Heidegger presents a reductive and vaguely Kantian dichotomy: theology proceeds “from the principle of faith,” philosophy “from the principle of reason.” Theology is then a merely local and subjective phenomenon, one of many regional ontic sciences within the arche-science, philosophy; an ontic “mode of existing” which requires philosophy as an “ontological corrective.”

Faith is “in its innermost core the mortal enemy of the form of existence that is an essential part of philosophy,” where philosophy is clearly given primacy. Theology is said to be “entirely unquestioning about its subject matter” in the sense that it accepts revelation—which Heidegger, crucially, seems to reduce to assenting to a set of propositions, as opposed to a face-to-face encounter with the living God. His main point, the theological difference, is that faith cannot possibly overlap with ontotheology. Any real thinking of the divine would have to avoid metaphysics—a position that Heidegger would hold until the end of his life. Or, in other words, “there is no such thing as a Christian philosophy,” which is a “square circle.”

In the early 1920s, Heidegger considered himself to be a “Christian theo-logian,” but after 1927 and certainly by 1930 he tended to avoid speaking about himself in such terms, and certainly by 1935 he was in no way explicitly carrying out a “theological” project in the sense of doing a new sort of Christian dogmatic theology with the usual metaphysical categories. He did, however, continue (in

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60 GA9:48 (41).
61 GA9:52 (44).
62 GA9:65 (53).
63 GA9:66 (53).
64 GA9:66 (53).
the 1930s and later decades) to point to a revision of the traditional understanding of the Christian God, though he attempted to do so from a strictly non-theological (in the traditional sense, described above) point of view.

In terms of the rest of Heidegger’s thought, the theological difference builds on the ontological difference,66 which points out the difference between being and beings, emphasizing that being as such is typically left unquestioned insofar as our understanding of beings always falls into one mode of being (a single as-relation, constant presence) and covers up the play of different ways of “to be.” The theological difference makes a deeper claim. Thought after the ontological difference, the theological difference is “the difference of God” from “entity, beingness, and being-itself.”67 This distinction is of paramount importance in understanding Heidegger’s project in the Beiträge. However much his project changed from the beginning to the end of his career, this distinction (between true divinity/God and being) remains a constant, and is the reason that Heidegger thinks the last god in terms of Seyn rather than Sein. The last god presents a model for the groundless ground of God thought in Luther’s sense, i.e., without Greek philosophical interference and the categories of ontotheology.

There are hints of this position in the published version of Sein und Zeit, where Heidegger advocates for a renewed theology in Luther’s sense.68 The topic also comes up in lectures given in

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66 Technically there are ‘two’ ontological differences (the distinction between entity/beingness, and between beingness/being), but the term usually refers to the latter.
67 Heidegger is quoted in Max Müller, Existenzphilosophie im geistigen Leben der Gegenwart, 3rd ed. (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1964), 66-67 and 73. The passage was brought to my attention by Jeff Owen Prudhomme, God and Being: Heidegger's Relation to Theology (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997), 174n89; Pöggeler mentions it as well (Path of Thinking, 212).
68 See Sein und Zeit. “Theology is seeking a more primordial interpretation of man’s being towards God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it. It is slowly beginning to understand once more Luther’s insight that the ‘foundation’ on which its system of dogma rests has not arisen from an inquiry in which faith is primary, and that conceptually this ‘foundation’ not only is inadequate for the problematic of theology, but conceals and distorts it. … only after the area itself has been explored beforehand in a corresponding manner do these concepts become genuinely demonstrated and ‘grounded’” (10 [30]).
1927 and 1931, 69 where Eckhart is raised as the solution to the problem that ens infinitum and ens finitum are both thought under ens understood ontotheologically, thus trapping God in metaphysics. In other words, Eckhart thought the theological difference, a deeper and truer understanding of God, but was condemned by the (ontotheological) Catholic church. There is also the oft-quoted passage from a 1951 seminar manuscript, where Heidegger states, after mentioning Luther as a model: “Faith does not require the thinking of being. And in no way can being be considered the ground or essence of God.”70 The difficulty here is that Heidegger is using theological propositions (rooted in a non-beyng-historical perspective) drawn from his reading of Eckhart, Luther, Schleiermacher, Hölderlin, et al., and uncritically incorporated into his philosophy. These propositions break the boundaries between thinking and faith that Heidegger tries to set up in the Beiträge, and this is fatal to his entire project insofar as this actually works against a deeper questioning of the divine, as he does not subject his views on God and the gods to dialogue or question.71

Holy, Godhead, and Last God

The theological difference is the most basic distinction for understanding Heidegger’s talk about the gods, but we turn now to his distinctions between the holy, the last god, and the revealed God as a preparation for examining the last god in the Beiträge. Heidegger’s terminology is somewhat vague in the beyng-historical notebooks: “gods” and “the last god” are sometimes used

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69 Heidegger writes in 1927 of Eckhart’s “superessential essence” as “not, strictly speaking, God … but Godhead,” adding that “if it were said of God that he is, that would be added on. … God is for himself his ‘not’ … he is the most universal being, the purest indeterminate possibility of everything possible, pure nothing” (GA24:126-28 [90]). These lectures would have probably formed the final section of Sein und Zeit, which was to mention the theological difference.

70 GA15:436-37.

71 The theological difference was carried forward into the 1950s and beyond; see GA15. The problem here (see Chapter 4 for an extended treatment) is that Heidegger’s claims for the skepsis or functional atheism of thought, the ‘piety’ of thought, and the idea that the philosopher thinks from finitude and does not use his faith, etc., are misleading insofar as Heidegger’s philosophical project is predicated on a very specific theological premise.
interchangeably (perhaps to indicate the undecided nature of this god). Thankfully other texts written in the 1930s and 1940s bring some clarity to this issue.

Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” presents an extremely clear précis of many themes from the beyng-historical notebooks. In this text, Heidegger describes a necessary series of steps which are comprised in his project. The place from which the thinker (and poet) must accomplish this project is 1) “the dimension of the holy,” which cannot be accessed if 2) “the open region of being is not cleared” through historical deed and art and language (i.e., by the sheltering of beyng in a being), as opposed to the nihilistic cultural products of late modernity. Only then can we think 3) “the truth of being,” from which 4) “the essence of the holy can be thought,” from which 5) “the essence of divinity is to be thought,” which is itself a prerequisite for asking 6) “what the word ‘god’ is to signify.” In other words, Heidegger’s goal in the beyng-historical notebooks is to attempt to clear the open region of being by moving beyond metaphysics, machination, and ontotheology, overcoming the first beginning, in order to allow humanity to reach the dimension of the holy, at which point one can think about the truth of being, think the holy (the ground of all divinity) in new language, and then think of divinity as such, finally enabling us to think God/gods in the proper way. This provides a basic picture of his project, but further clarity can be found in an essay written at roughly the same time entitled "Wozu Dichter?" (Why Poets?). In this essay, Heidegger makes more specific distinctions regarding das Heilige (the holy), which he defines as “the element in which the godhead essences [west],” where this “essencing” is meant to rethink and concretize the traditional

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72 Heidegger’s single clearest statement on the matter is the following: “In beyng-historical thinking the name ‘gods’ merely names the empty site of the undeterminedness of godhood that arises out of man’s lack of attunement” (GA66:249 [219]).

73 GA9:267 (182). Heidegger puts this most clearly in GA54:167-68 (112-13): “How is an appearance of the divine at all supposed to be able to find the region of its essence, i.e., its unconcealedness, if, and as long as, the essence of being is forgotten? … Only when being and the essence of truth come into recollection out of oblivion will Western man secure the most preliminary precondition for what is the most preliminary of all that is preliminary; that is, an experience of the essence of being as the domain in which a decision about the gods or the absence of the gods can first be prepared.”
metaphysical view of essence. It is this element “in which alone gods are gods,”74 In a healthy non-nihilistic culture, the holy is a “track to the godhead,”75 but for the West the holy is being bled away by machination and hence we can no longer find our way to the divine.

A preliminary word of warning here: Heidegger’s use of the words “holy,” “god,” and “godhead” in the 1930s and 1940s is very unorthodox. “Godhead” is emphatically not understood according to the usual interpretations of traditional theology or philosophy. As we might expect from Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, godhead is not understood as transcendent, and is not the apophatic source of the kataphatic Christian God. Rather, godhead is described in the Beiträge as a philosophical concept (as it were), Gottwesen, the general essencing of the divine.76 Similarly, with the word “holy,” it is misleading to translate Heidegger’s Heile/das Heilige as “holy” because we lose Heidegger’s wordplay of Heile as the “whole” (similar to the English “hale”). With the word “holy,” Heidegger signifies the very opposite of the Judeo-Christian holy or sacred as a theological concept denoting transcendence as opposed to immanence, which for Heidegger are Platonic and ontotheological categories. Heidegger follows Hölderlin in noting that “nature” is “another name” for the holy, and is “prior to all actuality and all action, even prior to the gods.”77 “Holy” means wholeness, the proper relation to beings, sheltering beyng in beings in the fourfold, uncorrupted by machination.78 The holy is what grants the Da, what grants the granting itself, the condition for the

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74 GA5:272 (202).
75 GA5:275 (205).
76 Whether or not this can actually be formally indicative in the way that Heidegger wants is questionable, as we will see below.
77 Heidegger adds: “Nature is older than those ages which are measured out to men and to peoples and to things … nature is the oldest time” (GA4:59 [81]), in the sense of being distinguished from mere Christian eternity. He continues: “Nature is prior to all actuality and all action, even prior to the gods. … [A]s the clearing, in her everything can first be present. … Thus ‘holiness’ is in no way a property borrowed from a determinate God. The holy is not holy because it is divine; rather the divine is divine because in its way it is ‘holy’” (GA4:59-60, 63 [81-82, 85]). He concludes: “In its coming, the holy, ‘older than the ages’ and ‘above the gods,’ grounds another beginning of another history. The holy primordially decides in advance concerning men and gods, whether they are, and who they are, and how they are, and when they are” (GA4:76 [97]). As we will see in Chapter 4, this is an ontotheological misreading of Hölderlin.
78 See GA4:18 (37), where he writes of the holy as “the very opening for any stream of light … [a] pure opening which first grants the open to every space and to every time-space [Zeitraum].”
possibility (thought in a non-metaphysical sense, if that is possible) of the Da’s giving. The holy and the sheltering of beyng in a being are integrally related, appropriated through each other. It is this sheltering which allows the Da to be suffused with the holy, through which the divine can come to presence.

The sheltering of beyng in a being, rooted in the holy and helping to sustain it, helps to recover a non-representational relation to beings and prepares for any sense of the divine. It allows the relation to occur at all, and functions as an ur-phenomenological (though Heidegger would resist this term) condition for the possibility of any concrete experience of divinity. It allows the “goddning” of God/gods to happen. As Heidegger writes, “What is required is not only a table of commandments but more originally and essentially that God’s passing demands a steadfastness from a being and thus from man in the midst of beings.” In other words, the moral or other content of a religion is only possible if there is a more essential basis in the whole, in a world not lost in nihilism. It is within the space of the holy/whole/fourfold, the sheltering of beyng in beings, that man can “come into contact with the divine.” The divine is understood in a general or undecided sense as the essencing of the Gottwesen, and without this “we have no experience of God.” Again, returning to Heidegger’s distinction in the “Letter on Humanism,” we need to recover thought from ontotheology and properly understand being and truth in order to recover the holy, thereby to

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79 Heidegger assures us, somewhat unconvincingly, that “‘ground of the possibility’ is still spoken metaphysically, but thought from within the belongingness that rests in abyss” (GA65:296 [209]).

80 See GA9:181 (266): “[Human as being-in-the-world] contains no decision about whether the human being in a theological-metaphysical sense is merely a this-worldly or an other-worldly creature,” though of course this actually implies a number of decisions about what ‘theological,’ ‘metaphysical,’ and ‘other-worldly’ mean. After resisting phenomenological language for many years, Heidegger eventually referred to his own thinking as the “primordial sense of phenomenology,” a “phenomenology of the inapparent” (GA15:80), in the sense that he is describing an experience that is not experienced (the withdrawal of Ereignis, the absence of the last god, etc.).

81 GA65:412 (290); emphasis added.

experience the divine (the gods divinizing by way of the Gottwesen/godhead, through the holy), in order to approach any particular God.83

God can only ‘be’ God ‘through’ the godhead, that which gives God his essence. The last god “makes what is ownmost to the uniqueness of the Gottwesen most prominent,”84 and hence is a messenger from the godhead in the sense that it allows God to become God, “passing by” and touching those sites where beyng is sheltered in a being, after which God can sich ereignen, come into its own (i.e., occur) and enter into relation with man. The last god would then be an intermediary which may or may not give rise to a wholly new divinity, the purest expression of godhead, the highest essencing of God. In other words, the last god is an expression of the divinity, as such, of any manifestation of divinity. This is the primary meaning of “last” as Heidegger uses the word, i.e., in the sense of “ultimate.” The last god is the ultimate, highest aspect (as it were) of divinity. It is the element in which God can be God, analogous to what Eckhart describes as Godhead.

The “passing by” of the last god is another way of putting the question: will the death of the God of Christendom be reversed? The God of Christendom still exists in a bare ontotheological sense, but Heidegger is asking whether the reality or divinity of this God (or possibly other gods) can be restored. This will be done by sheltering beyng in a being, i.e., through artwork, deed, thought, poetry which is sigetic, i.e., in tune with Ereignis and not Technik. If and when the last god passes by, true divinity will be restored to God/gods, and the West will be saved.

83 This aligns with the basic argument of Paola-Ladovica Coriando in Der letzte Gott als Anfang: Zur ab-grundigen Zeit-Raumlichkeit des Übergangs in Heideggers “Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)” (Munich: W. Fink Verlag, 1998); see esp. 20.
84 GA65:406 (285).
The Last God

With this general framework in place, we now turn to look more closely at the last god in the *Beiträge.*

Despite the preliminary remarks in the previous section, it should be made clear that there are no easy answers here. Heidegger does not present a “philosophy of the last god” or “theology of the last god” in the *Beiträge*—as he writes later in the beyng-historical notebooks, “the thought of the last god is unthinkable.” Heidegger was struggling to formulate a new sense of god (thought from *Ereignis*), and while certain possibilities seem more clear than others, there is a persistent ambiguity here regarding the extent to which the last god is a messenger of a coming God or is this God to come in an absential mode—and then, regarding its nature, whether it is meant to prepare the groundwork for a Germanic religion of strife and finitude (based on a rethinking of pre-Socratic mytho-poetic *theos*) and/or is meant to rethink the divinity of the Christian God.

The ambiguity in this position points to the complex context of Heidegger’s lectures at the time. He had a sustained interest in German Idealism from roughly 1928 onwards, and was strongly influenced by Fichte's understanding of the self as well as Schelling’s understanding of divinity (see the 1936 lectures), which would have a strong influence on his understanding of the “strife” between man and God. Outside of the context of German Idealism, Nietzsche was perhaps equally influential at this time, though Heidegger grew more critical of his thought by the 1940s.

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85 This section as well as the following section are primarily expository, and I will reserve most of my interpretative work for the end of the chapter.
86 GA71:5.
87 At Davos in 1929, Heidegger had dismissed Goethe and German Idealism, but in following years he grew more interested in Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. This was somewhat critical at first—see *Der Deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Hegel, Schelling) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart,* ed. C. Strube (Frankfurt, a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), hereafter “GA28”—but then he became more positive, particularly in his appraisal of Schelling. See GA42, GA32, and *Die Metaphysik des deutschen Idealismus. Zur erneuten Auslegung von Schelling: Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände (1809),* ed. G. Seubold (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991); hereafter “GA49.”
88 See Ryan Hellmers, “Reading in *Ereignis*: Schelling’s System of Freedom and the *Beiträge,*” *Epoché* 13, no. 1 (Fall 2008), 136.
Still, the beyng-historical notebooks still contain many Nietzschean themes and ideas regarding divinity, as we will see below.

The last god is first and foremost an anti-ontotheological god, a photographic negative of all theology hitherto—though, oddly, many of the terms that Heidegger uses to describe the last god are drawn from Scripture and Christian theology. Heidegger writes: “The last god has its most unique uniqueness and stands outside those calculating determinations meant by titles such as ‘mono-theism,’ ‘pan-theism,’ and ‘a-theism.’ ‘Monotheism’ and all types of ‘theism’ exist only since Judeo-Christian apologetics, which has metaphysics as its intellectual presupposition. With the death of this god, all theisms collapse.” Even the basic sense that God gives beatitude or happiness is abandoned. Nearness to the last god “cannot be counted as ‘happiness’ or ‘unhappiness,’” as the last god “carries its own measure within itself.” The old moral ontotheological categories either no longer apply or are entirely reinterpreted: of the “happiness and pseudo-completion” of ontotheology, Heidegger writes that “the last god especially hates all of this.”

The last god also involves a rethinking of the ontotheological sense of eternity, mentioned above. As Augenblick, the last god is in some sense not being but becoming (thought as Ereignis), and gives time-space commensurate to itself. Only where the “truth of beyng is not willed into questioning” is “all time-space withdrawn from the moment,” and a new history is not founded.

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89 This is especially surprising given that the last god is “other than the Christian God” (GA65:7 [5]), and “the totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God” (GA65:404 [284]), though the “Christian God” often seems to indicate only the cultural ontotheological version of God, and not a rejection of Christianity per se. In other words, where Heidegger writes “the Christian God” he seems to imply the God of Christendom. In any event, the “passing by” of the last god is drawn from the Bible (possibly via Hölderlin, i.e., 1 Kings 19:11-12 and Exodus 33:18-34:9).
90 GA65:411 (289).
91 GA65:11 (9).
92 GA65:407 (286).
93 Heidegger’s description of the last god also bears many resemblances to the later Schelling’s Absolute. The phrase “the last god” is found in Hölderlin’s poem “Friedensfeier” and also Schelling’s lectures on the philosophy of art in 1802-03, where the context is clearly Christological (see George Seidel, “Heidegger's Last God and the Schelling Connection,” Laval Théologique et Philosophique 55 [1999], 89-90).
94 GA65:410 (288).
The later Schelling’s conception of the Absolute and the 1935 Hölderlin lectures (collected in GA39) are important sources here. As non-ontotheological, the last god is Götterung, “goddng,” sheer event. The last god is not to be understood as an object, subject, creator, or cause.\textsuperscript{95} The last god “is neither ‘a being’ nor a ‘not-being’—and also not commensurate with beyng.”\textsuperscript{96}

Instead of asking a metaphysical question, ‘what is the last god?’, we should rather ask, as Stenstad puts it, “what takes place in the saying of the last god?”\textsuperscript{97} The answer to this is the sheltering of beyng in a being. By naming the last god in a reticent way, we shelter its mystery and concealed nature; in our time, the last god is radically absent. Despite this distance and absence, for Heidegger (following Hölderlin), godliness still determines human life, albeit “as a power that is not fulfilled anymore, as a fading and dark, but still powerful power.”\textsuperscript{98} The flight of the gods is a mode of the divine, absence but not therefore nothing. As Heidegger writes in the Beiträge, “the remoteness of the last god is a unique kind of nearness.”\textsuperscript{99} The absence and withdrawal, the fact that the divine cannot be grasped with representations is in fact a way to be closer to the divine, in reverent silence, which is only possible for “the few.”

The passing by of the last god grounds “the origin of the future style,”\textsuperscript{100} which Heidegger adumbrates in the Beiträge. “The nearness to the last god is silence,” the sigetic described earlier, which must be “set into work and word in the style of reservedness,”\textsuperscript{101} which is non-theoretical. Within this reservedness, Da-sein attunes itself to the last god, to get ‘in tune’ with its stillness. The last god “withdraws from all calculation,”\textsuperscript{102} and there can be no content for the last god in our transitional time. As we are in the time of degraded language and nihilism, any content that we give

\textsuperscript{95} GA65:4 (4).
\textsuperscript{96} GA65:263 (185).
\textsuperscript{97} Gail Stenstad, “The Last God—A Reading,” Research In Phenomenology 23 (1993), 176.
\textsuperscript{98} GA39:95; see Figal, “Forgetfulness of God,” 202.
\textsuperscript{99} GA65:412 (290).
\textsuperscript{100} GA65:415 (292).
\textsuperscript{101} GA65:11 (9). Heidegger mentions another Grundstimmung, deep awe, which is “the way of getting near and remaining near” to the last god (GA65:15 [12]).
\textsuperscript{102} GA65:405 (285).
to the last god will be inappropriate. The sigetic saying of the last god is thus necessarily formally indicative and vague. This is evident in Heidegger’s using *Gott, Götter*, and *der letzte Gott* more or less interchangeably in *Beiträge*.\(^{103}\) As he puts it, “the talk of ‘gods’ here does not indicate the decided assertion on the existence of a plurality set against a singular, but is rather meant as an allusion to the undecideability of the being of gods.”\(^{104}\) He adds that the “multitude of gods” after the collapse of “all theisms” “cannot be quantified.”\(^{105}\)

Another important aspect of the last god is its dialogue with man. Man is used by, and needed by, the godhood of the last god, in order for it to be founded by man’s sheltering of beyng in a being.\(^{106}\) It is in this “domain” that “the last god appropriates to itself.”\(^{107}\) Godding needs beyng,\(^{108}\) the cleared *Da* where the decision can happen for “the creative-preserving of god,” who “only divinizes [*durchgottet*] beyng in work, sacrifice, deed, and thinking.”\(^{109}\) Each of these modes of sheltering beyng in a being are, as Vallega-Neu puts it, “ways in which the ‘one’ last god sways,”\(^{110}\) and are the precondition for the decision to found another beginning.\(^{111}\)

Man needs the godhood of the last god, but perhaps surprisingly, the strongest impression that one takes from *Beiträge* is the needfulness of the gods.\(^{112}\) Heidegger writes that despite it “seem[ing] as if man might have to await god,” rather “god awaits man’s leaping-into *Da-sein*.”\(^{113}\) Both need each other to come into a self, a dialectic which is reminiscent of both Hegel and

\(^{103}\) However, he began to make finer distinctions in the 1940s.
\(^{104}\) GA65:437 (308).
\(^{105}\) GA65:411 (289).
\(^{106}\) GA65:140 (98).
\(^{107}\) GA65:240 (170).
\(^{108}\) GA65:240 (169).
\(^{109}\) GA65:262 (185).
\(^{111}\) GA65:415 (292): “The last god is not the end but the other beginning of immeasurable possibilities for our history.”
\(^{112}\) There are parallels with both Schelling and Rosenzweig here. As Heidegger put it in his 1936 Schelling lectures: “This whole project of divine being and being in general is accomplished by man. God is only the elevated form of man. … Man must be in order for the god to be revealed. What is a god without man? The absolute form of absolute monotony. What is a man without god? Pure madness in the form of the harmless. Man must be in order for the god to *exist*” (GA42:204, 207 [117, 119]).
\(^{113}\) GA65:416 (293).
Schelling. In rejecting ontotheological characteristics of God as traditionally understood, Heidegger also rejects a transcendent all-powerful personal God who makes demands of us.\textsuperscript{114} ‘Man is needed by beyng itself’ in order to shelter beyng in a being, but this site of sheltering is “for the moment of the fleeing and arrival of gods.”\textsuperscript{115} The gods need a site, and beyng needs man to prepare this site. As we recall from the theological difference, “gods do not stand ‘over’ being,” but “gods do need beyng,” the essencing of beyng in the strife/fourfold, in order to be at all.\textsuperscript{116}

There is in fact another, deeper needfulness: “Gods need beyng-historical thinking.”\textsuperscript{117} Without Heidegger’s attempted transition into an other beginning, a new way of sheltering the divine in language without ontotheological error, gods cannot exist at all. Beyng “finds its truth only in en-thinking [Erdenken],” and in the other beginning, renewed “philosophy must be if ‘gods’ are again to come into decision and if history is to obtain its ownmost ground.”\textsuperscript{118} It almost seems at times as if the last god is a ‘projection’ of man, of Da-sein, just a corollary or way of speaking in Da-sein’s becoming a self,\textsuperscript{119} in many ways functioning as the ‘call’ [Zuruf] of being in Sein und Zeit,\textsuperscript{120} insofar as the last god does not manifest as anything, cannot be worshipped, and seemingly shares nothing in common with ‘gods’ as normally understood. Again, the last god does not make any

\textsuperscript{114} The ‘gods’ in Heidegger are at times, especially in the 1930s, very reminiscent of Kant’s god as regulatory idea; not knowable by representation, but known in the ‘heart’ (a word Heidegger often uses), and reworked as formal indications. In 1936, Heidegger writes: “Our representation of God is only an idea. By this Kant does not want to say that God doesn’t exist or is a mere fantasy; God’s existence was free of all doubts for Kant. He only wants to say as existing, God can never become certain for us by mere belief in what is thought in the concept of God and by an analysis of these representations ... the ideas do not bring what is represented before us bodily, but only point out the direction in which we must search” (GA42:63 [36]).

\textsuperscript{115} GA65:293 (186).

\textsuperscript{116} GA65:438 (308). He continues: “Gods do not need beyng as their ownhood, wherein they themselves take a stance,” i.e., as a ground, but gods do nonetheless “need beyng in order through beyng, which does not belong to gods, nevertheless to belong to themselves.” Beyng is needed by gods but is “never causable and conditionable” (GA65:438 [309]).

\textsuperscript{117} GA65:438 (309).

\textsuperscript{118} GA65:438 (309).

\textsuperscript{119} See GA65:408 (287): “The last god is hinted at in these hints, the law of the great individuation in Da-sein, of the aloneness of the sacrifice, of the uniqueness of choosing the shortest and steepest pathway” and GA65:437 (308): “When the self leaps, it decides on its god.”

\textsuperscript{120} The flight of the gods is somewhat like nothingness or the uncanny in Sein und Zeit, occasioning one’s appropriating authenticity, though in this case, it is all of German culture which is brought to itself.
demands of us. This seems to be, as Powell puts it, “a moment of spiritual transformation in humans when they recognize that they are no more than the opening of beyng,” a finite god that reveals our finitude to ourselves.121 Men and the gods need each other to become themselves, but how does this appropriation occur?

Poetic Dialogue with Gods

The dialogue of the poet and the divine is the most important aspect of the passing-by of the last god. Thus far we have examined the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of the last god in the Beiträge, and we turn now to the ‘how’—poetic thinking. Recalling our earlier discussion: “Language is not merely a tool which man possesses alongside many others; rather, language first grants the possibility of standing in the midst of the openness of beings. Only where there is language, is there world … only where world holds sway is there history,” i.e., a history which can only be given to man if the last god grants it.122 Poetry is the “projective saying” which says “world and earth, of the arena of the strife, and thereby of all nearness and distance of the gods.”123 It is poetry above all that holds the Da open, and founds gods. Heidegger notes in Beiträge that “more readily than others the poet shelters the truth,”124 and indicates at many places in the beyng-historical notebooks the importance of poetry, though it is his concurrent lectures and essays (often mentioned in the text of the Beiträge itself) that give the deeper context here.125

121 Powell, 115. Polt adds: “[Heidegger] runs the risk of reducing the gods to an aspect of the relation between beyng and Da-sein” (Emergency of Being, 213)
122 GA4:38 (56).
123 GA5:62 (46).
124 GA6:19 (14).
125 Heidegger consistently emphasizes the importance of language, and of poetry in particular, in the sheltering of beyng. He writes that “the statue and the temple stand in silent dialogue with man in the unconcealed,” but “if there were not the silent word, then the looking god as sight of the statue and of the features of its figure could never appear. And a temple could never, without standing in the disclosive domain of the word, present itself as the house of a god” (GA54:172 [116]).
In the essay *Wozu Dichter?*, he writes that “poets are the mortals who … sense [spüren] the track [Spur] of the fugitive gods, they stay on the gods’ track, and so they blaze [spüren] a path for their mortal relations.”126 The poets are attentive to the absence of the divine; in the midst of the nihilism of machination, the poet’s “song still lingers over the desolate land.”127 It turns out that Hölderlin’s poetry fulfills this task *par excellence*; Hölderlin’s hymnal poetry is that which “says the holy.”128 Hölderlin “determines a new time … of the gods who have fled and of the god who is coming”129 with his poetry. He inaugurates this history by his poetry, not just describing it, but helping to bring it about.

What does it mean to inaugurate a history, precisely? Heidegger writes that “language can have begun only from the overwhelming and the uncanny … language is the primal poetry in which a people poetizes being. In turn, the great poetry by which a people steps into history begins the formation of its language.”130 The gods of a people, of its nation and language, are an important part of this. Hölderlin’s poetry is *Unheimlich*, uncanny, founding a *Heimat* but keeping the German people exposed to beyng and danger, holding them out into the strife to raise them to greatness.131 Heidegger’s oft-stated goal for humanity, to dwell poetically on the earth, in the words of Hölderlin, “means to stand in the presence of the gods and to be struck by the essential nearness of things.” Poetry is the key, “not just any saying, but that whereby everything first steps into the open, which we then discuss and talk about in everyday language.”132

Following Hölderlin, Heidegger writes that the poet is the first to hear the hint of the gods, and the thinker then translates this poetic content into thought. Both the poet and the thinker

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126 GA5:272 (202).
127 GA5:274 (204).
129 GA4:48 (64).
131 GA4:149 (170).
132 GA4:43 (60).
remain in the uncanny, and “translate” this uncanniness to a people.\footnote{See GA39:32 and GA39:286.} As described earlier, the holy is above men and gods, and holiness is the whole where men and gods come to themselves and are appropriated to each other. As he writes, “neither men nor gods by themselves can ever achieve an immediate relation to the holy; men need the gods and the heavenly ones need mortals.”\footnote{GA4:68 (90).} The gods need the poet to prepare and “name poetically the one and singular ground of the becoming homely of human beings as historical.”\footnote{GA53:192 (154).} Gods and a world are not a consequence of language, but rather are simultaneous with it. It is “precisely in the naming of the gods and in the world becoming word that authentic conversation [\textit{eigentliche Gespräch}], which we ourselves are, consists.”\footnote{GA4:40 (57-58).} Yet the poet also needs the gods, the inspiration of the gods, to bring gods to language. Just like the sculpture of a god in a Greek temple “allows the God himself to presence and is, therefore, the God himself,” in fact “the same is true of the linguistic work.”\footnote{GA5:29 (22).} Yet what is this god that is brought to word? Is this the Christian God (rethought as event), the Greek sense of the divine as \textit{to theion}, or something else altogether?

\textit{Last God as Pascalian Critique?}

We have spoken before of Heidegger’s ambiguity regarding the nature of the God/gods brought to presence in poetry and thinking. In this section and the following section, two possible interpretations of the last god will be presented—the last god as Pascalian critique (recovering the divinity of the Christian God) and as \textit{to theion} (the impersonal event described in early Greek thought). First, I consider the last god in \textit{Beiträge} as being part of a wider critical project in
Heidegger’s thought, a critique of Christendom which is not wholly a rejection of the Christian God as such.\footnote{One of the most interesting signs that Heidegger is not rejecting Christianity is the strong similarity of structures between beyng/Da-sein (in Heidegger) and God/soul (in Christian theology, Eckhart in particular), which we return to in Chapter 4.}

In \textit{Beiträge}, Heidegger writes that the last god essences in the “sheltered and hidden transformation” of “the gods who have been,” that he is “not debasing God,” but rather the last god will “make what is ownmost to the uniqueness of the divine essencing [\textit{Gottwesen}] most prominent,”\footnote{GA65:407, 410 (286, 288).} implying that this will be a transformation of God as traditionally understood.\footnote{GA65:416 (293). My position differs here from that of Prufer, who writes: “[P]erhaps Heidegger indicates a way both to a rediscovery of Greek philosophy and to a rediscovery of Christian theology, to a rediscovery of what has been before the beginning and will be after the end of modernity ... Heidegger opens up a space beyond the dialectic or push-pull between parts and whole and between obscurity and clarity. This space is not theologized; precisely therein lies its importance for theology” (69, 69n2). The problem is that \textit{Ereignis} is indeed implicitly theologized, favoring a specific interpretation of Greek impersonal \textit{theos} (which is misconstrued as a neutral basis for any philosophy or theology) over personalist Christian \textit{theos}, though there is admittedly some ambiguity here. However, in either case, this space is certainly “theologized.”} The majority of Heidegger’s interpreters tend to emphasize any and all aspects of Heidegger that reject traditional theism (in favor of anything atheistic or post-Christian), but as Westphal rightly points out, “the Pascalian character of Heidegger’s critique is overlooked,”\footnote{Merold Westphal, \textit{Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 148.} i.e., “Pascalian” in the sense that Heidegger wants to sharply contrast the God of faith and the God of the philosophers, emphasizing the chasm between them. Probably the most illuminating passage on this issue outside of the \textit{Beiträge} is given in the 1936 Schelling lectures:

When the ecumenical office [\textit{kirchliche Lehramt}] loses the sole power as the first and real source of truth, the total realm of beings as it was formed by Christianity does not disappear from view. On the contrary, the order of beings as a whole—God, the creator, the world of creatures, man, belonging to the world and destined for God—these beings as a whole thus experienced now especially demand a new assimilation on the foundation and with the means of knowledge founding itself. Here, however, we must take into consideration the fact that through German Protestantism in the Reformation not only Roman dogma was changed, but also the Roman-Oriental form of the Christian experience of being was transformed. What was already being prepared in the Middle Ages with Eckhart, Tauler, and Seuse and in the ‘German \textit{theologia}’ is brought to bear in a new beginning [\textit{Ansatz}] and in a
more comprehensive way by Cusanus [i.e. Nicholas of Cusa], by Luther, Sebastian Frank, Jacob Boehme. … Shattering of the sole dominance of the church … is understood as a liberation of man to himself … but what man is in himself … is determined only in his liberation. 142

This passage deserves a word or two of explanation. What Heidegger calls the German theologia refers to the 14th-century manuscript commonly called the Theologica Germanica which was discovered by Martin Luther and published in 1516 (and later translated into English in 1648). 143 Given Heidegger’s fondness for Luther’s early work, it is not surprising that he would share Luther’s intense interest in this text. The Theologia Germanica is perhaps the most important single text of so-called “Rhineland mysticism,” a 14th-century movement which included Heinrich Seuse, Johannes Tauler, and Eckhart. Heidegger’s esteem for this movement is rooted in the fact that he sees in its thinking a precursor of beyng-historical thinking, i.e., of an understanding of divinity beyond the usual scholastic/ontotheological language, focused on the inner spiritual life relatively more than on external and traditional practices, outside of the mainstream of the church at that time. Tauler had a reputation in the late medieval period as a “master of living” rather than a “master of learning,” 144 and we can see how this would appeal to Heidegger. Again, recalling our earlier discussion, this is part of Heidegger’s narrative about the history of Christianity, where primal Christian faith was immediately corrupted by philosophy, alongside which Heidegger gives a consistent account of a marginalized tradition which thinks God and the divine without metaphysics and can be traced through St. Paul’s letters, the Theologica Germanica, Pascal, Luther, and Schelling. Heidegger is, at the very least, sympathetic to this way of understanding God.

Especially important here is the sense in which God and man are to be thought anew, a theme mentioned in the Beiträge, but the key is that in this passage he links the renewal with

142 GA42:54 (31).
144 Ibid., 15-16.
“Christianity,” noting that we need a “new assimilation” of Christianity, inflected with the early Schelling’s language of freedom,\(^\text{145}\) outside the mere “ecumenical office” of official churches (a theme we will see repeated in Rosenzweig), all of which imply that Heidegger thinks of himself as having a more profound understanding of Christianity than his contemporaries.\(^\text{146}\) As we have seen above, in the *Beiträge* Heidegger approves of Schelling’s Absolute as an “eternal becoming” thought outside the categories of metaphysics.\(^\text{147}\) When we take into consideration that Heidegger was also very strongly influenced by Hölderlin in this period, one might wonder whether Heidegger is not—albeit in a tentative and merely suggestive way—engaging in Tübingen theology carried on by other means, seeking a higher sense of God in a sort of philosophical preamble to Schelling’s speculative theology which transcends dogma and church.

There are many passages in the *Beiträge*\(^\text{148}\) and elsewhere that support this reading of the last god as somehow a part of the German *theologia*. Heidegger often hints that he has a profound insight into ‘true’ Christianity, the right way to relate to God, and that he has found a way to recover it. We have seen above, in looking at the theological difference, that Heidegger does appear to maintain an unorthodox sort of Protestant faith, though this develops and changes over the decades, and may

\(^\text{145}\) Hellmers points out that Fichte is another source; he helped Heidegger “to push past the Latinate thinking of subject as substrate in favor of subject as temporalizing ground” (Ryan Hellmers, “Reading in *Ereignis*: Schelling’s System of Freedom and the *Beiträge*,” *Epochê* 13:1 [Fall 2008], 136).

\(^\text{146}\) In 1928 Heidegger writes: “Is it not possible however that the supposed ontical faith in God is basically godlessness? And is it possible that the metaphysician is more religious than the common believers, members of a ‘church’ or even the “theologians” of every confession?” (GA26:211n9 [165]); and in 1959, “This new thinking is necessary because we cannot raise the question concerning humans from within religion and also because the western relation to the wholeness of the world is today no longer transparent, but confused. This conclusion stems in part from the various orientations of the faith of the church” (Petzet, 177).

\(^\text{147}\) Much later in his life, Heidegger mentioned attending Carl Braig’s lectures in 1911 (in Freiburg) and first hearing “of Schelling’s and Hegel’s significance for speculative theology as distinguished from the dogmatic system of Scholasticism” (ZSD 82 [75]).

\(^\text{148}\) The clearest example of this is Heidegger’s reinterpretation of “faith” in *Beiträge*, which now becomes Heidegger’s own reticent speaking about the last god, maintaining a vigil for the advent of the last god and return of the holy. He refers to himself as one of the “originary and actual believers,” and admits that this essential knowing is so unlike normal knowledge that it is “not a ‘knowing’ but a ‘faith’ ” (GA65:369 [258]). See also GA66:246 (217): “The enthinking of beyng is a deed deeper than any immediate veneration of God.”
have vanished almost entirely by the end of his life.\textsuperscript{149} In the late 1920s, Heidegger made a distinction between “Christianity and being Christian,” and in later years contrasted ontotheological Christentum (with its Kirchenlehre) versus deeper Christlichkeit.\textsuperscript{150}

Similarly, in a lecture of 1942 delivered as he was writing the last of the beyng-historical notebooks under consideration, Heidegger responded to complaints from students about his supposedly anti-Christian views, stating: “Our discussions … are being interpreted as stemming from an anti-Christian hostility. Let us leave it for theology to decide whether the meditation on the essence of truth we have attempted here could not, taken in context, be more fruitful for the preservation of Christianity than the aberrant desire to construct new ‘scientifically’ founded proofs for the existence of God.”\textsuperscript{151} See also his essay on ontotheology, published in 1957: “Someone who has experienced theology in his own roots, both the theology of the Christian faith and that of philosophy, would today rather remain silent about God when he is speaking in the realm of thinking.”\textsuperscript{152} During a trip to Greece taken in the 1950s, Heidegger visited a Greek Orthodox monastery and writes that he found here an authentic Christianity,\textsuperscript{153} which implies that he was at some level interested in a deeper form of Christianity not mired in ontotheology (whether Orthodox

\textsuperscript{149} Heidegger wrote on January 23, 1928, in a letter to his wife: “Schirmer wants a confirmation for his assertion that though I'm 'officially' Catholic, I'm inwardly Protestant. I confirmed this for him by return post ...” (FE 155), and on September 12, 1929 added in a letter to Blochmann (EB 32) grace could still come from the Christian God. By 1930, his faith seems to have faded somewhat, though not entirely. While visiting the monastery at Beuron, he writes to his wife (on October 19, 1930): “Only now am I capable of letting the full richness of the wisdom of this monastic existence take effect. Today the liturgy took the words of St. Paul as its subject … be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man. Even though I cannot go along with the way of faith actually called for, it does all help me to reflect [Besinnung] and find inner strength; and only now am I again seeing that even work is not enough unless it is thoroughly pervaded in its sway by the right spirit” (167 [125]). Two decades later, again from Beuron, he writes (on October 24, 1951): “During the liturgy in Beuron all sorts of thoughts came to me about the form and effect of the spiritual … a dwelling within the praise of God transpires [vollzieht] in the liturgy. but there's often also a doubt as to what extent a fruitful closeness is still alive” (FE 270 [219]). It is also noteworthy that Heidegger asked to be buried as a Catholic, and Müller reports that on hikes in his later years, whenever they came to a church or chapel “Heidegger always dipped his finger in the stoup and genuflected. On one occasion I had asked him if this was not inconsistent, since he had distanced himself from the dogma of the church. Heidegger's answer had been: ‘One must think historically. And where there has been so much praying, there the divine is present in a very special way’” (Safranski, 433).

\textsuperscript{150} Petzet, 176.

\textsuperscript{151} GA54:244 (166).

\textsuperscript{152} ID, 54-55.

or otherwise). Even as late as 1970, he notes “the extent to which the Christianness of Christianity and its theology merit questioning.”

To be sure, Heidegger’s position in the late 1930s, as expressed in the beyng-historical notebooks, is relatively more critical (in comparison to his earlier or later years) of Christianity and the Christian God as such. But the last god can still be reasonably interpreted as a way of speaking about godhead as somehow creating a possible space for the recovery of holiness of the Christian God (thought in an idiosyncratic way). As Heidegger clearly stated in 1951, just a few years after writing the beyng-historical notebooks: “Neither in the Catholic nor the Protestant Church can a creative or history-making piety be enforced by a liturgical movement—unless God speaks Himself. This is why it may after all be a proper way to prepare us to hear what addresses us, to furnish a presentiment of its realm, and to arouse this in the individual.” This is a relatively straightforward claim that he hopes for the preparation of a ground from which God could speak in the liturgy of the established Christian churches. While he is not attempting to reform Christianity or point to the renewal of Christian belief in any sort of immediate, public, political, or cultural sense, his critique of Christendom is at least partially a Pascalian critique, as Westphal puts it, and is not carried out from a position antithetical to Christianity as such.

**Last God as Pagan Theos?**

There is, however, another theme in Heidegger’s writings about divinity and the last god which is more radical than mere Pascalian critique—i.e., the recovery of Greek *theos*. The theme of impersonal *theos* is emphasized most strongly in the 1930s, but is present in the post-1945 writings

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154 GA9:45 (39).
155 FE 270 [219], letter of October 24, 1951.
156 Though even in the 1920s: “It is no accident … that Aristotle already called first philosophy by the name of *theologia*. We should take note here that this concept of theology has nothing to do with the present-day concept of Christian theology as a positive science. They have only the name in common” (GA24:38 [29]) and also in the late 1910s under the
in an attenuated way. Recalling his ontotheological critique, Heidegger writes in 1936: “We must remember that the word and concept ‘theology’ did not first grow in the framework and service of an ecclesiastical system of faith, but within philosophy.”¹⁵⁷ This would imply not (or not only) a Pascalian critique of Christian theology, but a rethinking and recovery of Greek (i.e., pre-Christian) mytho-poetic discourse about the divine. Heidegger notes that the German word Gott means a being that man invokes, but the original Greek sense of theos is deeper, and “expresses something essentially different,”¹⁵⁸ which is closer to his conception of the last god.¹⁵⁹ While this initially seems to point in a different direction than Pascalian critique, as we will see there may be a deeper correlation: though Heidegger is not explicit on the matter, it may be (as noted earlier) that deconstructed Greek theos would be the proper style of a true relation to the Christian God, as only the original Greek theos was really closest to beyng as Ereignis.

Freeing the word theos from two millennia of obfuscatory Christian philosophy and theology is a central theme of Heidegger’s beyng-historical notebooks and concurrent writings, particularly his lectures on the Presocratics. Heidegger’s interest in this was sparked by Nietzsche and Jünger as well as the sense of crisis and nihilism in German culture in the late 1920s, which led him to look to the deepest past and furthest future—back to the Presocratics to find a source to renew the West, and forward to Nietzsche and Hölderlin as the most futural thinkers who pointed the way to a transition

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¹⁵⁷ GA42:87 (50-51). He continues: “Every philosophy (understood as metaphysics) is theology in the primordial and essential sense that logos of beings as a whole asks about the ground (the ur-Sache) of being, and this ground is called theos, God. … But one should never appraise the theology in philosophy according to some dogmatic ecclesiastical kirchlichen theology; that is, one must especially not think that philosophical theology in only the rational, enlightened form of ecclesiastical theology. … Rather, the reverse is true, that Christian theology is the Christianization Verchristlichung of an extra-Christian philosophy and that only for this reason could this Christian theology also be made secular again.”

¹⁵⁸ GA54:164 (111).

¹⁵⁹ Heidegger at times conflates the Judeo-Christian God with a somewhat caricatured “Latin God,” where “the God of the Old Testament” is equated with a “commanding God” in the sense of the “Roman gods, designated by the Latin word numen, which means ‘bidding’ and ‘will’ and has the character of command,” but this “does not at all touch the essence of the Greek gods, i.e. gods who dwell in the region of aletheia” (GA54:59 [40]).
out of nihilism. Part of this project involved rethinking the divine as non-ontotheological, with the help of the most ancient (Anaximander and Parmenides) and most futural (Hölderlin). The theme of rethinking *theos* is closely related to Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, where his goal is to rediscover the true meaning of *ousia*, *theos*, and *logos*. Just as the word “holy” retains little of its original meaning after Heidegger’s analysis, so too for *theos*. The usual Greek word for the divine is *to theion*, which is an indefinite present absence, a grammatical neuter (like the “it values” of Heidegger’s 1919 lectures). In Heidegger’s understanding, *theos* is always a predicate for the Greeks, never a subject, and far less an ontotheological subject. Heidegger’s reading of Greek *theos* as an event of illumination transforms *theos* from God into something more like a strong description of an experience, aligning closely with his description of the last god in the *Beiträge* (not a subject, sheer event, and so on).

The last god is at least partially a recovery of *theos* in Parmenides,160 who refers to the gods as equivalent to being. Heidegger writes: “[B]eing, shining into beings, is *to daion-daimon*. Descending from being into beings, and thus pointing into beings, are the *daiontes-daimones*.”161 Being “*is to daion-daimon*,” the uncanny. The gods (and the last god) descend from being into beings. Greek *theos* would then be the only style or content that a true relation to God could have, since only the very beginning of Greek culture was in proximity to the source (of the first beginning and also the other beginning)—beyn as *Ereignis*. Heraclitus and Parmenides (as well as Hölderlin) are closest to beyn because they are at the beginning of the West and at the other beginning of the West, and so *theos* is best expressed in these figures.

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160 Jaran makes an interesting and ultimately persuasive case that Aristotle is another important source: “In Aristotle’s notion of the divine [we find] an antecedent of an attempt to approach the world with regard not to its cause but to its wholeness—*theion* understood as a *holos* [whole] and not as *theos*. In this regard, Heidegger’s metaphysical enterprise succeeded in retrieving the question hidden behind the historical theologizing misinterpretations of Aristotle” (François Jaran, “Heidegger’s Kantian Reading of Aristotle’s *Theologike Episteme*,” *Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 3 [March 2010], 591).

161 GA54:157 (106).
The most important aspect of this recovery of *theos* is that it incorporates the Presocratic mytho-poetic understanding of the world as *ur*-phenomenological, as the archetype of the fourfold, thought as the pre-theological and pre-philosophical basis of all past and future religion. In a later seminar, Heidegger refers to his thought as the “primordial sense of phenomenology” and a “phenomenology of the inapparent.” As he writes of Greek *muthos* regarding *to theion*, it “names being in its primordial looking-into and shining; names *to theion*, i.e., the gods.” This *muthos* of the gods of the fourfold thus becomes a new mytho-poetic “theology” (understood anew) of being which is truer than any Biblical or other theology. Heidegger is not advocating the worship of Zeus and Apollo, for this would be a misunderstanding of what Greek gods are, mistaking them for subjects to be worshipped. *Theos* is deeper than philosophy or theology; in its indeterminacy and primacy it is the basic experience at the root of any subject-object relation or conceptual understanding in philosophy or theology.

In probably his most telling statement on the topic, Heidegger writes: “The default of God and the divinities is absence. But absence is not nothing; rather it is precisely the presence, which must first be appropriated, of the hidden fullness and wealth of what has been and what, thus

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162 GA15:80.
163 GA54:166 (112).
164 GA54:164 (110): “The fundamental essence of the Greek divinities, in distinction to all others, even the Christian god, consists in their origination out of the presence of ‘present’ being.”
165 Heidegger writes: “The gods appear in the form of man not because they are thought of as ‘human’ and are anthropomorphized, but because the Greeks experience man as the being whose being is determined through a relation of self-disclosing being itself to what, on the basis of this very relation, we call ‘man.’ Therefore the look of the God who stems from being can emerge ‘in’ man and can look out from the form of ‘man’ as gathered in the look. Therefore men are often divinized and thought of according to a divine form, since gods and men receive their respective distinct essence from being itself, i.e., from *aletheia*” (GA54:161 [109]).
166 For example, he describes “the clearing that occurs in the concealed essence of *aletheia*” in which “we experience emergence and presence,” i.e., the basic *Da/Erregns* relationship. But then he adds a key component: “What appears to the looking is already a response to the original look, which first elevates human looking into its essence” (GA54:158 [107]), i.e., the mutual appropriation of man and god described in *Beiträge*. But the point here is that ‘the look’ (*to theon*), in an etymological sleight of hand, is now portrayed as equivalent to *to theion*; “*to theon*, i.e. *to theion* … the ‘divine’ … *oi theoi*, the so-called gods, the ones who look into the ordinary and who everywhere look into the ordinary, are *oi diamones*, the ones who point and give signs … The god is the *daion-daimon* that in the look presents himself as the un concealed.” He adds: “Man himself is that being … in his looking and in his sight, the uncanny itself, god, appears” (GA54:154 [104]). Thus, *theos* is rethought, and the nature of the last god (and/or the god to come) is rethought as sheer event, as verb, as the raising of man into humanness, uncannily awakening us to creation/history, shaking us out of everyday and ontotheology, etc.
gathered, is presencing, of the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus.” The claim presented here implies very strongly that “the divine”—understood from Beiträge and other texts as theos in a deconstructed sense, where the last god is highest messenger/divinity of Gottwesen or godhead—is the source, a primal experience which is later “translated” into Greek, Jewish, and Christian religiosity. Theos would then be the ‘divinity’ or divine element of any religiosity.

Yet it is somewhat misleading for Heidegger to equate all three, insofar as he is taking Greek to theion as a standard and thus privileging the Greeks above Judaism or Christianity. Indeed, as Heidegger writes, “Man in the Greek experience, and only he, is in his essence and according to the essence of aletheia the god-sayer.” It is Greek theos, more than the early Pauline communities or Old Testament prophets, which really comes closest to Ereignis, as only the inceptual Greek thinkers (Herakleitos and Parmenides) are fully rooted in the initial dawning of beyng. It is difficult to see how this could really apply to Jewish or Christian religiosity, however. As Schürmann puts it, there is an absurdity to the idea that “widely differing experiences of the divine conveyed by both the Greek and the Biblical traditions can be gathered together in a single nucleus and extracted from their speculative and religious straitjacket.”

It is this understanding of to theion, not the Christian or Jewish understanding, that will truly allow the holy to be recovered (by the Germans in particular). Apparently, the Christian God must pass the test of Heidegger’s sense of Greek theos to be considered divine at all. Heidegger makes this quite clear: “The gods of Greece and their supreme god”—i.e., godhead and/or the last god—“will return only transformed to a world whose overthrow is grounded in the land of the gods of ancient Greece. If the ideas of the Greek thinkers—as the flight of the gods had begun—had not been

167 GA7:177 (PLT 182); letter of June 18, 1950.
168 GA54:166 (112).
169 Schürmann, 518.
uttered in a developed language and had these sayings not, in turn, been altered into an instrument of an alien worldview”—i.e., Christianity as ontotheology—“then neither the power of the all-pervasive modern technology, still hidden from what is proper to it, nor the corresponding science and industrial society would now be dominant.”

Heidegger claims that this recovered Greek theos is neither pagan nor Christian; indeed, it falls outside of all previous dichotomies. He insists that this is not a reversion to finitude and paganism, but rather a deeper origin underlying both religion and philosophy, the primal event of beyng, a non-theological divinity (thought from Ereignis) which is the true source of the West, of which any other influence is an adulterant.

**Conclusion**

Looking forward to Chapter 4, we can note provisionally that while Heidegger claims to go ‘behind’ the Greeks to recover a basic phenomenon that precedes theology and philosophy, this is based on a very specific and unquestioned understanding of theology. His claim is that Christianity defines itself against paganism, and therefore misunderstands and reduces paganism in much the same way that ontotheology misunderstands God. The underlying difficulty here is that in attacking the ontotheological God, Heidegger has set up a straw man. I am certainly not the first to have noticed that if we look at the texts involved, just about everyone escapes Heidegger’s ontotheological critique—i.e., all of the Church fathers and virtually all of the medievals (not to mention many of the moderns).  

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170 Heidegger, *Aufenthalte*, 3 (3).
171 Heidegger strongly rejects the Christian separation of ‘pagan’ and ‘Christian,’ which fails to take paganism seriously and treats it as merely opposed or a precursor to Christian truth: “Passed off as a precursor to Christianity, respectively as ‘paganism’, and can be considered overcome” (GA65:211 [147]). Herakleitos’s teaching on logos, for example, is taken as a “predecessor of the logos mentioned in the New Testament” (GA40:96 [133]) and hence misunderstood. See also GA54:89 (60).
172 Caputo provides an especially perceptive defense of Aquinas on this score; see John Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 250: “What is unspoken in Thomas is that the metaphysical-theological way to think is a ladder which is to be thrown away, that metaphysics is something to be overcome. … This metaphysics, unlike all post-Cartesian systems, invites deconstruction. The elaborate scaffolding of
There is a related difficulty in that the last god may only be able to recover a Greco-German pantheism, which would not be thought from Ereignis but from various historical categories—primarily those of German Romanticism—which, given that Heidegger is operating in a Christian context, can only be seen an explicitly theological choice to reject Christian theology as normally understood, i.e. a debate within theology, and for this reason it cannot also coherently serve as a philosophical recovery of the holy understood ur-phenomenologically. As Safranski writes, “A god or a being, whether spelled Sein or Seyn, will find it difficult to reveal itself if it is not allowed to reveal itself as ‘something,’” and the content of such a god is in fact drawn (in varying degrees) from the German theologia and Greek theos despite Heidegger’s claims to the contrary.

Heidegger’s claim that the content of these volumes was simply given to him and hence we should not examine his biography or psychology for possible distorting effects goes against his own explicit advice to the contrary in the early 1920s. In 1938 he admits that “a confrontation with Christianity reticently accompanied my entire path up to now,” though immediately adds that he “it is not proper to speak of these most inward confrontations since they do not revolve around

Thomistic metaphysics conceals what it attempts to reveal, and hence reveals what it conceals; that the end of the self is a non-metaphysical union with God. It is a matter of no little irony to me that Heidegger was able to find a more gentle nature in Aristotle but not in St. Thomas. He finds in Aristotle’s physics an echo of the original Greek experience of phusis … but in the high Middle Ages he finds only the metaphysics of making, a tough-minded logicism and ontology which is only one step removed from technology and the will-to-power,” yet in fact this is not surprising at all, given Heidegger’s fondness for Luther. It should also be noted that Heidegger obviously has a point regarding a tendency towards ontotheology in some modern theology, and arguably in a couple late medieval thinkers (such as Suarez and Ockham), but the critique does not apply nearly as widely as he imagines.

173 Heidegger defines himself against the “mere counter-Christian, that is, the pagan imitation of the ‘mythical’” (GA66:237 [210]), yet I think he falls victim to a more subtle version of this tendency.

174 Safranski, 309.

175 While I disagree with various aspects of his work, Prudhomme is absolutely correct on this issue: “It’s not clear how [Heidegger’s] mytho-poetic approach to theology surmounts, or even responds to, this [ontotheological] situation … one would suppose that the key to developing a non-metaphysical theology would be to elaborate the connection of God and being, rather than of God and entity. Yet Heidegger also neglects—or refuses—to work out a clear connection of God (or the gods, or the holy) to being, not only leaving open the danger of a return to the metaphysical notion of deity, in terms of entity, but at times encouraging such an interpretation when he says that gods require being insofar as they are. […] The mere use of the term god … does not of itself assure that the content dealt with is truly theological. It is perhaps better described as cosmological. […] Without drawing a systematic connection of the language of God, the gods and the holy to being itself, one remains unable to say in another language what the mytho-poetic formulations all really mean” (God and Being, 16).

176 GA66:415 [368].
issues that concern the dogma of Christianity and articles of faith, but rather only around the sole question; whether God is fleeing from us or not and whether we, as creating ones, still experience this flight genuinely.” Notably, there are times when Heidegger shows awareness of his ambiguous relationship to his Christian origins. In a key letter to Jaspers, Heidegger mentions that throughout his later work there are two tenacious “thorns” (Pfähle) in his side, “the encounter [Auseinandersetzung] with the [Christian] belief of my youth and the failure [Misslingen] of the rectorate.”177 While he is able to admit this occasionally in his letters, in the beyng-historical notebooks he writes that “the worst that could happen to these efforts would be the psychological-biographical analysis and explanation.”178 Yet this statement is precisely the problem. The very fact that Heidegger thought to explicitly warn the reader, in print, against a psychological reading is telling and cannot help but induce the opposite reaction. It is no small matter if his interpretation of theology and of the history of the West in the beyng-historical notebooks is based on a selective understanding of the history of the West which is due to the impact of important incidents in his life. Obviously Heidegger’s philosophy cannot be reduced to these incidents, but this is an important issue. How he inquires into a new beginning, why he feels the need to inquire, his understanding of “true theology,” etc., are all partially contingent on this context.

One difficulty, as we will see, is that Heidegger forgets Jerusalem as the second origin of the West, apart from Athens. Though Rosenzweig’s grasp of the history of theology and philosophy is not without its shortcomings, he has the great virtue of understanding and utilizing the resources of the Hebrew language and the concrete life of liturgical Judaism and Christianity, which clearly indicate another side to the supposedly ontotheological tradition that Heidegger rejects. To be precise, where Heidegger writes that “all assertions about the ‘being’ and ‘essence’ of the gods …say

178 GA66:427 [377].
nothing about them,”179 this would only be the case if the ontotheological critique actually applied to the history of theology in the way that he imagines. As we will see in Chapter 3, Rosenzweig provides a compelling way to achieve a deeper thinking beyond metaphysics and ontotheology based on God’s revelation to man which does not require Heidegger’s contortions in the beyng-historical notebooks to think the other beginning with only the resources of finitude. One cannot solve a problem without diagnosing it correctly, and Rosenzweig has a much better grasp of the issues at stake as well as the resources that can be marshaled to address them. For both thinkers it is clear that the God of the philosophers has died, and that the West needs to somehow recover or rethink the divine, but only Rosenzweig makes concrete steps towards achieving this goal. We turn now to examine Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*.

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179 GA65:438 (308).
Chapter 3: Speech-Thinking and Everyday Life

In the following analysis of Rosenzweig’s work,1 I will focus primarily on speech-thinking and grammatical thinking, i.e., the way in which Rosenzweig accounts for language and personhood in light of the relationship between the self and God. I will then examine how this account relates to his understanding of religious life, Alltäglichkeit (everydayness), and the Johannine Age. My goal is to provide a reading of Rosenzweig which emphasizes those aspects of his thought that align with (and provide illuminating contrasts with) my reading of Heidegger in Chapter 2.2 As we will see below, Rosenzweig shares a number of themes with Heidegger—factual new thinking over old “idealistische” philosophy, a polemic against ontotheology, an emphasis on the poetic dialogue between the divine and the human as a way to save culture from nihilism, a temporalizing and rethinking of language and grammar, a return from fragmented modernity to whole life, the incorporation of theology/faith into philosophy, and involvement with the themes and ideas of German Romanticism and German Idealism.

1 While I must of course make some reference to Star 1 and Star 3, this chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive or elaborate reading of Star, but rather a focused exposition and analysis of the most important themes of Star 2 (with some reference to other texts), to be treated in dialogue with Heidegger in Chapter 4. For detailed interpretations of Star, the three best texts are Norbert Samuelson, A User’s Guide to Franz Rosenzweig’s The Star of Redemption (Richmond, VA: Curzon, 1999); Martin Fricke, Franz Rosenzweigs Philosophie der Offenbarung: Eine Interpretation des Sterns der Erlösung (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003); and Benjamin Pollock, Franz Rosenzweig and the Systematic Task of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). While they of course do not agree on every particular, these three authors are best for the fine detail of the Star which I do not treat here. My interpretation of the Star is closest to Pollock’s, though I disagree with him on a few issues (e.g., I think that he understates the extent to which Rosenzweig was, in his post-Star period, a theologian and a relatively pious Jew). I should also note that in terms of the Star itself, I have used Rudolf Hallo’s English translation as my basis; there is a second extant translation by Barbara Galli which has been generally ignored by scholars, with some justification. See The Star of Redemption, trans. Barbara Galli (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and The Star of Redemption, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971). Galli takes liberties with the text, and inexplicably decided to translate Rosenzweig’s unrevised 1920 edition, rather than the latest version. While her translation is elegant, readable, and occasionally more accurate than Hallo’s, the latter has ultimately produced what must be considered a superior translation (due to its accuracy), though it has a somewhat dry style which does not do justice to the lyricism of Rosenzweig’s text. I have slightly modified Hallo’s translation where necessary.

2 As noted earlier, this chapter will be shorter and somewhat more straightforward than Chapter 2 due both to the fact that Rosenzweig published far less material (due to his tragically early death) than Heidegger and also because he is relatively less ambiguous.
This chapter will begin with a general synopsis of Rosenzweig’s overall project; it is followed by a detailed interpretation of the Star, focusing especially on Sprachdenken (speech-thinking) and grammatical thinking in Star 2 and it concludes with an examination of the ambiguous nature of Rosenzweig’s “everyday.” Like Chapter 2, this chapter is meant to be primarily expository. While I will of course offer my own interpretation and commentary, most of the applications of Rosenzweig’s ideas will be found in Chapter 4. In the present chapter I will argue that Rosenzweig is most fruitfully read as a thinker in line with traditional Judaism (against some of his own tendencies to the contrary) who points to the phenomena of religious life in a cogent and philosophically interesting way. I should also note the ways that I am not reading him: as an ecumenical theologian (his esoteric and reductive view of Christianity in Star 3 renders this approach pointless, in my view), as a Scriptural scholar and translator in his post-Star work (this falls outside the scope of my argument), or as a postmodern or primarily alterity-focused philosopher (he is, rather, the author of a philosophical system in the German Idealist tradition, albeit one which transcends the later idealist model3).

For the most part, this chapter is a sympathetic presentation of Rosenzweig’s ideas, and I will be comparing him favorably to Heidegger (in Chapter 4). Though I am critical of the shortcomings in Rosenzweig, in general I will argue that he presents a coherent and persuasive account which stays more true to the phenomenology of religious life while also incorporating the insights of modernity and hermeneutics by way of a creative approach to language and grammar.

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3 Some Rosenzweig scholars write about Rosenzweig as a post-modern “anti-systematic” thinker, but this is inaccurate. Rather, as Pollock conclusively argues in Systematic Task, Rosenzweig is recovering a deeper and more holistic sense of system which was first formulated by Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling in the 1790s. This promising beginning was, on Rosenzweig’s view, already corrupted and calcified in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, and utterly lost after the collapse of the task of system in the wake of Hegel’s death and the rise of positivism in the 1840s.
Rosenzweig’s Project

I begin with a general account of Rosenzweig’s project. All philosophy hitherto is deficient for Rosenzweig insofar as it merely seeks after essence. Like Heidegger, Rosenzweig bemoans the corruption of the event-nature of *logos* into static forms which presuppose the rational conceivablebility of the world. He is primarily combating tendencies in neo-Kantianism, many of which he traces back to Hegel and denotes as “idealistic,” i.e., based in theory rather than life. As we have seen in Chapter 1, but Rosenzweig sees this as a problem with philosophy as such, and finds this essentializing tendency even in the first sentence of philosophy, “All is water,” in which there “already lurks the presupposition of the possibility of conceiving the world” in the untenable reification of the word ‘all.’ Asking “what is all?” should sound as non-sensical to us as “what is much?” or “what is some?” The problem is that the word “all” is assumed “to have an unambiguous predicate.”

Rather, Rosenzweig argues, if we try to comprehend the world only with philosophical concepts, then the world conceals itself; and so too for man and God. It is only in the relation of these three fundamental realities, as creation (God and the world), revelation (God and man), and redemption (man and the world), that they open themselves up to each other. Rosenzweig wants to change the primary philosophical question, “asking about essence,” to asking about “what happens,” about the event of existence. In exactly the same sense that Heidegger reinterprets essence as

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4 See Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of World, Man, and God*, trans. Nahum Glatzer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 57; hereafter “SAH”: “Our enemy is not idealism as such; anti-idealism, irrationalism, realism, materialism, naturalism, and what not, are equally harmful. The real cause of the illness is not that reason assumes that ‘spirit’ is the essence of reality; it is its assumption that it is possible for something to exist beyond reality. Reality, matter, nature, are all terms denoting ‘essence’ and are just as unacceptable as ‘spirit’ or ‘idea.’ All claim to ‘be’ either reality itself or the ‘essence’ of reality. All abstract from life. All neglect the fact of names.”

5 *Star* 13 (12).

6 *Star* 13 (12).

7 GS3:150 (PTW 125): “If we want to comprehend [begreifen] Him, God conceals [verbergen] himself, the human self closes up, and the world becomes a riddle. Only in their interrelation, only as creation, revelation, redemption, do they open themselves up.” God, man, and world are independent primeval principles, the ‘elements of creation,’ pre-historical in Schelling’s sense; they approach each other in historical time and finally converge in redemption, the supra-historical ‘third age of the world,’ when God will be all in all.
participle—as a temporal essencing, with an event-like character rather than an atemporal/static one—for Rosenzweig, the world is only truly understood when it is grasped as a living and historical “essencing essence,” which can in turn only be accounted for by its being continually created and sustained by God.

Philosophy, or at least a certain way of doing philosophy, is then a sort of temptation to which we are all subjected. Philosophy seeks unity by reductively uniting God, world, and man in thought. In reality, however, the only question that we can ask is about what happens among these elements. What God, man, and world are, we do not know (and cannot know); we know only “what they do, what is done to them,” and this is found in theology. Therefore one must add “theology”—i.e., hermeneutics, subjectivity, particularity, revelation—to philosophy in order to grasp reality as a whole.

Rosenzweig argues in the *Star of Redemption* that all attempts to think of the world as created by God or to think the unity of the world in some way other than through Jewish and Christian revelation is doomed to failure, as one will inevitably reduce God to the world (in pagan thought and modern natural science) or reduce God to man (in Kant or Fichte), and in any event will think God ontotheologically, thus failing to account properly for our everyday experience of God and the world. As we recall from Chapter 1, the only way to avoid subjectivism and relativism, for Rosenzweig, is to accept objectivity as a gift, *anzuerkennen* (to acknowledge) objectivity as God’s revelation, i.e., not *erkennen* (to know) it in philosophy, for we cannot know the world as created in the sense of a demonstrative proof.

One important way in which we properly acknowledge God and the world is through the phenomenon of love, particularly of our love for the other as neighbor, a love which precedes and

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8 GS3:155 (PTW 132).
9 *Star* 201 (181).
exceeds both objectivity and subjectivity. Love allows us to escape the totality of the world in a way that philosophy cannot; the Tatsächlichkeit (factuality) of love transcends the philosophical attitude. The key here is that the phenomenon of love “simply cannot be purely human,” for Rosenzweig. Love cannot be accounted for within the unity of being and thinking, and it cannot be made sense of in ontological or human terms without denying its character as a gift from the other, grounded in freedom, and ultimately rooted in God. We can only show the limits of a thinking which fails to incorporate this vision. For those who are outside of liturgical life and deny God’s call, this will appear to be an arbitrary and dogmatic claim, but this ultimately is not for Rosenzweig a matter of proof, or of philosophy.

Rosenzweig emphasizes that it is our trust in speech in particular, accepting the words of our neighbor, that cannot be accounted for within philosophy. He argues that only the theological understanding of God as the originator of language can do justice to the reality of speech. An important facet of this argument is Rosenzweig’s grammatology, developed in dialogue with Rosenstock and his immediate circle. Both Rosenzweig and Rosenstock note that love does not appear in the language of philosophy—which is in the third person, as past indicative. Rather, love is only in the first and second person, which are phenomenologically prior. In a clear parallel with Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, Rosenzweig emphasizes that we live in the imperative mood (rooted in the first and second person), and reflect philosophically in the indicative. Both science and philosophy aim at an already objectified reality, but language itself shows us that the indicative is not the whole of reality, and it is only a mistaken bias of philosophy hitherto that treats truth as primarily to be found in the third-person objective tense.

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10 Star 224 (201). We can see here a decisive leap beyond typical philosophical argumentation.
11 Gibbs gives a helpful example here; the word “y’all” in idiomatic American English, which is not objectifying and which presupposes that “y’all” will respond. This example taken from everyday language also neatly captures the spirit of Rosenzweig’s project. See Gibbs, Correlations, 78.
If we think in the indicative mood and live in the imperative mood, then liturgically we live in the “cohortative” mood; in the language of the Psalms, “let us praise God.” When God’s revelation speaks to us now, in love, God reaches into the past and identifies himself as the one who originated the dialogue. The past indicative of creation is revealed to be a divine monologue, which unfolds into divine-human dialogue. This present imperative takes up creation in a new way and points to the cohortative, which redeems creation. Human beings are finite, but our lives point towards redemption insofar as our love transforms the natural and human worlds. As Rosenzweig wrote shortly before writing the Star:

When I was born (and even more so, prior to that) I was highly factual; when I die (and even more so thereafter) I hope to be highly personal. … The world was created as a fact, and it must be redeemed into personality, down to the last barber’s apprentice, the last waiter, prostitute, and fraternity student (see Joel 3:1-2). Therefore each step, each action—consciously for the knowing, cluelessly for the clueless [Ahnungslosen ahnungslos]—is a step toward the personalization of the factual [Sachlichen], the humanization of ‘things.’... [T]he path to our personality must lead through the entirety of factuality, through the whole object-world that has been given to us with our birth, our body, our time, and our world.12

Introduction to Star

The primary vehicle for this vision is the Star of Redemption, the content of which should be understood in the context of the texts mentioned in Chapter 1—Rosenzweig’s own Urzelle and Hegel and the State, Schelling’s oldest system fragment and Weltalter,13 and Cohen’s later work, among other texts. While Rosenzweig further developed some of the themes of the Star in the 1920s with his essay “The Eternal” (to be examined in Chapter 4), “The New Thinking,” and his commentaries on the medieval Jewish poet Jehuda Halevi, the Star of Redemption remained foundational for his thought. Rosenzweig himself compared the Star to Schopenhauer’s World as Will and Representation, i.e., a single monumental work written at a relatively young age (Schopenhauer finished writing his

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12 GS1.1:596-97 (80-81), letter of August 18, 1918, to Mawrik Kahn.
13 Else Freund provides the earliest and most wide-ranging analysis of the influence of Schelling’s philosophy, particularly the Potenz-Lehre, on Rosenzweig (see esp. 17-45).
masterwork at age 30; Rosenzweig finished the Star at age 32) in which the author had said virtually everything he wanted to say.\textsuperscript{14}

The Star is, at the very least, one of the most interesting volumes of German philosophy yet produced. It is both an idiosyncratic work of Jewish theology and a recapitulation of 18th and 19th century German philosophy, with resemblances to a wide array of thinkers, such as Hamann, Kant, Formsteicher, Herder, Goethe, Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Kierkegaard,\textsuperscript{15} Nietzsche, and Cohen. The Star is lyrical and poetic, yet also maddeningly dense and abstract. It is arguably the last system of German Idealism, written (fittingly) by the scholar who discovered the oldest system fragment of that movement. As we recall from Chapter 1, Rosenzweig was interested in bringing that outline of a system to fruition, creating a system of freedom and hence completing the project that Schelling had left unfinished. The Star is both a system of philosophy and an anti-system. It begins with uncertainty and ends in everyday life, and is a “system” based in potentiality, nothingness, matter, particularity, and multiplicity. Against Hegel, for whom the reader’s progression through the system ends in the apprehension of Geist as Geist, Rosenzweig’s system concludes with an elaborate promissory note for a future intellectual intuition provided by the living God. Unity,

\textsuperscript{14} After completing the Star, Rosenzweig writes: “I am not going to write anything of the sort again. I have an unequivocal feeling that in this book I have drawn up the summation of my mind’s being and that anything subsequent will be no more than addenda that might be prompted by the impulse of the moment and the demands of the outside world. What is most my own, insofar as one can give one’s own in the form of a book, is what I have written here. I see a future before me only in life, no longer in writing” (Letters of Martin Buber, 248, letter of August 1919). Three years later, he adds: “I ought to be writing my Parerga and Paralipomena [i.e., Schopenhauer’s short post-magnum opus essays]. But it bores me to death. And yet it’s a shame. For in the Star these things are not phrased so that everyone gets them” (GS1.2:795 [116], diary entry of June 18, 1922). A year before his death, he wrote in a letter to Richard Koch: “I have had an experience like Schopenhauer’s with regard to my philosophical writings; everything written after my ‘main work’ has turned out to be parerga, paralipomena, and a second part that annotates the first” (GS1.2:1196 [165], letter of September 2, 1928 to Richard Koch). He did in fact end up writing a short explanatory essay entitled “The New Thinking” which phrased the ideas of the Star in an accessible format, and despite a debilitating illness he managed to write a considerable amount of material, though almost entirely within theology and Scriptural translation. While he took a step back from some of the positions of the Star (particularly the idealist method), this early text remained in some sense central to his thought. Some scholars, such as Mara Benjamin, have downplayed the importance of Star, i.e., “Star appears to be an early, even immature experiment rather than a crowning achievement. Star, I contend, does not fully represent Rosenzweig’s concepts of revelation, of the Jewish people, and of history as a whole, all of which were refined over the course of the next decade” (Rosenzweig’s Bible: Reinventing Scripture for Jewish Modernity [Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 20). This is somewhat of an overstatement, as I will argue in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{15} Kierkegaard, while Danish, was so strongly influenced by German philosophy that it seems appropriate to include him as a quasi-German.
identity, actuality, and certainty, rather than forming the starting point for the system, are only achieved after the end of the world.

Much like Heidegger’s *Beiträge*, Rosenzweig’s *Star* is rooted on the anti-foundational *Abgrund* of freedom in Kant.16 By creating a system in the spirit of the oldest system fragment, Rosenzweig adopts the early German Idealist appropriation and recapitulation of Kant’s initial breakthrough into freedom, which (so the argument goes) Kant himself only partially understood and thus failed to systematize properly,17 though he did point the way to a system of freedom in the *Opus Postumum* and certain passages at the end of the *Critique of Judgment*. As we will see below, this leads to an ambiguity in Rosenzweig’s work, as he remains within a loosely Kantian framework while partially breaking through to a new thinking.18 For example, even after accepting revelation as orientation, Rosenzweig maintains that autonomy is nonetheless primary and that the content of the Torah must be submitted to his own subjectivity, and that each believer can decide which parts of the Torah to follow (which is opposed to the traditional Jewish view).

It must also be noted that there are many ways in which the *Star* is a victim of its own ambition. Even Rosenzweig’s admirers have noted that the *Star*’s claims of systematicity are not especially convincing.19 As Gordon puts it, the *Star* is written “in a grand and self-confident style

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16 In the midst of the dialectic in *Star* 1, Rosenzweig emphasizes that Kant’s “miracle of freedom sank back into the miracle of the phenomenal world with the neo-Kantians” (*Star* 11 [10]) adding that “it remains true that here too, as everywhere, Kant, alone among all the thinkers of the past, showed the way which we are now to follow, and showed it, as always, in those comments to which he gave utterance without drawing their systematic consequences” (*Star* 24 [21]); Kant “secured the nature of freedom with undeniably magnificent intuition. Further developments, too, will again and again lead us close to him, albeit again and again close only to his intuitions” (*Star* 72 [67]). Years later, in “The New Thinking,” Rosenzweig writes: “Freedom as the wonder in the phenomenal world; just saying this would make Kant the greatest of all philosophers. … Kantian freedom is thus the ship on which we can embark to find the new world of revelation” (GS3:129-30 [PTW 59-60]).

17 Rosenzweig writes that the dark root of the imagination was first “clearly enunciated by Kant, though to be sure he could not, as idealist, surmise its actual meaning” (*Star* 157 [142]).

18 Mara Benjamin puts this particularly well: “Underneath his intricate but ultimately precarious structure, the beams of post-Kantian religious thought are clearly visible” (*Rosenzweig’s Bible*, 63).

19 Gibbs, e.g., who is quite sympathetic to Rosenzweig overall, writes: “The failure of Rosenzweig’s system is pervasive … throughout the *Star* Rosenzweig has not taken history half seriously enough. … it seems that every time Rosenzweig tries to make any claim on the basis of historical facts, he is at best half-right; his empirical claims are false … indeed, it causes one to doubt the worth of this book as a whole” (*Correlations*, 113).
that does very little to encourage the reader’s confidence in Rosenzweig as a philosophical
authority."20 Despite his erudition, Rosenzweig had surprisingly little knowledge of the history of
philosophy or theology before Kant, and certainly before Luther. Also, the dialectical structure of
the Star is particularly unconvincing (I will pass over much of this material altogether), and
Rosenzweig’s portrayal of Judaism and Christianity in Star 3 is deficient and based not in historical
life but rather in abstract esoteric concepts developed in collaboration with Rosenstock, which is
surprising given the rich descriptions of religious life in Star 2 (not to mention Rosenzweig’s other
writings).

Perhaps the sharpest philosophical shortcoming, which Rosenzweig shares to an extent with
Heidegger, is the equating of all pre-1800 philosophy with the basic themes later found in
neo-Kantianism and idealism, as if all philosophers across three millennia were just slightly different
versions of Simmel or Windelband, i.e., that there is no essential difference between them. Related to
this is the curiously Hegelian assumption that Hegel is the culmination and completion of
philosophy, the representative of philosophy as such, and the greatest of all philosophers. In refuting
Hegel, Rosenzweig mistakenly assumes that he has refuted all who come before Hegel. However,
the manner in which he claims to have moved beyond Hegel remains somewhat Hegelian, insofar as
he claims to have achieved a philosophical standpoint beyond Christianity and Judaism which
understands each as merely partial.21 Rosenzweig also has a more ambiguous relation to traditional
Judaism than many of his admirers realize, as I will explore in detail below.

20 Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger, 122. He adds (123): “Rosenzweig’s claims to systematicity lapse occasionally into
parody—at times, one suspects that he is out to explode the ideal of a self-grounding philosophical structure from
within.” Mara Benjamin, writing about a particular passage in the Star, writes a critique that could in fact apply to the
book as a whole (Rosenzweig’s Bible, 45): “[T]hick with Scriptural allusions that Rosenzweig pieces together and reworks
with lyrical language and peculiar rhetoric, building towards a definitive assertion that he never justifies.”
21 See Emil Fackenheim: “The Star here clearly rises above Jewish and Christian existence alike so as to see how each
partakes of ‘the truth.’ This gives us pause. Does not a thought thus rising understand both Jew and Christian differently
from the self-understanding achieved by either? Does it not, in consequence, incongruously assert ‘enmity between the
two for all time’ and, achieving its own higher viewpoint, make an end to that enmity from that time on? Above all, in
seeing the Jewish and Christian ‘part’ in the ‘whole’ truth from the standpoint of the whole truth, does the ‘system’ not,
Despite these issues, Rosenzweig’s work is philosophically valuable. Just as one does not need to accept the entirety of Hegel’s mature system to glean insight from individual sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, there are numerous ideas in Rosenzweig which work perfectly well outside of the context of the systematic claims of the *Star*.

**Outline of Star**

The new thinking of the *Star* is a style of thought which is focused on the hermeneutic subject, on the proper name (the true ‘I’ rather than a philosophical construct) as it exists in the world of living experience. As noted above, the problem that Rosenzweig sets out to overcome the way in which so-called idealism speaks of God and “the all,” i.e., the Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism of liberal European culture. The key difficulty is that the self and God are referred to in the third person indicative. In a point similar to Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, Rosenzweig writes: “Thinking falls into these traps by the force of the word ‘is,’” but “experience discovers only the human, worldliness of the world, and divinity.” The practical precedes the theoretical. Rosenzweig describes the *Star* as “absolute empiricism,” i.e., the inversion of Hegel’s absolute idealism:

[Absolute empiricism] knows nothing of the heavenly except what it has experienced—this, however, it actually [knows], no matter how philosophy may slander it as knowledge [*Wissen*] ‘beyond’ all ‘possible’ experience; and of the earthly too [it knows] nothing that it has not experienced—but about [that which it has not experienced, it knows] absolutely nothing whatsoever, no matter how philosophy may praise it as knowledge ‘before’ all ‘possible’ experience.²⁴

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²² GS3:144 (PTW 116).
²³ GS3:144 (PTW 116-17).
²⁴ GS3:161 (PTW 138).
The reference to knowledge beyond all possible experience is a rejoinder to Kant and his followers. The dismissal of everyday religious experience as “enthusiasm” is untenable, for Rosenzweig. His conception of absolute empiricism is an argument from religious phenomena (though not exactly a phenomenology of religion in the sense of Duméry or Otto), from what he also refers to as common sense, i.e., the default worldview of everyone before roughly 1800. This is what would traditionally be described in Christian theology as that which is known by the natural light of reason—a basic knowledge of God, man, and the world. The Star rethinks common sense as a “method of scientific thinking,” taking the insights of common sense and using them to cure the sickness of a metaphysical fixation on essences. As Franks writes, Rosenzweig wants to recover the “naive trust” in language that the idealists have lost, which is nourished by life. Idealist logic, as we have seen in Chapter 1, attempts to stay in pure logic, abstracted from life. Against substantives and essences, Rosenzweig emphasizes “the verb, the time-word.” Words are only understood in their enactment, and philosophy is a paralysis or sickness that removes us from simple, healthy, real

25 GS3:149 (PTW 123).
27 In Chapter 1, Schelling and Cohen were mentioned as models for the Star, and this is certainly the case, but perhaps the most unexpectedly helpful analogy is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s work (both early and late). I am not the first reader to be struck by the strong correlation between their thought (see Hilary Putnam, among others). Putnam notes that Wittgenstein’s understanding of religion was very close to Rosenzweig’s, i.e., he deplored making religion into a theory rather than a deep-going way of life” (Hilary Putnam, Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008], 11). For example, Rosenzweig’s insistence that ‘what-questions’ are non-sensical is similar to the later Wittgenstein’s (“Wittgenstein II”) position regarding essences, and is the foundational premise of Rosenzweig’s Understanding the Sick and the Healthy. There is another helpful parallel to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, however: Star 1 can be understood as analogous to Tractatus 1-6, a self-refuting delineation of the limits of philosophy which serves all the more to highlight that which is beyond philosophy, the gnomic final line, Tractatus 7. Instead of cryptic silence, Rosenzweig is able to expand beyond Star 1 precisely because he goes beyond the bounds of philosophy by incorporating poetry, theology, and the extra-philosophical. He does not need to be silent, as Wittgenstein does, because he changes the meaning of philosophy after Star 1. Though Star 2 and Star 3 transcend philosophy in the sense of idealism, the entire Star inasmuch as it is a system of philosophy could be compared to Tractatus 6.54, where Wittgenstein writes that the entirety of the Tractatus must, in the course of being understood, refute itself; the reader “must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it. He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness [London: Routledge, 1974], 74). Rosenzweig, similarly, writes that everyone should do philosophy once—he is thinking especially of his contemporaries, who remain in an idealistic understanding of God, man, and world—in order to be cured and thence depart into life.
28 GS3:148 (PTW 122).
relations with God and the world. The old thinking asks: is God essentially transcendent or immanent? But the “new thinking attempts to show how and when he turns from the distant to the near God.”

Accordingly, Rosenzweig correlates the living God with the living human being, the bearer of a proper name, the subject who uses speech.

I interpret the Star as centering on the theme of Sprache (in the double sense of “speech” and “language”) and how it links God/man/world, and I interpret this work as a system which combines theology and philosophy and ultimately favors Judaism over other forms of religious life (pagan and Christian), despite some ambiguity from Rosenzweig on this issue. The basic division of the Star is that between Sein (equated by Rosenzweig with negative philosophy in Schelling’s sense, reason, and the a priori) and Dasein (positive philosophy, history, revelation, and the a posteriori). The colloquial German meanings of Sein and Dasein, being and existence, are actually appropriate in this case, as opposed to Heidegger’s rethinking of both terms.

Like Heidegger, Rosenzweig has an idiosyncratic way of defining terms such as philosophy and theology. Revelation is equated with “theology” by Rosenzweig. Unlike Heidegger, for whom revelation is related to faith, involves the acceptance of certain Christian dogmas, and is sharply differentiated from philosophy and theology as traditionally understood, for Rosenzweig “theology” is another way of describing the face-to-face revelatory relationship with the living God who commands man to love Him. Theology for Rosenzweig is rooted in this personal encounter, and his position aligns with Heidegger insofar as both would claim that true theology (thought anew) would fall outside of metaphysics and the old thinking (described by Rosenzweig as “philosophy”).

The system of the Star transcends both philosophy and theology by incorporating both into a new perspective from which each is sublated into theosophy. In the Urzelle, Rosenzweig writes: “The eternal occurrence in God can be understood … from the basis of fulfilled philosophy

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29 GS3:148 (PTW 122).
(Schelling) and on the basis of revelation (mysticism). Thus theosophy … is joined to theology and philosophy, concluding the triangle of the sciences.”30 Rosenzweig’s use of this term has nothing to do with the theosophical movement as such, but rather indicates the systematic nature of his claim, where theology and philosophy are sublated into a more complete whole.

Again, theology does not refer to an explication of a set of dogmas for Rosenzweig, but is rather a catch-all term for subjectivity (and the believer’s personal relationship with God), while philosophy fulfills the same function for objectivity, and both concepts are united dialectically (or “dialogically”) in theosophy, which is itself comprehended within a system of philosophy. This might seem to place philosophy above theosophy, but Rosenzweig is clear about the provisional and incomplete nature of his system, which is merely the first step towards a “theosophical” life. As Rosenzweig puts it, “Theological interests helped the breakthrough to the new thinking. …[N]evertheless, it is no theological thinking. … [The] grammatical method renders human problems, I-thou, logic of the name, etc., graspable for scientific comprehension,”31 i.e., in the form of his system, which transcends subjective “theology” by narrating an expansion of the relationship between God and the individual to a relationship between God and the community.

The structure of the Star is complex, to say the least. In terms of distinctions made above, Star 1 is correlated to philosophy, Star 2 to theology, and Star 3 is their sublation into theosophy. These three parts are each subdivided into three “books” dealing with God, world, and man (respectively) from a new perspective in each case—creation in Star 1, revelation in Star 2 and redemption in Star 3. The most important distinction in the Star is that between creation and revelation, i.e., Star 1 and Star 2, between man as mute before being called by God and then rising into true selfhood. Different modes of grammar are correlated to each part of the Star. Star 1 is in

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30 GS3:138 (PTW 70).
the third person past indicative, *Star 2* (revelation) is in the first and second person imperative (concluding in congregational first person plural) and is correlated to the self brought into speech by God’s call, of the self as transformed into true selfhood. *Star 3* (redemption) is in the cohortative mood, first person plural in the future tense, calling for the kingdom of God, culminating in the language of gesture, liturgy, and communal prayer.\(^{32}\)

In terms of content, *Star 1* depicts the elements of creation, God/world/man described in purely logical and formal terms where the elements are not yet in real, historical relation and hence can only be known with third person indicative truth, i.e., what Rosenzweig denotes as philosophy. *Star 1* deals with “speechless” thought, i.e., logic and mathematics, which are correlated to an isolated and ahistorical self that is not yet fully realized (“the I’). *Star 2* deals with theology (in Rosenzweig’s sense of the term), where the elements enter into relation with each other in the “fulfillment” of the “prophecy” of the philosophical elements of *Star 1*. *Star 2* is the world that we live in, the second age of the world in Schelling’s sense, where God becomes actualized and man enters into relation with God and the world. The elements in *Star 1* did not exist “before” *Star 2* (rather, *Star 1* is atemporal) but underlie reality as depicted in *Star 2*. In *Star 2*, the elements come into their own by being brought into relation with each other by God. Man becomes truly man, God truly God, and world truly world, rather than categories, and point towards an eventual holistic unity of the God/man/world at the end of time. *Star 3* illustrates how the unity of the system, which will only be achieved at the end of time, can be known in the present within the life of Jewish and Christian liturgy, which anticipate (in a complementary way) the denouement of the system. Within the liturgical year, the eternity of redemption is symbolically represented within time, and one who is part of these communities fully appropriates and becomes aware of his or her participation in the movement toward redemption.

\(^{32}\) Redemption is presented by Rosenzweig in diagrammatical form as the Star of David, which gives the *Star* its name.
The *Star*

The *Star* begins with the words “from death”—it is “from the fear of death that cognition [Erkennen] of the all originates.” By beginning with the most basic of human experiences, the certainty that “I” (my proper name) will one day die, i.e., the particular nothingness of my own death, Rosenzweig (like Heidegger in “What is Metaphysics?”) shakes the reader out of soporific theoreticism. Hegel famously began his system with being and nothing (and their first sublation into becoming) as purely formal concepts, and this is symptomatic to Rosenzweig of philosophy as an attitude or mood in which one attempts to flee from the inevitable death of one’s self, the death of the proper self, by sublating it into the essence of humanity, the B=A of the *Urzelle*. Philosophy “must rid the world of what is singular,” but the fully realized self is irreducibly singular.

The fear of death shows that we are not merely an instance of a universal. We live in the first and second person, and become wholly third person only upon our death. The error of philosophy is in attempting to intervene and reduce us to a universal while we still exist. The “idealistic” worldview attempts to deny God’s personhood, divine revelation, and the proper name as being unreal insofar as they “originate beyond reason” and are thus treated as merely irrational. Hegel’s system had “promised to bring … neither dichotomy nor mere congruity [Übereinstimmung], but rather an innermost interconnection,” but Hegel failed insofar as he left out the proper name, i.e., the most salient feature of reality (from each person’s perspective). By building a system on the basis of the fear of his own death, Rosenzweig rejects the tendency to base a system on abstract concepts, the fact of reason, or identity with the absolute. Rather, he starts from the middle, with the philosopher himself, in all of his ignorance, temporality, and particularity.

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33 *Star* 3 (3).
34 *Star* 4 (4).
35 *Star* 6 (6).
36 *Star* 7 (6).
In *Star* 1, Rosenzweig references his predecessors in this task: Schelling, who focuses on the redemption not of man in general but of Søren Kierkegaard, the bearer of a proper name who stands outside Hegel’s system; Schopenhauer, who asks about the value of the world and not its essence; and finally Nietzsche, who made his self integral to his philosophizing, uniting his life and his thought. Another key predecessor is, of course, Kant, who is mentioned rarely in the *Star* but always with high praise. An important aspect of this section is Rosenzweig’s hermeneutic openness about his influences, his clear statement of where he fits into the spectrum of recent trends in philosophy, as opposed to Heidegger’s misleading claims about the uniqueness and radicality of his position.

As noted above, Rosenzweig (like Heidegger) takes very seriously the insight of Kant into the dark ground of the imagination, the utter singularity and freedom of the self which (on this reading) underlies the architectonic. For Rosenzweig, Kant was the first to see the particular, irreducible self of *Star* 2, i.e., he is “the single exception” in the history of philosophy before the 19th century, the discoverer of the irrational remainder which is the “stumbling block of idealism, and thus of philosophy as a whole from Parmenides to Hegel,” a tradition which cannot comprehend freedom but can only know a “dead chaos of givens.” The simple equation of theological soul with Kant’s philosophical understanding of the human person points to a curious ambiguity in Rosenzweig’s work, as we will see below.

The isolated self is what Rosenzweig calls “metaethical,” in the sense of being beyond an ethics rooted in universals and categories. Philosophy knows only ethics, man understood in formal terms, but the self-contained unity of the person cannot be incorporated into this totality.

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37 *Star* 13 (12).
38 *Star* 8 (7).
39 *Star* 8 (8).
40 *Star* 9 (9).
41 *Star* 51 (47).
Rosenzweig gives the example of the uniqueness of each new human birth, in which “unthinkable individuality plunges [stürzt] over the most individual of all human acts,”42 and is purely individual in each case as part of the world, the category of humanity, even before being called into heightened particularity as the proper name of Star 2. Rosenzweig thereby rejects the Hegelian unity of being and reason. Rather, reason is reinterpreted and understood as founded on life, originating in life, and correlated to the realized self. Reason is not primarily theoretical or self-sufficient. Correlatively, God and the world are to be understood in the same way—not as universals, but as living reality.43

To escape the idealism of Star 1, “a new concept of philosophy must arise.”44 Like Schelling, Rosenzweig articulates this new concept by going beyond the resources of traditional philosophy, incorporating freedom (both God’s freedom and our own) by way of theology, mythology, and revelation. The charge often laid against Schelling is that by the 1830s he was no longer doing philosophy in any sense of the word, but merely reverting back to pre-Kantian ‘dogmatism’ (i.e., theology). Rosenzweig’s response is that philosophy does not achieve its goal (to articulate reality). The requirement of philosophy to be scientific and objective cannot be achieved because philosophy (as Nietzsche made clear, and as Hegel failed to understand) is inescapably rooted in the particular, finite self.45 Where Heidegger decides to rethink philosophy itself as grounded in a new understanding of the divine, Rosenzweig turns to theology itself. He completes the philosophical

42 Star 54 (49).
43 I leave aside here the details of the dialectic of God’s becoming in Star 1 and the beginning of Star 2, as it does not apply to my argument. Rosenzweig himself leaves behind this dialectical construction after the Star, and perhaps for good reason. For helpful analyses, see Samuelson, 30-33 and Pollock, Systematic Task, 159-60. The idea of God’s “becoming” is drawn from Boehme, Schelling, and the Kabbalah (among other sources). In Star, this is described as the inner life of God prior to creation, an eternal past outside of time. Much of Star 1 is drawn from Cohen, particularly the infinitesimal method, where our ignorance of God/man/world (as “nothings” for knowledge) are built into a system. The details of this involve strained dialectical movements (e.g., “an attracting field of force forms about the universal” in Star 52 [48]) and wordplay (Tat and Sache become Tatsache, etc.) that do not concern us here. The difficulty with the dialectic in Star 1 is (as Gibbs points out) the “questionable nature of the construction” of the God of Star 1, i.e., that Rosenzweig has “imported into [this] God just what he hoped to get out” (Correlations, 46), i.e., claiming a priori truth for aspects of the God of Star 1 that he clearly derives from a posteriori sources.
44 Star 116 (105).
45 Star 118 (106).
project (to understand God, man, and world) by transcending philosophy as normally understood.

Philosophy as old thinking (Star 1) is sublated into the later parts of the system. Formal, logical truth is a necessary condition for the possibility of the truth of the Star as a whole, but taken in itself is a merely partial picture of reality insofar as it cannot account for particulars or man as bearer of a proper name.

Rosenzweig must transcend the old philosophy to fulfill its own requirements, and thankfully “the ‘categories’ of theology demonstrate a greater extension than those of the idealistic philosophy,” while “the idealistic categories can at most cover the terrain of the first theological category of creation [i.e., the elements in Star 1]—or try to do so.”

In reality, Rosenzweig claims, there are no true categories and hence nothing for philosophy to grasp. Like Heidegger’s formal indications in GA65, even the concepts of the Star, Rosenzweig emphasizes, only appear to be concepts. Though he necessarily refers to creation, revelation, and redemption as separate concepts, this is merely “a concession to the idealistic mode of thinking.”

In rejecting so-called idealism and accepting the insight of Nietzsche and others that philosophy must begin with my proper name, Rosenzweig appears to find himself in the troubling situation that Nietzsche and arguably Heidegger found themselves in—i.e., the loss of all objectivity, the failure of philosophical language to convey meaning, and a subsequent descent into subjectivism, relativism, and nihilism, despite valiant attempts to avoid this fate by prophesying the establishment of new values or a wholly new objectivity (e.g., Nietzsche’s over-man and Heidegger’s hope for the ones to come). Rosenzweig’s solution to this problem, which he takes to be the ineluctable endpoint

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46 Star 210 (188-89).
47 Star 210 (189). It must be said that Rosenzweig is somewhat vague in his account of universals. One could certainly question whether or not he has truly grasped the complex history of the philosophical problem of universals, and it appears that he takes Hegel and the neo-Kantians to be representatives of philosophy as such. We return to this issue in Chapter 4.
of philosophy, is in the living God bringing the self out of itself, thus avoiding the false objectivity
of the ontotheological God.

The “bridge from maximum subjectivity to maximum objectivity”\textsuperscript{48} is achieved by
subjectivity becoming objective, with God’s revelation providing the bridge. The philosopher, called
by God, becomes the form of the philosophical system, as Rosenzweig had concluded after his 1914
conversation with Rosenstock (recall Chapter 1). This is Rosenzweig’s clever way of incorporating
the insights of Nietzsche while retaining objectivity. The “theological” objectivity of revelation
provides the orientation that modernity lacks. The central point here is that it is the revelation of the
living God, the Judeo-Christian God (and not the “view from nowhere,” the absolute standpoint, or
Spinoza’s \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}) that provides the only possible stability for a philosophical system. The
stability of revelation creates the living basis for language and truth that Heidegger sought to provide
with the last god. The living relationship between God and man as proper name, which Nietzsche
had failed to properly appreciate, is the key to systematicity.

Rosenzweig points out that recovering the simple, obvious reality of God, man, and world is
not in fact a particularly difficult leap to make. Everyone thought this way before 1800 (and certainly
before modernity), and the only difficulty is that his contemporaries have closed themselves off
from this reality. An argument from common sense is not, of course, sufficient for philosophical
proof in the sense of \textit{Star} 1. Rosenzweig pushes the proof out to redemption, where everyone will
simply see that this is the case, without delusion. Of course, Rosenzweig is being somewhat
misleading here, as he has a specific understanding of common sense in mind, just as Heidegger’s
simple wholeness of the fourfold precludes certain possibilities and endorses others.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Star} 117 (106).
The pivotal move into the common sense of religious life is what Rosenzweig calls *Sprachdenken* (speech-thinking), which deals with the speech shared by man and God.\textsuperscript{49} *Sprachdenken* begins with our everyday experience of language, where we can see that our speech already overcomes philosophy’s “rigid identification of object with thing”—rather, a thing is in motion, it is “between thing and event” and best described by the participle, where activity is grasped as attribute, fixed in time, to definite things.\textsuperscript{50} Revelation provides the self with substance. A higher self is constituted by the spoken word, and the grammatical form is changed from logical/descriptive to indexical, associated with a person, time, and place. Rosenzweig writes:

> The soul is not a thing. All psychology from Aristotle and Thomas to Haeckel and Wundt has founded on this truth. The appearance that the soul must be a thing, a ‘substance,’ a ‘something,’ is engendered by the fact that it, like all things, is ‘here.’ But though things may indeed be ‘here,’ they can just as easily be ‘there.’ The soul, however, always can only ‘be here.’ A soul ‘there,’ a soul in the third person, does not exist. The soul is always present [anwesend]—my soul, your soul, our soul, and thus always; this soul here.\textsuperscript{51}

*Sprachdenken* is always related to “this soul here,” to a self in time, and not to the neo-Kantian abstraction of “the I.” Like much else in Rosenzweig’s work, *Sprachdenken* is everything that idealism is not. Rosenzweig (like Heidegger) turns to impersonals and middle-voiced verbs in an effort to avoid idealist language,\textsuperscript{52} though Rosenzweig goes further. While Heidegger avoids any recovery of self beyond the barest *Eigenheit* thought in terms of *Ereignis* (as he considers selfhood to be almost

\textsuperscript{49} The best analysis of *Sprachdenken* is found in Anna Bauer, *Rosenzweigs Sprachdenken im “Stern der Erlösung” und in seiner Korespondenz mit Martin Buber zur Verdeutschung der Schrift* (Frankfurt a.M.: P. Lang, 1992). Rosenstock was an important influence (see Pollock, *Systematic Task*, 84-86); the main point that Rosenzweig adopts from Rosenstock is the idea of the word as both sensuous and supersensuous, divine and human. For the most complete formulation of his thought, see Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Angewandte Seelenkunde in Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts: Eine leibhaftige Grammatik in vier Teilen* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1963).

\textsuperscript{50} See *Star* 144 (129-30).

\textsuperscript{51} Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte Schriften IV.1: Sprachdenken im Übersetzen, Fünfundzwanzig Hymnen und Gedichte, Deutsch und Hebräisch*, ed. Rafael Rosenzweig (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), partially translated as *Ninety-Two Poems and Hymns of Yehuda Halevi*, ed. Richard Cohen, trans. Thomas Kovach, Eva Jospe, and Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 114 (115); hereafter “GS4.1.” There is a clear parallel with Heidegger here. See also GS4.1:116 (117), where Rosenzweig writes: “[T]he soul does have a place, though it is no ‘there’ to which our finger could point, but an in-between [ein Zwischen],” i.e., precisely the same word that Heidegger uses in the beyng-historical notebooks, and the same sense of *Da-sein* not as substance/object but as dative of manifestation.

\textsuperscript{52} See *Star* 144 (130); like Heidegger’s *et regnet*, Rosenzweig gives the example of *et träumte mir.*
entirely bound up with subjectivism, ontotheology, etc.), Rosenzweig allows for the “selves” of the first and second persons, of the everyday self, a hermeneutic and phenomenological analysis that Heidegger failed to carry out.\(^5\)

Where idealism is related to “pure thought … alienated from the natural soil [\textit{Naturboden}] of language,” using a logic that is “foreign to language and beyond man,”\(^5\) speech-thinking concretizes and temporalizes language, indexing it to a time and place. \textit{Sprachdenken} draws on a long mythopoetic tradition stretching back to Vico, Herder, Humboldt, and Hölderlin. The key point in Rosenzweig’s formulation is that speech needs time. I think because I have been addressed, and speech is always rooted in a living person with a proper name. Logical thinking, the “thought” of \textit{Star} 1 as opposed to the “speech” of \textit{Star} 2, is addressed to anyone and to no one. All philosophy hitherto is in the third person, where space/time are inessential, but we do not \textit{live} in the third person. Rather, we live in the full range of grammatical moods and tenses, and philosophy must be adequate to the particularity of this “theological” reality.

Speech-thinking in \textit{Star} 2 is contrasted with the “arche-words” of \textit{Star} 1, i.e., the language of logic and mathematics but also the basic operators of language, ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ “a language prior to language.”\(^5\) But this language of \textit{Star} 1 is “mere inception [\textit{Anfang}] until it finds reception [\textit{auf-fängt}].

\(^{53}\) Though Rosenzweig was only slightly familiar with phenomenology, as Levinas writes, his analysis is nonetheless “exactly similar to phenomenological analyses” (Emmanuel Levinas, “Between Two Worlds,” in \textit{Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism}, trans. Seán Hand [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], 190).

\(^{54}\) \textit{Star} 121 (109). Speech-thinking builds upon a pre-linguistic language of logical and grammatical operators, a complex dialectic of language in \textit{Star} 1 that is not directly applicable to my argument; in short, Rosenzweig presents ‘yes’ as the archo-word of language, the “amen’ behind every word,” correlated to ‘in the beginning’ in Genesis 1:1, which makes possible and sustains any words at all (\textit{Star} 29 [27]). Heidegger would make a similar statement about \textit{Seyn/Da}, writing that “all would rush away resistlessly into the void if the ‘is’ did not speak” (\textit{Was heisst Denken?}, ed. P.-L. Corrado [Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002], translated from an earlier edition as \textit{What is Called Thinking?}, trans. J. Glenn Gray [New York: Harper, 1968], 193 [174]; hereafter “GA8”). The ‘yes’ is the identity of each word; ‘no,’ the changing position of the word in the sentence, is difference (\textit{Star} 35 [32]); any spoken sentence thus “presupposes ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (\textit{Star} 36 [33]), along with the third archetypal word, the ‘and,’ which is the “keystone of the arch” of the “edifice of the logos of linguistic sense” (\textit{Star} 36 [33]). Rosenzweig then goes on to analyze the elements of language at length; certain word-forms apply to \textit{Star} 1, such as adjectives, pronouns, articles, nouns, while other word-forms apply to \textit{Star} 2, such as the copula, participles, infinitives, etc. The basic point is that speech-thinking involves indexical/historical language. The relevant issue for my argument is that revelation shows the inadequacy of the language of \textit{Star} 1, and indicates that “a
in an ear, and response [ant-wortet] in a mouth.” Speech makes us fully human and particular: “Man became man when he first spoke,” and “language as the organon of revelation is at the same time the thread running through everything human that steps into the miraculous splendor of revelation and its ever-renewed presentness of experience.” Speech was of course already in everyday life, but everyday life is transformed in revelation. Nothing in revelation (in this sense) is truly new. As Rosenzweig writes, “Speech is truly mankind’s gift from the creator, and yet at the same time it is the common property of all the children of men,”56 but it “awakens to real vitality only in revelation.”57

God’s particular call, “Love me!”, is imperative and accusative, and not third-person indicative. The self of Star 1 was only a logical subject (“the I” of idealism), but is now implicitly a “you” to God’s I, and thus raised into selfhood. God’s love is a real event and not a proper accident attributed to God conceived as third person object or spoken of theoretically, as in neo-Kantianism or ontotheology. God’s love is not a “rigid mask,” but rather the “alternation of mien [Mienenspiel], the ever youthful radiance which plays on the eternal features … His love roams the world with an ever-fresh drive.”58 Correlatively, when the self of Star 1 is called into its full potential and decides to be a proper name other men become not just other men in the third person but other selves, particulars, “thou” to my “I,” recipients of neighborly love. Philosophical logic and categories, correlated to Star 1, are shattered by the particularity of love. More precisely, concept-knowledge has no weight, no meaning, when we use speech. Rosenzweig denotes the knowledge of speech-thinking as Bekenntnis (confession), not Erkenntnis (knowledge).59
The raising to selfhood applies to man as bearer of a proper name, of course, but just as importantly it applies to God. The God of idealism is “an it … the object remains object even after becoming God.”\(^{60}\) For idealism, the end result is always that “God as spirit is none other than ‘the I,’ the subject of cognition,” and thus “the ultimate sense of idealism becomes clear; reason has triumphed … nothing is inaccessible to reason; the irrational itself is only its boundary, not a beyond.”\(^{61}\) Again, the important thing to note here is that Rosenzweig is using Kant’s insight into freedom as abyss, the dark root of the *Ding-an-sich*, which neo-Kantianism and idealism had “shunted to the outermost edge of objectivity,”\(^{62}\) as providing a solution. Kant’s “one fateful moment” of seeing a common root for *Ding-an-sich* and the human character “opens the prospect of an ‘all’ in which world, man, God live side by side in undisturbed factuality [*Tatsächlichkeit*],” outside of the reach of abstraction.\(^{63}\) Philosophy’s false paradise of *Star 1*, the abstract logical system, is cast out. Its “original sin” was to have trusted in its own wisdom more than the creative power of God which sustained it.\(^{64}\)

Logical or abstract language is correlated to the unrealized self of *Star 1*. For the realized self of *Star 2*, the type of language is rather speech, which has a historical and particular locus and is lived in the first and second person. Speech-thinking is further delineated in the second part of *Star 2*, which is at the center of the *Star* both literally and thematically. *Star 2.2* is a crucial illustration of Rosenzweig’s phenomenology of religious life and an expression of the Biblical conception (rooted in the Hebrew language) of the paradoxical unity of the eternal and the temporal. The text of *Star

\(^{60}\) *Star* 160 (144).

\(^{61}\) *Star* 160 (144).

\(^{62}\) *Star* 160 (145).

\(^{63}\) *Star* 161 (145).

\(^{64}\) *Star* 162 (146).
2.2 is also central to his grammatical thinking, which transcends and deepens Heidegger’s account of language, as we will see below.

*Star 2.2* is primarily a commentary on the Song of Songs, and is one of many instances in *Star 2* where a particular idea is correlated with a specific passage in the Hebrew Bible. Rosenzweig’s overriding point in *Star 2.2* is that human speech is grounded in divine speech—an idea that he borrows from Hamann \(^{65}\) by way of Rosenstock. God’s speech functions as a sort of common agent intellect, i.e., “What man hears in his heart as his own human speech is the very word which comes out of God’s mouth.” \(^{66}\) The past eternity, the pre-historical elements of *Star 1*—God, man, and world understood in idealistic terms, in isolation, with reason alone—is now correlated with creation in Genesis 1:1, creation as past tense, third person, ‘it was good.’ \(^{67}\) It is only later that the “present tense suddenly appears,” with “let there be” (Genesis 1:3), an imperative present, yet still not spoken to anyone, still only “a prophecy of His own future speech.” \(^{68}\) With “let us” make man, objectivity is shattered, a person is now creating a person, the I and thou. Adam is a “thou” and not an “it,” and personhood is thus not just “good” but “very good” (Genesis 1:31), uniquely good. Adam’s personality is in the image of God and is thus not mediated through a universal or general, but loved as a particular self.

Indeed, the love of God for man is expressed in the first line of *Star 2.2*, “love is strong as death” \(^{69}\) (Song of Songs 8:6), and is a response to the “death” of *Star 1*. It is the intense focus of love on the present moment, on the indexical proper name, that “challenges death.” \(^{70}\) “Bursting

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\(^{66}\) *Star* 168 (151).

\(^{67}\) *Star* 168 (151).

\(^{68}\) *Star* 172 (154).

\(^{69}\) *Star* 174 (156).

\(^{70}\) *Star* 174 (156).
forth eventfully [ereignishaft] with the whole force of the moment,”71 the love of God is eternally
renewed, eternally present, a vital creative force, “tearing the lover’s own love away from the
moment and eternalizing [verewigt] it.”72 The “I” now becomes a name, and not just a word; we
recognize that the abstract “I” is taken from the real “I”: “[O]nly in retrospect can we recognize the
actual word as a representative of its verbal species as well,” but “we find it directly as word and
response [Wort und Ant-wort],” in speech.73 The self is pulled out of the bare self-contained isolation
of Star 1 and into historical reality.

God’s word is a “keyword, traversing revelation like a single sustained organ note,”
continually addressed to “I” and not “he,” commanding the present imperative of love, pulling us
out of the third person. The commandment knows only the moment.74 God’s “let us” has been
transformed outwards into the I-thou; the “he-she-it of the third person has fallen silent.”75 There is
nothing here in the indicative mood or third-person. Revelation is not a statement about love, but
rather love is speech, as the Song of Songs is speech; wholly active, personal, and alive. True
statements about love must come from acknowledgment, not knowledge, and only the living ‘I’ can
acknowledge.

The pivotal idea here is that language is both divine and human, and that the Song of Songs
illustrates this basic feature of reality. Rosenzweig writes that language is “truly analogy [Gleichnis],
and therefore more than analogy”:76

It is not enough that God’s relationship to man is explained by the analogy [Gleichnis] of the
lover and the beloved. God’s word must contain the relationship of lover to beloved directly
…and so we find it in the Song of Songs. Here it is no longer possible to see in that
analogy ‘only an analogy.’ Here the reader seems to be confronted by the choice either to
accept the ‘purely human,’ purely sensual sense and then to ask himself what strange error

71 Star 178 (159).
72 Star 191 (171).
73 Star 194 (174).
74 Star 198 (178).
75 Star 198 (178).
76 Star 221 (198).
allowed these pages to slip into God’s word, or to acknowledge that the deeper meaning lodges precisely here, in the purely sensual sense, directly and not merely allegorically. Up to the threshold of the nineteenth century, the latter alternative was chosen unanimously. … One simply knew that the I and thou of human discourse is without further ado also the I and thou between God and man. One knew that the distinction between immanence and transcendence disappears in language.

The Song of Songs helps us to overcome the misunderstandings of God, man, and world found in idealism (as Rosenzweig defines the term) and to recognize everyday life as transfigured by God. Only with revelation as orientation can the soul truly “look around itself at the world of things.” In the light of revelation, the “formerly familiar view of the ancient world, this Platonic-Aristotelian cosmos, suddenly became an unfamiliar, an uncanny world.” Yet this uncanniness is not like the uncanny of Heidegger, as it does not point to a wholly new dispensation. Rather, God, world, and man are now understood anew—and more deeply—with Judeo-Christian revelation. It is only if we forget that God’s speech is our speech that He withdraws back into the idealistic, ontotheological God of Star 1, “into his neo-pagan/Spinozist concealment beyond the heavenly vault of the ‘attributes’ covered by the cloudbank of the ‘modi,’” becoming ontotheological.

Rosenzweig expands on this idea a couple years later in the context of what he refers to as “the differentiation between what can be stated about God and what can be experienced about God.” He writes:

What can be stated objectively is only the very general formula, ‘God exists.’ Experience, however, goes much further. … [In] the same way that the empty announcement that two persons have married, or the showing of the marriage certificate, is related to the daily and hourly reality of this marriage … [t]he reality cannot be communicated to a third person; it is no one’s concern and yet it is the only thing that counts, and the objective statement of the fact of marriage would be meaningless without this most private, incommunicable reality.…

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77 Star 222 (199).
78 Star 206, 245 (184, 220).
79 Star 223 (200).
80 It is noteworthy that, unlike Heidegger’s rejection of the ontotheological God, Rosenzweig dialectically incorporates God as ontotheological (static, eternal, immutable, omnipotent) into a substructure of the living God, the transcendental foundation or ‘pre-history’ (Star 1) of the God of revelation (Star 2).
It is exactly the same with what man experiences about God … everyone knows that though unutterable it is not a self-delusion (which a third person might well think it!).

In this trust in the everyday, in the simple experience of love (both human and divine), Rosenzweig shows the most tenable way out of idealism and neo-Kantianism. Just as the inner life of a marriage cannot be communicated in objective, third-person language (or proven in philosophy), and is nonetheless real, so too for religious life. Philosophy cannot move beyond bare description, categorization, and objective truth—but the truths which matter most to the philosopher, to the living, breathing person who is actually doing the philosophy, cannot be expressed in philosophy, which points to the inadequacy of philosophy as a description of reality (even when thought on the basis of Ereignis). In the light of this vision presented in the Star, Rosenzweig advocates that we should turn from the Star into life. Of this transition, Rosenzweig writes:

No-longer-book [Nichtmerbuch] is the enraptured-startled knowledge [entzückt-erschrockene Erkenntnis]… [that] in this seizing of all being in the immediacy of a moment [eines Augenblicks] and blink of an eye [Augen-blicks], the limit of humanity is entered. No-longer-book is also becoming aware that this step of the book toward the limit can only be atoned for by—ending the book. An ending which is also a beginning and midpoint; stepping into the midst of the everyday of life. The problem of the philosopher … find[s] its definitive solution. Everyone should philosophize once. … But this is not an end in itself. The Star is

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81 Unpublished letter, quoted in Glatzer, 243.
82 In the remainder of the Star, Rosenzweig goes on to explain how this relationship between God and man transforms the world. The circle of love is expanded to one’s neighbors until all will say together, liturgically, that “He is good.” In a striking parallel with the wording of Heidegger’s statement three decades later, Rosenzweig describes this liturgical sentence as “the roof over the house of language” (Star 258 [231]). This is because it is true in any grammatical tense or mood; it is the “root-sentence of redemption” (ibid.), a first-person plural acknowledgment that God is good and cohortatively calling for the kingdom. To this end, the third part of Star 2 is correlated to Psalms 111-118, where the ‘I’ is “quite truly an individual … [and is yet] a member, nay more than a member of the congregation” (Star 279 [250]). This “all-encompassing we” is best expressed in Psalm 115, which “alone among all the psalms in general, begins and ends with a mighty and emphatic ‘we.’ And the first of these two ‘we’s is in the dative,” but “the advent of the kingdom … moves the ‘we’ into the fulfillment constituted by immediate proximity to the divine name” (Star 279 [251]). “The ‘we’ are eternal; death plunges into the nothing in the face of this triumphant shout of eternity” (Star 281 [253]). Finally, in Star 3, there is the "silence of the liturgical gesture" (Star 327 [295]) culminating in a vision of God himself: “In the redeemed world … the word falls silent. … the truth is this shining of the divine visage alone” (Star 465 [418]). See also GS4.1:51 (33): “In this moment [Yom Kippur], he is as close to God, as near to His throne, as any human can ever be. In the ecstasy [Entzückung] of this nearness, the ‘you’ falls silent, not only the ‘you’ to whom his agonized outcry had been directed, but also the ‘you’ of his yearning and his love. Like the angel under God’s throne, he turns around, acknowledging and confirming - ‘Him.’ And he is granted this anticipation of this final, highest moment, because just a few minutes later, when the trumpet blast of the jubilee year has brought the holy day to a close, he will once more say … forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned.”
not an attained goal. … To know and live it as ‘everyday,’ the day of the life of the all had to be traversed.83

Yet what is this everyday? Against the background of speech-thinking and man’s relationship to God as articulated in the Star, we turn now to the complex issue of how Rosenzweig understands common sense and religious life. As we will see, he shares many ambiguities with Heidegger on this score. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, despite his attempt to overcome idealism, Rosenzweig retains some modern and idealist ideas in the Star and later work. His position is not simply a hope to restore vitality to traditional Jewish life,84 as the life and common sense that Rosenzweig wants to recover are somewhat ambiguous. Just as we discovered an ambiguity in Heidegger regarding whether he was recovering a space for a possible future Christian theology and/or recovering an explicitly pre-Christian Greek theos, there is an ambiguity in Rosenzweig between recovering traditional Jewish religious life and a Johannine Age, post-institutional understanding of everyday life. As with Heidegger, there seems to be some overlapping of themes. It is possible that Heidegger’s recovery of pagan theos (as event-character) is in some sense a way to recover a space for a possible restoration of the divinity of Christianity, and it is possible that Rosenzweig’s devotion to restoring Jewish life and adherence to the Torah in the Frankfurt Jewish

83 GS3:136 (PTW 136-37).
84 Charry has presented a helpful summary of the (loosely Schellingian) ways in which Rosenzweig challenges classical theism: 1) we can know God as he is in himself and as he lets himself be known to us, 2) God is one of three eternal potentialities, 3) the selfhood of God (as everything else) is composite, 4) only in becoming present to world/persons is God self-fulfilled, and 5) self-fulfillment is an act of self-sacrifice for God; Ellen Charry, “The View of God in The Star of Redemption,” in Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), Internationaler Kongress Kassel 1986 (vol. 2), ed. W. Schmied-Kowarzik (Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber, 1988), 594. Most of these propositions are related to the dialectic in Star 1 and the end of Star 3, and fall outside of my argument here. It is noteworthy that some of these ideas could be taken to be in line with mainstream religious tradition if the words are defined as precisely as possible. For example, Schelling is very careful to emphasize when he speaks of God’s potentiality that this is only a manner of speaking, that we cannot possibly understand this as potentiality in our usual sense of potential versus actual (in Aristotelian metaphysics). So too, it seems clear that Rosenzweig does not intend to say that the Judeo-Christian God is potential as opposed to actual, but rather to emphasize (much like Heidegger in his 1936 Schelling lectures) that God is not ontotheological, that His eternity should be understood as Augenblick, and so on. The whole point of Rosenzweig’s project is arguably to rethink a more traditional view using entirely new language and categories, but there are certainly aspects of his thought (listed by Charry, above) that fall outside of what is usually considered traditional Jewish theology.
community was his way of furthering progress towards his vision of a truth higher than Judaism or Christianity. We begin by examining the “traditional” reading of Rosenzweig.

Everyday Life in Judaism

After finishing the Star, Rosenzweig followed his own advice and stepped into the midst of everyday Jewish life. Rosenzweig reports in 1920 that “picayune, and at the same time very necessary struggles with people and conditions have now become the real core of my existence.…[K]nowing [erkennen] no longer appears to me as an end in itself. It has turned into service, a service to human beings.…[N]ot every question seems to me worth asking.” And indeed, by the early 1920s Rosenzweig was focused on Jewish adult education at the Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Frankfurt, which he helped to found, and began writing commentaries on the poetry of Jehuda Halevi.

In his diaries of the 1920s, Rosenzweig partially rethinks the philosophical approach of the Star, adding nuance and in some instances rejecting the Star’s approach entirely. His initial plan had been to write a companion book to the Star, a commentary on the Torah which would go along with the Star’s creative midrash, but he embarked instead on a new German translation of the Hebrew Bible (with Buber). As we have seen, Rosenzweig shared Heidegger’s goal of restoring the Heile, the basic integrity of life as opposed to the nihilism of late modernity. Rosenzweig has in mind, in particular, a return to everyday life understood as parable, as simultaneously transcendent and immanent, in an explicitly theological vision correlated to the revelation of the Judeo-Christian God as expressed in Scripture. Rosenzweig advocates a return to liturgical everydayness, but one might wonder, if the religious life of Jews and Christians has not fallen victim to the death of God and is to

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85 GS1.2:681 (97); letter of August 30, 1920, to Meinecke.
86 GS1.2:951 (133); letter of March 28, 1924, to Isaac Breuer: “When I finished the Star of Redemption I thought I would then have decades of learning and living, teaching and learning, before me [Rosenzweig died of Lou Gehrig’s disease in 1929], and that perhaps toward the end, when I had reached a hoary old age, another book might come out of it, and this would have been a book on the Law.”
be used as a force for renewal, then why write the Star at all? Why not simply point to liturgical life and avoid philosophy altogether?

The answer is at once autobiographical and cultural. Rosenzweig understands his own biography—as we saw in Chapter 1, he was raised in an assimilated Jewish family, taught by neo-Kantian philosophers, and adrift in historicism and nihilism until his late twenties—as common to many in his generation, and he is to some extent writing the Star not only for himself but also for his liberal Jewish neighbors in Germany, who are unable to have the simple, whole Jewish life that he found among eastern European Jews. Liberal Jews need the Star in order to properly work through and overcome idealism.87 In the same sense that the Song of Songs is a true myth, a true analogue, Rosenzweig’s vision of everyday “common sense” involves the overcoming of the unreal cultural world of modernity, the world of the public as opposed to the individual:

[This is] accomplished through the constant presence of the scriptural Word, which places another reality in front of the realities surrounding us and demotes these to the status of mere semblance or, more precisely, parable. It is not that the Scriptures are used as parable to illustrate the incidents of everyday life, but quite the other way round; these incidents serve to interpret the Scriptures and, in this sense, become parables…[A]ll our seeming contradictions arise from the equation between the Today that is merely a springboard into tomorrow, and the Today that is a springboard to eternity. No day has written on its forehead which of the two Todays it is. One can never tell.88

The Star should then be interpreted as a hermeneutic circle, in Heidegger’s sense, which helps Rosenzweig’s generation return to the place where they already were, to reappropriate their lives more deeply and knowingly—in other words, to correct the common misunderstandings of God, man, and world found in idealism and liberal theology and arrive at a more holistic understanding of their interrelation. While the vision at the end of the Star is of the “hypercosmos,” of “a life beyond

87 I think that Pollock is mistaken where he writes that Rosenzweig “is primarily a systematic philosopher who recognizes that one cannot live everyday life, and cannot ask the basic questions that emerge in everyday life, without inquiring into the all and one’s place in it” (Systematic Task, 315). It seems clear from Rosenzweig’s statements on the matter that before 1800 (and certainly before modernity) there would have been no need for the Star.
88 GS1.1:345 (47); letter of February 5, 1917, to Gertrud Oppenheim.
Rosenzweig returns to life, where “we grasp the ultimate knowledge of God’s essence in the light of the hypercosmos only to recognize it as the very same discovery that we had already been able to make daily within the world.”

Indeed, as Rosenzweig emphasizes repeatedly in his post-Star work, the ‘new thinking’ is not, after all, so new: “[H]ealthy human understanding has always thought in this way.” In the light of the Star’s understanding of speech and of parable, it becomes clear that the philosophical distinction between immanence and transcendence is not true to the Hebrew language or to life, where the two are mysteriously combined. As Rosenzweig writes:

Holy and profane, sabbath and workday, Torah and the way of earth, spiritual life and the earning of a livelihood … the maze of paradoxes appears when one tries to consider the elements of Jewish life as static elements. The question as to what is the essence can only be answered by exposing paradoxes, and thus cannot really be answered at all. But life that is alive does not ask about essence. It just lives, and insofar as it lives, it answers all questions even before it asks them. What in the investigation of essence seemed a maze of paradoxes falls into an orderly pattern in the yearly rings of life.

Following Micah, Rosenzweig advises the reader to “walk humbly with thy God,” emphasizing that “nothing more is demanded there than a wholly present trust.” He praises “the whole and simple life” of Deut. 13:9-15, posed by Scripture against all desire for “‘magical’ knowledge,” the “where and when, the below and above” of creation. Like Job, Rosenzweig is silent before the majesty of God. The life that he speaks of is “earthly life (1 Samuel 1:25-26), which hails the soul … ‘into life!’ then, becomes the password of admission into ‘the community of the souls of

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89 Star 471 (424).
90 Star 432 (389).
91 GS3:140 (PTW 111). Horwitz strikes a critical note here, writing that (71) “the use of the concept common sense, or healthy human understanding, is unfortunate, inasmuch as Rosenzweig’s metaphysics, based as they are on God and man, creation, and revelation, are in no sense closer to common sense than are the monistic constructions of the idealists,” which is ultimately incorrect as Rosenzweig’s more general point is that the basic core of his message (if not the precise idealistic form of the Star) applied nearly universally before modernity; a normal, healthy relationship to God, man, and world (in some form) was normative, though this is best expressed by Judaism and Christianity.
93 Star 472 (424).
94 GS4.1:57 (39).
his righteous ones.”\textsuperscript{95} He makes the argument from what was known before modern education (i.e., before 1800) but also makes reference to the Bible itself as a phenomenological account of the ‘common sense’ of a people. The Proverbs are derived from experience. Rosenzweig notes that “it is exactly from these lowlands of experience that philosophical ethics flees into its own more rarified heights. And it is exactly to these lowlands that the Bible descends.”\textsuperscript{96}

Rosenzweig emphasizes in a lecture given at the Lehrhaus that “here it is not a matter of the ‘experience of God’ as a special, high, aristocratic sort of experience \textit{[Erleben]}, rather of the quite simple experience, of experience simply. But just as one cannot see without seeing nature, not perceive without perceiving mind, just so one cannot live without experiencing God.”\textsuperscript{97} In other words, God is not transcendent, not a substantial being with certain properties,\textsuperscript{98} and also not a Heideggerian \textit{Deus absconditus}. Rather we know God in the sense of acknowledging, of being a part of our everyday life.\textsuperscript{99} To speak of God as theoretical object, or write a proof to demonstrate God’s existence, should never occur to us. God should be a practical object of our life and love, and not a theoretical one, i.e., we should recover the basic religious norms that the West maintained before

\textsuperscript{95} GS4.1:134 (141).
\textsuperscript{96} GS4.1:109 (107). The Bible is an important source, though there are also shades of the oldest system fragment and of Vico and Herder, i.e., the supposed original poetic-mythical state of humanity as the primordial source of language and meaning, the common sense of healthy life as opposed to the errant path of modern philosophy. Though, to be clear, Rosenzweig also emphasizes that “Biblical experience is not simply the sum of human experience” (GS4.1:109 [109]). There is a higher sort of common sense at work here, a deeper everyday built on the incipient common sense of paganism and \textit{Star} 1. As we will see in Chapter 4, Heidegger’s Greco-German mythic nationalism is also in this tradition, to an extent, recovering Greco-German poetry/myth behind the liberal nation-state (against Cassirer’s reading of myth). Yet Rosenzweig is attempting to recover this mythic past as Judeo-Christian myth, parable that is not just parable, myth that is more than myth, the \textit{Unheimlich} at the root of the \textit{Heimat}.
\textsuperscript{98} GS3:145 (PTW 118).
\textsuperscript{99} This is also a rejection of Kant’s having “turned this most self-evident quantity, the I, into the most questionable object” (\textit{Star} 70 [62]). Though Rosenzweig is sympathetic to Kant in many ways, he is also critical (and somewhat unfair to Kant), writing in the Halevi book: “It is a new—not even 150 years old—doctrine of modern education, hence also of modern religious sensibility, that God may not be sought in nature. At the source of this prejudice is Kant with his refutation of the physico-teleological proof of God’s existence, which suddenly seemed to rule out as unwarranted the step from creation to creator … mankind certainly would not have let itself be dissuaded so easily from praying, had the world itself not become increasingly invisible to the human eye precisely during this last century. … [The] enormous advantage of the Ptolemaic system over the Copernican … [is] that in the former, the mind of those with common sense took at least its first steps in harmony with the view of the childlike soul. … Below is really below and above is above, a certainty of which Copernicus was to rob mankind” (GS4.1:64-65 [47, 49]).
Thus we see that the only way to argue against theoreticism (“idealism”) is to dissolve it, to show that it is inadequate to lived reality, to personhood and love. Idealism is only able to transform God, man, and world into concepts because it distorts the historical basis of our real experience.

Rosenzweig ultimately wanted his own philosophy to become common sense (in the sense of being normative and unquestioned) in the same way that our natural understanding of God, man, and world was left unquestioned before modernity. Rosenzweig writes to his mother in 1921: “I understand that I was put in a sermon yesterday and my book referred to as ‘the sublime book of a new thinker who lives in our midst.’ But it won’t be really good until they use me in sermons without quoting me, and best of all, without even knowing it is me that they are using.” The point of his work on reforming education at the Lehrhaus was not to transmit knowledge but rather to incorporate Judaism holistically into the everyday life of Frankfurt Jews. He describes this whole Jewish life in terms reminiscent of the oldest system fragment: “Do you perceive what we lost when our grandparents turned their back on the beautiful life, and turned towards a life in which beauty is

100 There is some ambiguity here on Rosenzweig’s part regarding his Johannine Age views, where Jew, Christian, and pagan/humanist are seen as equally individuals beyond external divisions of nationality, yet at other times Jewish liturgy is seen as the highest form of religious life. There is also an ambiguity regarding, on the one hand, healthy common sense—a vague, incipient sense of the basic reality of man, the divine, and the world—as found in all cultures (correlated with Star 1) and, on the other hand, explicitly Biblical references to a specific Judeo-Christian version of this common sense in Star 2, where he implies that Judaism and Christianity have an understanding of God, man, and world which goes beyond paganism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism (all of which are critiqued in Star 1). Regardless, Rosenzweig’s basic point—that there is a more natural, healthy relationship to God, man, and world that has been covered up by modernity and idealism—does not require Scriptural support. This is what Rosenzweig means, I think, where he writes (in “The New Thinking”) that he happened to use Jewish words to express this basic idea, but that a Christian or pagan would use words more appropriate to their Christian or pagan facticity. Yet, despite this, Rosenzweig maintains that Judaism is the highest expression of truth.

101 GS1.2:725 (104), letter of October 5, 1921, to his mother.

102 See GS1.2:821 (117), letter of August 1922 to his mother, on the Lehrhaus: “Its main direction (non-specialist, non-rabbinical, non-polemical, non-apologetic, universalist in content and spirit) has been assured.” Soon after, upon being offered a chair in Jewish theology at the University of Frankfurt, he writes to Buber: “I am aware that the portal bears the inscription ‘theological faculty’; but behind this it is possible there will be that theological universality for which we are all working, both for the sake of theology, which must be de-theologized [i.e., transformed into Johannine Age ‘theosophy’ beyond the traditional forms of Jewish or Christian theology], and for the sake of the university, which must be universalized” (GS1.2:878 [127], letter of January 12, 1923, to Martin Buber).
but an island, an isolated phenomenon? Do you perceive what we have to gain, and how we have to be regained? A life that is art all through, nay, beauty all through, because it is the totality of life.\textsuperscript{103}

*Common Sense and the Johannine Age*

Yet Rosenzweig’s (possibly unconscious) use of the early Schelling’s idealist language—art as the totality of life—to describe Jewish life points to the complexity of his position regarding common sense. The Johannine Age has been briefly mentioned above. Heidegger’s occasional statements regarding German *theologia* and a new way of thinking about God can be loosely grouped with this conception, and it is spoken of by Rosenzweig at length in *Star* 3.

The Johannine Age illustrates some tensions at work in Rosenzweig’s thought. In the conception of the Johannine as developed by Rosenzweig and his contemporaries (i.e., Rosenstock and other figures at the journal *Die Kreatur* and the Patmos circle, such as Ebner and Buber), there is a strong focus on speech, dialogue, and a new understanding of language, which for Rosenzweig was expressed most clearly in the *Sprachdenken* of *Star* 2. These Johannine thinkers emphasize St. John’s gospel (St. John being the namesake of the Age) and his emphasis on spokenness, on the deeper mystical teachings of Christ beyond the mere outward form of the synoptic Gospels. As Rosenzweig writes (in the *Star* and also in letters\textsuperscript{104}), the Johannine Age refers to the third age of Christianity, beyond the Petrine (i.e. Catholic) political universalist conversion stage, which “creates a visible body” and “penetrates this world structurally and administratively, step by step, in the unity of the empire above the kingdoms of the nations.”\textsuperscript{105} This is followed by the Pauline (i.e. Protestant)

\textsuperscript{103} Horwitz, 71, quoting an unpublished lecture.

\textsuperscript{104} See GS1.1:303 (JDC 157-58), letter of November 30, 1916, to Rosenstock: “The church has entered on its final (and to use Schelling’s own expression) Johannine Age; that is, it has become without substance… there is no longer any instituted paganism, nor ‘Greek’ wisdom, nor ‘Roman’ empire; now there is only Christianity. That is what the followers of John’s gospel wanted from the beginning … [in] this Johannine Age of Christianity, which began in 1789 … the Jew becomes merely ‘the Jew of Christianity.’”

\textsuperscript{105} *Star* 311 (279).
church, which occurs after paganism has been sublated into Catholicism and the political power of the church wanes. The Pauline church adds freedom and subjectivity to the merely external Catholic church.106

This culminates in the “German Idealist movement which followed these three [Pauline] centuries,” which “disclosed weakness” in the Protestant faith as merely sentimental and purely spiritual: “[F]aith had simply forgotten the body.”107 The Johannine Age then dialectically combines both (the Petrine and the Pauline) in a sublated post-political post-institutional religion, where the emphasis is on particular human beings and not on Christians and Jews as members of institutional religions. In other words, man as proper name transcends the ‘categories’ of Christianity and Judaism to some degree. As Stahmer writes, the Johannine Age is “dedicated to the creation and preservation of a truly human society … a time thirsted after by Jew and Christian, but also one wherein men will feel incomplete simply as Jew or Christian.”108 In the Star, Rosenzweig describes a series of Enlightenments in an account which recalls his youthful neo-Hegelianism.109 After 1800, we can no longer have “simple acceptance” of tradition. Rosenzweig points instead to a dichotomy between two inadequate relations to God: 1) the “epigones and renovators of ‘German idealism’” who “‘generate’ belief out of idealistic intellect”—i.e., neo-Kantians such as Simmel—and 2) “orthodox circles” who are “easily satisfied,” trying to “stake out belief’s place exactly and to secure it,”110 i.e., the Jewish equivalent to the neo-Scholastic Thomists that Heidegger decried in his youth.

I would argue that despite some appearances to the contrary, Rosenzweig is not anti-traditional, but rather he asks for a more considered relation to tradition; i.e., not to blindly

106 Star 312 (280).
107 Star 313 (281).
108 Stahmer, 111.
109 See GS1.1:234 (JDC 98), letter of September 1916 to Rosenstock: “Don’t you grumble about the Enlightenment; it is not its fault that inertia stuffed its discoveries into cushions, instead of industrious people getting to work on them.”
110 Star 114 (102). See also Franz Rosenzweig, Die “Gritli”-Büfie. Brifve an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy, ed. Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer (Tübingen: Bilam Verlag, 2002), hereafter “GB,” 537, letter of January 24, 1920, to Gritli, where he refers to “liberal shallowness” and “orthodox superstition,” both of which are to be rejected.
follow the letter of the law. His goal is to shake liberal Jews out of ontotheology, much as Barth (and Heidegger, in some sense) attempted to do for Christendom. Yet Rosenzweig at times goes further, writing in a letter to Buber: “It is sinful to banish His working into ‘isms’ … the buildings (churches, temples, synagogues) are secular buildings and not houses of God.” The goal then seems to be beyond institutional religion, to transcend institutions not merely in redemption, but here on earth; when Rosenzweig speaks of his philosophy becoming ‘common sense,’ he is arguably signifying something like a messianic Johannine culture which goes ‘beyond’ Jew and Christian and has only a tenuous connection to liturgy or tradition.

In Rosenzweig’s understanding, Goethe is the first figure of the Johannine Age, the first complete man, living beyond mere Jew and Christian. In a statement which seems completely at odds with traditional Jewish thought, Rosenzweig writes that only with Goethe did “time begin to be truly fulfilled,” and “only now does the kingdom of God really have its advent within time.” Goethe is the first of the new Church fathers, the first Johannine sublation of the Petrine and Pauline into the whole man, the new man, transcending mere dogma, “wholly at home within his self and by virtue of that very fact, also entirely at home in the world,” the pagan who is equal with Jew and Christian. Goethe’s existence is the “dawn of a new world day, like a great new beginning,” the Johannine completion. The Johannine Church leaves an outer shell of establishment religion, but has “no visible form of its own,” is “formless [gestaltlosen] and necessarily unestablished and thus always dependent on the established church.” When Rosenzweig writes that he hopes for his own philosophy to become common sense, it may be in the Johannine sense of the “suprahuman

111 Letters to Buber, 276-77; letter of August 27, 1922.
112 Star 319 (287).
113 Star 315 (283).
114 Star 316 (284).
115 Star 317 (285).
powers” which will save European culture that “will in turn become secularized and Europeanized, especially if they succeed.”

Rosenzweig had a rather cavalier attitude towards institutional religion, which may be explained by the fact that (despite his erudition) he failed to properly understand it. His writings on the matter seem to indicate a largely theoretical interest. Rosenstock would later note that in their dialogue in the 1910s, he and Rosenzweig were really only dealing about “Judaism and Christianity as simple unities,” i.e., esoteric Johannine Age versions of actual religious traditions which have little in common with historical reality. For Rosenzweig and Rosenstock, Judaism is really Tatsache, and Christianity is really Ereignis. Surprisingly, given his embrace of revelation and rejection of idealism, Rosenzweig’s account of Christianity and Judaism in Star 3 is only partially phenomenological (despite references to the liturgical year) and instead utilizes vague and post-institutional representations of each religion. While Rosenzweig provides a richly detailed account of the believer’s relationship to God (in Star 2 and other writings), whenever he places this into the context of faith communities as they actually existed in Germany in the early 20th century, something goes awry.

These shortcomings are most clear in Rosenzweig’s view of the sisterly relation of Judaism and Christianity in Star 3, i.e., the idea that Christianity is working towards a goal that Judaism has already achieved. This overlooks, obviously, the very specific theological claims that cannot possibly be reconciled (on any traditional reading) between the two religions. Indeed, it turns out that one difficulty with Rosenzweig’s wholesale rejection of concepts in favor of life is that theological subtlety and dogmatic definitions are rejected as well, to the detriment of his thought. “Judaism” is at least partially Rosenzweig’s subjective Johannine version of Judaism, and Christianity is

117 JDC 48n1.
Rosenstock’s equally esoteric version of Christianity. With these limited definitions, Rosenzweig has no problem referring to their friend Hans Ehrenberg as a “Jew-Christian,” and considers himself to have a “special”\textsuperscript{118} relation to Christianity despite referring to Christ’s divinity as a delusion,\textsuperscript{119} stating that *Star* 3 is “blasphemy”\textsuperscript{120} for Christians, and reporting that “the one time I read [the New Testament] completely, I recall with physical nausea.”\textsuperscript{121}

As Mara Benjamin argues in her work, Rosenzweig’s understanding of Judaism is limited as well. Rosenzweig’s immediate circle of friends had “disabused him of an actual historical revelation to the Israelites on Mount Sinai.”\textsuperscript{122} Rather, revelation is a subjective and philosophical concept—i.e., precisely what Rosenzweig claimed to be avoiding—and is accordingly ahistorical, abstract, and apparently unrelated to the actual history of the Jews.\textsuperscript{123} Benjamin takes this line of argumentation somewhat too far, but it is true that Rosenzweig gives far too much ground to the Enlightenment, to what he elsewhere attacks as modern education, in his perplexing wholesale acceptance of modern historical critique of Scripture (see, e.g., his interpretation of miracles at the beginning of *Star* 2).\textsuperscript{124}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item GB 386-87 (letter of August 17, 1919, to Eugen Rosenstock) and 372 (letter of August 3, 1919, to Gritli and Eugen Rosenstock).
  \item GB 350 (letter of June 27, 1919, to Eugen Rosenstock).
  \item GB 390 (letter of August 19, 1919, to Gritli Rosenstock).
  \item Benjamin, *Rosenzweig’s Bible*, 52.
  \item Hans-Christoph Askani makes a convincing case that Scripture in *Star* is essentially used only as an illustration of philosophical truth, and not for its own sake; see “Schöpfung der Welt und Grammatik der Sprache: Zum Verhältnis von philosophischem Gedanken und biblischem Text im Stern der Erlösung” in *Rosenzweig als Leser: Kontextuelle Kommentare zum “Stern der Erlösung*,” edited by Martin Brasser (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004), 415. Also, Mara Benjamin makes the most persuasive case in the secondary literature regarding the “paradoxical impulse at work in all of Rosenzweig’s encounters with the Bible; on the one hand, the Bible was to be the literal manifestation of divine revelation; on the other, revelation for Rosenzweig would always escape any definitive content” (*Rosenzweig’s Bible*, 20). She adds that Rosenzweig’s presentation of Scripture is a “compelling conceit” (28), a “strong misreading” (39) of Biblical texts, taking them out of the shared historical concrete context that he claims to want to recover. He is not only opposed to traditional midrash, but “almost belligerently contradicts it” (46). Even the command of revelation in *Star* 2 (*love me!*), is not actually found in Scripture; as Benjamin writes, there is a vast difference between “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” and “Love me!” (55); the former emphasizes heteronomy, Moses, the history of the Jews, whereas the latter is God speaking ‘ahistorically’ to the individual in a Kabbalistic/Schellingian pre-history postulated by a philosophical system. She concludes, correctly, that Rosenzweig has “harnessed the Biblical text to utterly reinvent the content of revelation; no longer is the primary meaning of revelation the experience of a people gathered together awaiting the commanding voice of God that imparts the teachings and burden of the written and oral law” (56).
  \end{itemize}
In the Johannine Age, no dogma gets in the way of the believer and God, and thus (if Rosenzweig is aligned entirely with the Johannine) there is a danger of revelation becoming idealistic and abstract due to the lack of a mediating tradition.

Rosenzweig’s view of the post-institutional nature of the Johannine would have other implications for his work. Though he in some sense appreciated the importance of Judeo-Christian tradition, he also thought of himself as beyond traditional morality. Most notably, he only followed the parts of the Torah that he agreed with, and had an adulterous affair with Rosenstock’s wife Gritli (with Rosenstock’s consent). He referred to the majority of his readers (presumably including the Jews he taught at the Lehrhaus) as “little souls” who were unable to grasp his sophisticated Johannine view of religion. He also apparently based the Star itself (at least in part) on a revelation that he had in 1918, mentioned only in letters to Gritli. This revelation was a direct vision of a holistic all, the “star” itself upon which the Star was based. This vision includes and transcends both Judaism and Christianity, a vision which (as Pollock notes) did not “take place within any religious communal setting, Jewish or Christian or other. It takes place in the dark of night when Rosenzweig is alone.”

And so despite breaking free of theoreticism in many ways and pointing to liturgical Jewish life (in his later work), Rosenzweig’s Star is in some sense a rejection or reshaping of this tradition. Rosenzweig was unable to fully return to the faith of the eastern European Jews that he so deeply

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miraculousness and instead translates miracle into something unrecognizable as miracle, i.e., an event as inevitable as natural law (Star 108 [96]).

125 For an account of this relationship of “free love,” see Horwitz, 13. Rosenzweig writes: “My love burdens my conscience, but I cannot repent. I know I am rebelling against God and still, I cannot stop believing in him. … [E]very hour, God’s wrath and God’s love are woven into my life. But this no longer fits into orthodox concepts. … [B]ut tell me, what path is it, when one can neither be orthodox nor oppose orthodoxy … what will become of me? Who am I?” (GB 508; letter of December 25, 1919, to Gritli and Eugen Rosenstock, quoted in Horwitz, 15). After stopping the affair and becoming engaged to Edith Hahn, he also thought of their relationship as somehow beyond traditional Judaism, writing on January 17, 1920 (they were married two months later): “What has happened between us, between you and me, means more to us than the Sabbath” (GS1.2:665 [91]).

126 GS1.2:701 [107], letter of January 30, 1922, to Joseph Prager: “The soul of a great Jew can accommodate many things. There is danger only for the little souls.”

127 See GB 222; letter of January 15, 1919, to Gritli Rosenstock; Pollock provides an extremely good analysis of this issue in Systematic Task, 258-65. Rosenzweig writes, of this vision: “The wealth of immediate vision is truth and verifies itself later in the elaboration … thus I saw the star and strangely enough it turned itself around and I saw within it everything I still need to write” (GB 159; written to Gritli on October 4, 1918, cited in Pollock, Systematic Task, 258).
admired, or to the piety of the everyday Jews that he taught at the Lebrhaus, which is odd given his conversion to the Jewish faith and deep devotion to the Jewish community.

**Conclusion: Towards Orthodoxy**

Ultimately, while Rosenzweig’s private views were not quite in alignment with traditional Judaism, Schwarzchild notes that as time passed “his actions became increasingly those of a fully observant, not to say orthodox Jew.”

Rosenzweig writes to Gritli in 1920: “My feet stand in the community, but my heart …” This points to the paradoxical nature of his work, but what is most relevant here, in my view, is that his feet do indeed stand in the community. Externally, it would be difficult to tell how he differed from a traditional Jew—and indeed, he was considered by his friends (who knew him well) to be a man of great piety. Rosenzweig’s esoteric private views seem inconsequential insofar as he was by all appearances truly devoted to promoting a traditional understanding of Judaism, educating Jews, and translating Scripture. The Johannine Age tendencies of his earlier work should then perhaps be treated at least partially as a relic of his youthful neo-Hegelianism, mostly left behind as he moved past the *Star*. Indeed, Rosenzweig’s separation of Judaism and its liturgy from what he calls “hell of world history” is at least a partial rejection of the Johannine.

There is a case to be made that faithfully following Jewish traditions (though in an somewhat unconventional way) should be interpreted as Rosenzweig’s method for reaching the whole truth beyond any one religion. In the *Star*, Rosenzweig writes:

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129 GB 647; written to Gritli on August 23, 1920.
130 “The messianic time … would, to be sure, put an end to the hell of world history” (GS4.1:207 [225]).
131 See Benjamin Pollock (personal communication): “Although neither Jews nor Christians (on my reading) has the complete, immediate vision of the All which completes the system for Rosenzweig, they do “see” a mediated, incomplete reflection of the All, and I take it that this is sufficient to direct them in the fulfillment of their respective
[T]he truth, the whole truth, belongs to neither to them [i.e., Christians] nor to us [i.e., Jews] … a direct view [Schau] of this whole truth is granted only to him who sees it in God. That, however, is a view beyond life. A living view of the truth, a view that is at the same time life, can become ours only from out the immersion into our own Jewish heart and even there only in image and likeness [Gleichnis].

Though his private vision of the star may have been his impetus, in the 1920s there was very little practical difference between his life and that of a traditional Jew. Admittedly, he maintained somewhat eccentric views regarding which aspects of Jewish tradition were essential, emphasizing poetry and hymns over the letter of the law, and enacting what Strauss rightly refers to as a “conscious and radical historicization of the Torah.” Yet one might call this a “Protestant-izing” of Judaism, as it were, rather than a rejection of it. Rosenzweig still follows the Law. Indeed, as he writes in the Star, “to learn the Torah and to keep the commandments is the omnipresent basis of Jewish life,” and he never repudiates this position. Though he was wary of fundamentalist or legalist Judaism and may have overreacted in the opposite direction, he still follows the Torah and takes the Sabbath seriously (as evidenced by his letters and by various first-hand accounts).

I would contend that Rosenzweig was in fact attempting (though perhaps imperfectly) to help Jews follow the Torah more closely by emphasizing the ‘new law’ (neues Gesetz), based on God’s redemptive tasks. I take it that this premise stands behind Rosenzweig’s commitment to the Frankfurt Jewish community.”

132 *Star* 462-63 (416).
133 Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, translated by E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken, 1965), 14. Rosenzweig’s relationship to orthodoxy is often reminiscent of Heidegger’s relationship to orthodox Christianity. Their emphasis on a new thinking does away with much of the old theology which was (supposedly) based on the old thinking. See for example, in a letter Rosenzweig wrote to Buber: “I, too, do not know whether the law ‘is’ God’s law. I know that as little and even less than I know that God ‘is,’” thus emphasizing experience and subjectivity over tradition and the letter of the law (*Letters of Martin Buber*, 327; letter of June 5, 1925).
134 *Star* 362 (326).
135 Many who have written on Rosenzweig have tried to elide the specifically Judeo-Christian nature of his vision of the everyday, favoring instead a supposedly more “inclusive” vision. See Richard Cohen, *Elevations*, 304. Eric Santner, in *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 122-23, provides perhaps the most representative sample: “None of this should be taken to mean, however, that Rosenzweig is staking a claim for some sort of absolute priority for this form of life, that it is, in other words, only by virtue of a life lived according to the commandments or structured around the rituals that punctuate the Jewish calendar that one can truly inhabit the midst of life.” He concludes by writing that Rosenzweig does not maintain that there is an “eternal and privileged essence of ‘Judaism.’” However, this simply does not align with Rosenzweig’s statements on the subject. To be fair, there is occasionally slight ambiguity in Rosenzweig regarding his views on the Johannine (particularly in his later years), but he repeatedly emphasizes the primacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the importance of Scripture and liturgy in this tradition.
commandment to love, which is not just a small part of Jewish life but part of the ‘whole’ that he
taught at the Lehrhaus.\footnote{Where Rosenzweig writes “the truths of Judaism aren’t dogmas,” this may sound unnerving to a traditional Jewish reader, yet he immediately adds that “prayer and poetry never tire of clothing it again in new words. … [I]t becomes word, meaning, form, but never dogmatic formula, never a philosophical topic,” which makes it clear that he is simply emphasizing (and perhaps slightly overemphasizing) the importance of the life of following the Torah over and against a legalistic/abstract understanding (“Apologetic Thinking,” GS3:678 [PTW 96]).} This is how the objective letter of the law (\textit{Gesetz}) is removed from the third-person objective and transformed into a living commandment (\textit{Gebot}) from God, an interpretation which is very much in line with the ‘new thinking’ and the \textit{Star} in general. Though, to be sure, Rosenzweig almost certainly overestimated the extent to which traditional adherence to the Torah was trapped in ‘old thinking,’ just as Heidegger overstated the extent to which Christian theology was captive to ontotheology.

It is also important to note that Rosenzweig’s view of redemption at the very end of \textit{Star} 3 is in alignment with traditional Jewish theology.\footnote{See \textit{Star} 291 (261): “We will see man wholly redeemed out of his every peculiarity \textit{[Eigenheit]} and selfishness into created image of God; the world, the world of flesh and blood and wood and stone, we will see wholly redeemed out of all materiality \textit{[Dinglichkeit]} into pure \textit{[Leib]} soul.” It is easy to be misled by passages such as “the kingdom is not a whit more worldly than human” (266 [239]), which sounds particularly Johannine. It does not help matters that Rosenzweig refers to Judeo-Christian life, somewhat misleadingly, as redemption-in-the-world.} Indeed, there is nothing especially radical or novel about saying that in redemption, there are no longer Jews or Christians, and that the usual earthly distinctions will not apply at the end of time, where God will be ‘all in all.’ Rosenzweig makes some statements on this topic in his later work (such as his essay on Lessing’s \textit{Nathan the Wise}) advocating humility regarding which religion has absolute truth, thus moving away somewhat from the emphasis on Christianity and Judaism in the \textit{Star}. While there are shades of post-institutional Johannine language here, this sentiment also echoes Nicholas of Cusa (among others). Rosenzweig’s statement that both Judaism and Christianity lack the absolute fullness of the truth can be interpreted as the uncontroversial (for traditional theology) view that no single religion—even the true religion—can be a full and complete representation of the ineffable, as symbols and words inevitably fall short.
Ultimately, as I will illustrate at length in Chapter 4, it is more philosophically fruitful (and closest to Rosenzweig’s insights in Star 2.2 and later work) to read him against his own Johannine Age tendencies. Rosenzweig’s position that the Jews are the eternal people, free from the vicissitudes of history and politics; that Jewish liturgy brings the eternal moment into time; and that Hebrew is both a liturgical language and a language nourished by everyday Jewish life, etc., render his private views about the Johannine relatively unimportant. His steps toward restoring hermeneutics and a focus on the subject to ossified liberal Jewish theology and neo-Kantian philosophy is worthwhile in either case, and his arguments regarding speech, love, and continually renewed liturgical life, even if initiated in an idealistic or Johannine way, still conclude with the life of the synagogue, the everyday of traditional Jewish life.

Leo Strauss, though he found himself unable to share Rosenzweig’s faith, expressed his friend’s position best: “God’s revealing himself to man, his addressing man, is not merely known through traditions going back to the remote past and therefore now ‘merely believed,’ but is genuinely known through present experience which every human being can have if he does not refuse himself to it.”138 The value in Rosenzweig’s work is the ability to combine subjectivity, hermeneutics, and speech-thinking with the insight that, contra Heidegger, the tradition survives the death of the ontotheological God. We do not need a new god but rather need only not to refuse the living God, and this can be accomplished by returning to the living phenomena of Christian and Jewish ritual, art, and Scripture.

138 Strauss, 9.
Chapter 4: Heidegger and Rosenzweig in Dialogue

As the previous three chapters have covered a great deal of material, I will now recapitulate the earlier stages of my argument in order to orient the reader. Chapter 1, which served primarily as an introduction, examined the shared biographical and neo-Kantian context of Heidegger and Rosenzweig, focusing on their turn from neo-Kantianism to existence and hermeneutics with a new thinking and new way of speaking about the divine.

Chapter 2, Part 1 elaborated upon Ereignis/Da in GA65 and the beyng-historical notebooks more generally, and illustrated Heidegger’s conception of using language as the primary way to bergen (shelter) truth in order to avoid what Heidegger sees as the utter nihilism of the West in the 20th century, the machination of ontotheology and metaphysics which culminated in the death of God and flight of the gods, diagnosed by Hölderlin and Nietzsche. This future thinking and poetizing will be achieved through the strife of the fourfold, spoken sigetically, i.e., from an attunement to the withdrawn absence and mystery of Ereignis. Heidegger prepares a possible restoration of meaning and wholeness to the West with the tentative, sigetic thought of the beyng-historical notebooks, pointing to the ones to come who await the passing-by of the last god.

Chapter 2, Part 2 examined precisely what Heidegger meant by the last god. We noted Heidegger’s position regarding ontotheology and the theological difference as well as his overstatement of the captivity of the Judeo-Christian tradition to ontotheology. This chapter culminated in an analysis of an ambiguity in Heidegger’s work; is the last god a Pascalian critique of Christianity, a recovery of Greek theos, or somehow both? I concluded that within the restricted parameters of his thought he is able only to recover a mytho-poetic pagan Greek theos built upon a Hellenic interpretation of German Romanticism (of Hölderlin in particular).
Chapter 3 presented Rosenzweig’s mature position, which was argued to consist of a philosophically useful counterbalance to Heidegger’s views which nonetheless shares many of his insights. After presenting a general overview of Rosenzweig’s project and of the Star in particular, we examined Sprachdenken and grammatical thinking, i.e., his understanding of language as rooted in religious life which turns from impersonals to the first and second person. This shift involves a living, present dialogue with God, as opposed to Heidegger’s hypothetical dialogue between future poets and the impersonal last god. Chapter 3 concluded with a defense of Rosenzweig’s traditional views despite his tendencies towards the Johannine Age.

This final chapter seeks to offer a constructive critique of Heidegger’s later project in dialogue with themes and ideas in Rosenzweig. In the argument that follows, the threads of the previous discussions will be pulled together, along with a small amount of new content, such as an analysis of Rosenzweig’s late essay (“Der Ewige”) on the Hebrew language as breaking free of metaphysics and Heidegger’s later writings on “the heart.”

I will begin by focusing on the widest context which underlies the later stages of my argument—1) the way in which Rosenzweig and Heidegger understand the basic relationships between philosophy, theology, and God. As we will see, there are areas of mutual agreement and possible dialogue, but I will primarily emphasize the shortcomings of Heidegger’s understanding of ontotheology and in particular his reading of Hölderlin, concluding with a critique of Heidegger’s lack of hermeneutic openness about his influences and lack of clarity about the fideistic aspects of his work, in contrast with Rosenzweig.

I will then examine 2) the way in which Heidegger’s and Rosenzweig’s general understanding of philosophy and theology informed their respective reactions to modern nihilism, which is to be combated by wholeness in two different forms: Heidegger’s ur-phenomenological fourfold/Heimat

1 GS3:801-16.
and Rosenzweig’s common sense. The differences between these conceptions then point to interesting debates and conflicts between Volk as German or Jewish (i.e., as either a temporal or eternal Volk), and theos as Greek or Judeo-Christian.

These differences provide a foundation for the most important stage of my argument, i.e., 3) an analysis of how, on the basis of their differing interpretations of wholeness (and the resources to account for it), one can see a clear divergence in how Heidegger and Rosenzweig understand language/grammar and divine/human personhood, which is ultimately at the root of these previously discussed issues. As I will argue, Heidegger misunderstood being by reducing it to Greco-German einai/Sein and thus eliding Hebrew hayah, which (as Rosenzweig argues) transcends the Indo-Germanic ‘to be.’ Being as hayah transcends metaphysics and denotes the becoming, entering, and happening of the personhood of man and God (i.e., approximately what Ereignis attempts to account for in GA65) which has informed millennia of philosophy and theology. Heidegger is limited by Greek and German in a way that Rosenzweig and the Western tradition are not. Ultimately, I will argue that Heidegger’s systematic focus on Hellenic sources crucially misunderstands the tradition that he was trying to overcome. He overlooks ‘Jerusalem’ in favor of ‘Athens,’ and fails to see that the Hebrew language’s non-ontotheological character renders the last god unnecessary, thus enabling Rosenzweig to provide a helpful corrective which is in fact a recovery of the young Heidegger’s more nuanced position.

This third and final stage of my argument concludes with an examination of Heidegger’s deficient account of divine and human personhood. For Heidegger, as we recall from Chapter 2, true humanity and divinity must be rethought on the basis of Ereignis and to theion, i.e., as impersonal (or ‘pre-personal’) events. Heidegger rejects any account of personal relationships or personal deities

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2 To be fair, Rosenzweig’s interpretation of the history of philosophy and theology is equally facile in many ways, but he at least presents a reasonably balanced (if simplified) understanding of the history of the West.
(e.g., in his reading of Hölderlin) insofar as he considers this sense of personhood to be wholly trapped in modern subjectivity—selfhood is simply equated by Heidegger with modern subjectivity and metaphysics. For this reason, Heidegger will not allow for any manifestation of God’s personhood beyond the vague and ontotheological, and so too for humanity; man is the neighbor of being, and not of the other. Heidegger remains entirely within the confines of the unrealized chaotic self of Rosenzweig’s *Star* 1, though his writings on “the heart” provide tantalizing glimpses of a possible personalist account. Ultimately, as I will argue, Rosenzweig’s account of *Ereignis* as personal encounter is altogether more convincing. It shows the extent to which Heidegger ignores the everyday and religious significance of selfhood defended so eloquently by Rosenzweig.

**Rosenzweig and Heidegger**

The old thinking and the new thinking met at a conference in Davos in the spring of 1929 which was fraught with generational significance. The neo-Kantian professors and their young students, represented by Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger (respectively), spent a number of days debating the best way to interpret Kant. Should Kant be understood as a foundation for the theoretical project of the Marburg neo-Kantianism, or as a precursor of the new thinking? As one might expect, Heidegger forcefully attacked the neo-Kantians for failing to do ‘real’ philosophy, for merely playing with ideas, and for completely misunderstanding Kant. Rosenzweig was ill and unable to attend the conference, though he later read a printed account and also spoke about the conference with Leo Strauss, who was in attendance.

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4 Heidegger at Davos: “To begin with, there are good reasons to doubt whether the interpretation carried out by Cassirer and, in general, by neo-Kantian epistemology, of what Kant means by the ‘Copernican revolution’ gets at the kernel of the transcendental problematic as an ontological problematic in its essential possibilities. But leaving that aside; can the *Critique of Pure Reason* simply be ‘extended’ to a ‘critique of culture’?” (GA3:264-65 [186]). He also critiques Cassirer for reducing mythical consciousness to a scientific category, and posits instead a deeper sense of myth, taken from Schelling and Hölderlin (GA3:257 [182]), as well as a deeper Kantian/Fichtean sense of ‘selfhood’ based on abyssal freedom.
Upon hearing of Heidegger’s role as a representative of the new thinking against Cassirer, Rosenzweig’s interest was piqued. Soon after the conference, he wrote an essay, “Transposed Fronts,” which notes the irony that Cassirer, Cohen’s student, remaining trapped in the old thinking while the master was already (in his later years) a representative of the new thinking. In other words, the later Cohen was on this reading more Heideggerian (in terms of the Heidegger of the 1920s) than Cassirer, in the limited sense that he understood man and God as factual entities rather than abstractions rooted in reason, thus ironically undercutting Cassirer as a representative of the neo-Kantian movement. While Rosenzweig’s portrayal of Heidegger is incorrect insofar as Heidegger was only vaguely familiar with the later Cohen, he was more perceptive than he knew. The later Cohen does indeed have more in common with Heidegger than with Cassirer, and Rosenzweig was also correct to intuit that he and Heidegger had many ideas in common (albeit with some very important differences).

Though the two philosophers were never to meet (Rosenzweig died in late 1929), this chapter can hopefully serve as a fruitful dialogue between Heidegger and Rosenzweig. My goal in this chapter is not to offer a merely external comparison of these two thinkers, i.e., to list their influences or do a historical study, but rather to see what we can learn from a dialogue between them. Indeed, as will see below, the parallels run deep. Though my intention is to place the two thinkers in dialogue, this dissertation is primarily an etiological and critical reading of the shortcomings in Heidegger’s thought, thus necessitating a slightly stronger focus on Heidegger than on Rosenzweig (particularly in the opening sections). In general, I will posit that Rosenzweig’s strengths are strongly correlated to Heidegger’s shortcomings, but this is not to say simply that Heidegger is ‘incorrect’ and that Rosenzweig is ‘correct.’ Rather, there are ambiguities with both,

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5 “Vertauschte Fronten” was originally published in *Der Morgen, Zweimonatschrift* 6, no. 6 (1930), and is collected in GS3.
though I will argue that Rosenzweig’s account of language and personhood is (at the very least) less limited than Heidegger’s.

*God and Philosophy*

As we have seen earlier, both Rosenzweig and Heidegger have a tendency to make broad sweeping claims about the history of philosophy as idealism or metaphysics. Overall, Heidegger is less egregious here, and takes the philosophical tradition more seriously than Rosenzweig, who (for example) summarily dismisses Plato and Aristotle. Even where Heidegger reads the history of philosophy in a reductive or one-sided way, his creative engagement with the tradition prevents him from simply equating ancient and modern philosophy with ‘idealism,’ though certainly he has a tendency to see the history of thought as an oversimplified steady descent from *Ereignis* into metaphysics and nihilism.

The underlying issue here is that both thinkers remain indebted to their neo-Kantian beginnings, though in a curiously inverted fashion. In strenuously rejecting the old thinking of their teachers, both thinkers react too strongly in the opposite direction (perhaps partially due to the shared influence of Nietzsche), rejecting *any* traditional understanding of substance, essence, reason, and so on, as if the neo-Kantian abuse of these terms required a complete rethinking of them. Rosenzweig turns to theology as a way to recover objectivity, but in doing this he overlooks the resources of philosophy. This is another area where Heidegger, despite his shortcomings, could add more depth to Rosenzweig’s account of philosophy in *Star* 1. Heidegger’s rethinking of *logos*/*legein* and *horismos*, for example, is far more subtle than Rosenzweig’s account of universals.

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6 It should also be pointed that just as both Rosenzweig and Heidegger conflate certain trends in modern philosophy with philosophy as such, so too with theology; both thinkers reduce almost all theology to “ontotheology” or “liberal theology.”
Both thinkers retain many of the themes and ideas of Schelling and Hölderlin. Heidegger is less clear on his debt to these figures, and claims in his reading of Hölderlin that the latter is entirely free of the context of German Idealism. More importantly, however, he makes clear in his 1936 Schelling lectures (GA42) that he thinks of his own work in the beyng-historical notebooks as in some limited sense a completion of Schelling’s project (or at least of its novel understanding of system), a systematic anti-system of philosophy which avoids what he sees as the theological and dogmatic shortcomings of the later Schelling. Rosenzweig, too, adopts both the oldest system fragment (written by some combination of Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling) and the Weltalter as the basis for a system that (unlike Heidegger’s) openly incorporates theology.

Despite the fact that Heidegger’s account of philosophy is more cogent than Rosenzweig’s in many ways, Rosenzweig’s arguments in Star 2 and elsewhere remains largely unaffected by the inadequacies of his account of philosophy in Star 1. For Heidegger, on the other hand, the flaws in his account point to systematic and fundamental problems in his work, which I now turn to address. Where Rosenzweig is able to provide a new basis for thought (by way of theology) after rejecting the so-called idealist account of God, man, and world, Heidegger is left with a philosophical night in which all cows are black, where any philosophy other than his own fragmentary gnomic thought is (supposedly) utterly destitute and captive to technology and metaphysics. While Heidegger attempts to prepare a pathway to a futural thinking which will somehow re-establish objectivity, it must be said that he fails in this attempt.

7 Perhaps the strongest example of this is where Heidegger writes that the West today thinks of the Greeks “in a Roman way, i.e., in a Latin, i.e. in a Christian way (as paganism), i.e., in the Roman, modern-European, way” (GA54:66 [45]), where each ‘i.e.’ is more absurd than the last, and the clear implication is that anything before Hölderlin is a long string of ‘i.e.’s with no essential differences. See also, in the Beiträge: “What ‘hair-style’ anthropology wears – whether Enlightenment’s moral one, a psychologically-natural-scientific one, a humanistic-personalistic one, a Christian one, or one which is politically oriented to the people – is totally insignificant for the crucial question … whether modernity is grasped as an end, and an other beginning is inquired into, or whether one sticks obstinately to the perpetuation of a decline that has lasted since Plato” (GA65:134 [94]). The difficulty here is that the wide spectrum of views opposed to Heidegger’s which might talk about the human person in a way other than from Ereignis—such as Rosenzweig’s—are summarily dismissed.
Indeed, one begins to wonder if Rickert and Cassirer were on to something in their critique of Heidegger. Rickert’s claim that anti-idealist philosophy reduces cultural values to life-values and hence must fail due to a descent into pure subjectivity and arbitrariness, without substance or form, is indeed a problem for both Nietzsche and Heidegger. Heidegger formally indicates a future philosophy which might one day speak from *Ereignis*, but this is insufficient. Just as Nietzsche tried and failed to express a paradoxical ‘philosophy of becoming,’ so too for Heidegger. Additionally, as Robert Pippin and others have noted, there is simply something missing in Heidegger’s account of philosophical knowledge; it somehow just seems to “happen.” Knowledge eventuates in a middle-voiced event without a subject or object, but this dodges the issue. Is this knowing like *noein* in Parmenides, *noesis* in Husserl, medieval *intellectus*, intellectual intuition in Schelling, or something else entirely? If it builds on Greek or German philosophy in some sense, then in what way does it do so? Heidegger does not provide a clear answer, and this provides a sharp contrast with Rosenzweig’s account of knowledge in *Star 1* and acknowledgement in *Star 2*.

The underlying difficulty in Heidegger’s account is that despite admitting that he is not making an entirely new language but is rather entering into a deeper grasp of the Greek and German languages, he often overstates the extent to which he has freed himself from history. Heidegger writes: “Truth [as *Ereignis*] is definitely disengaged from all beings in every manner of interpretation, be it as *phusis*, idea, *perceputum*, object, as what is known, what is thought. … [T]ruth’s own essential swaying … is determinable only from within the essencing.” This is more of a wish than a categorical statement, as completely disengaging *Ereignis* from history is impossible, which Heidegger admits in other places. The only way that Heidegger avoids relapsing into old metaphysics is by claiming not to provide any content (under the guise of formally indicating futural content), which is most clearly a problem with the last god, as content inevitably found its way in. This is where

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8 GA65:329 (231).
Rosenzweig’s conscious appropriation of theology provides a more cogent way to deal with this issue.

There are times where Heidegger partially acknowledges this problem and admits his reliance on metaphysics despite his attempts to transcend it.⁹ In talking about the pathway character of his thought, he notes that inevitably “every saying of beyng is kept in words and namings which are understandable in the direction of everyday references to beings … [This is] an approach that within certain limits must extend to ordinary understanding and must go a certain stretch of the way with it—in order then at the right moment to exact a turning in thinking, but only under the power of the same word.”¹⁰ An example might include understanding silence not as the mere lack of speech, but in an attunement which provides Heidegger’s deeper meaning of silence (as poetic saying). Again, this is an area where Rosenzweig’s return to everyday language, nourished by religious life, is a helpful counterbalance to Heidegger.

Without Rosenzweig’s basis in theological objectivity, Heidegger’s use of words such as “god” and “holy” are thoroughly unconvincing. Heidegger’s supposedly formally indicative definitions of these words ultimately refer back only to his understanding of divinity—which, again, is expressed in terms taken from Eckhart, Luther, Schelling, Hölderlin, etc., all of whom cannot be so easily removed from their historical and theological context (despite Heidegger’s protestations to the contrary). Heidegger in fact admits that “grasping the thinking of beyng from within the perspective of gods appears forthwith as arbitrary and ‘fantastic,’” insofar as he is “proceeding quite directly from the Gott-hafte [the divine] as if that is ‘given’, as if everyone agrees with everyone about the divine.”¹¹ He is right to admit this apparent arbitrariness. Indeed, the divine is already understood in a specific way by Heidegger, and his claim that he is indicating a sense of divinity

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⁹ Heidegger emphasizes that he is seeking “neither a destruction nor even a denial of metaphysics. To intend anything else would be childish presumption and a demeaning of history” (GA12:104 [20]).

¹⁰ GA65:83 (58).

¹¹ GA65:437 (308).
which is “entirely other” than all historical theisms (even if it in some sense a recovery of Greek
\textit{theos}) does not seem to be possible, for two reasons: Heidegger remains in a specific historical
context, and he does not present any way in which this future content could be expressed.

Heidegger’s hope that a future thinker will be able to do this is, roughly speaking—and even on the
most generous reading of his work—an admission of failure.

We learned in Chapter 2 that Heidegger’s ontotheological critique is not as unique as he
claims, but is in fact a relatively straightforward recapitulation of modern skeptical Protestantism (of
Bultmann in particular). Similarly, the way in which Heidegger claims to overcome western
metaphysics is in large part an extension of German Romantic and Nietzschean trends, moving
within these distinctions as one of many standard post-Enlightenment attacks on reason, a Romantic
valorization of art and poetry, etc.\textsuperscript{12} Rosenzweig, as we recall, lists his influences in \textit{Star} 1 and
carefully explains how he is building upon them; he also provides a detailed account of his
relationship to Cohen and neo-Kantianism, and in general has a helpful hermeneutic openness about
his position, in contrast to Heidegger.

Scholars such as Habermas,\textsuperscript{13} Rosen,\textsuperscript{14} Pippin,\textsuperscript{15} and Velkley\textsuperscript{16} have done good work on this
issue, noting ways in which Heidegger remains within modern debates, all of which attempt to wave

\textsuperscript{12} Habermas rightly notes that Heidegger remains firmly within a “repertoire of opinions typical of a certain generation,”
in “an unreflected horizon of prejudices of bourgeois culture critique” (Jürgen Habermas, \textit{Philosophical Discourse of

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Philosophical Discourse}, 138: “Heidegger does not free himself from the traditional granting of a distinctive status to
theoretical activity, to the constative use of language, and to the validity claim of propositional truth. He also remains
attached, in a negative way, to the foundationalism of the philosophy of consciousness … because Heidegger does not
gainsay the hierarchical orderings of a philosophy bent on self-grounding, he can only counter foundationalism by
excavating a still more deeply laid—and henceforth unstable—ground.” He continues (152): “The only way out of this
impasse is afforded by an operation with which he often enough found fault in respect to Nietzsche … he stands
\textit{Ursprungphilosophie} on its head without dissociating himself from any of its prior problems.”

\textsuperscript{14} “We take nothing away from Heidegger’s genius by saying that his teaching, once expressed by him, can be restated in
the language of the tradition with no greater strain than that required for assimilating the teaching of any other major
thinker” (Stanley Rosen, in Joseph Kockelmanns, ed., \textit{On Heidegger and Language} [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University
Press, 1980], 267). See also Rosen, \textit{Question of Being}, 299: “Heideggerianism is reversed Husserlianism; thinking remains
oriented toward the open and visible, of which the audible can only be derivative. It remains theoretical in the literal
sense of disregarding or bracketing all considerations other than the meditating of being.”
away the complexity of modern thought as *Technik* and representation—in Pippin’s memorable phrase, “vacuuming up all the distinctions into *das Man*.”\(^{17}\) And indeed, though he consistently fails to acknowledge it, Heidegger is thoroughly enmeshed in German Idealist, Romantic, and post-Kantian debates about the modern subject. He defines himself largely against neo-Kantians, as we have seen in Chapter 1, and in many ways this remains determinative for his later thought in ways that he failed to be sufficiently attentive to.

One early indicator of this tendency is in *Sein und Zeit*, where Heidegger remains in transcendental subjectivity but claims that he is doing ontology. This sleight-of-hand in *Sein und Zeit* §§2-4, the shift from phenomenology to ontology, is only possible if one accepts Kant, i.e., as Hart puts it, the “collapse of any meaningful distinction between ‘it is’ and ‘it appears,’” but “this is a move that remains metaphysical, conjectural, and hardens post-Kantian epistemology into a dogma.”\(^{18}\) By the time of the beyng-historical notebooks, of course, Heidegger claims to have made a leap past ontology (as normally understood), yet he remains within the Kantian confines of *Sein*.

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15 “[There is] a question of where Heidegger gets the resources to account for the possibility of pre-reflective intelligibility/finitude which renders modernist aspirations wrong. … How can Heidegger account for our acknowledgment of this historicity without some self-determination as historical? … We don’t find a coherent answer in Heidegger” (Robert Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 410). He adds: “Heidegger is largely insensitive to the fact that the modern obsession with skepticism, method, certainty, the modern sense of a loss of trust in the lived, immediate world, are not all phenomena that simply result from some sudden radicalization of modern humanity. … We tend now to forget that it is still in some sense true that the modern attention to epistemology and subjective certainty was not simply a continuation of Platonic metaphysics, nor a mere sudden ‘uprising’ of willfulness, but was itself provoked by historical crises, inventions, growing paradoxes in the old paradigms. … Heidegger’s ‘corrections’ of what he regards as the thoughtless, forgetful, hubristic, post-Cartesian spirit of modernity read like what Hegel would call ‘indeterminate negations’ or over-corrections and result, when thought through, in such curiously positivist appeals to the inexplicable play of ‘what happens’” (*Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 145-46).

16 Velkley writes that Heidegger is joined by Rousseau, Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel in “attacking objectifying forms of modern rationality that prevent attaining the unity, vitality, wholeness of true human culture” (Richard Velkley, *Being after Rousseau: Philosophy and Culture in Question* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002], 60), but “Heidegger does not seem to acknowledge that whether or not he uses the language of the metaphysical tradition, the search for the unified ground of human life connects his thinking to the modern tradition, especially to Kant and German Idealism, and that this search separates him from the Greeks by a vast gulf” (145). Rosenzweig, on the other hand, is openly in favor of certain aspects of modernity (and straightforward about his indebtedness to German Romanticism), and does not claim to be recovering primal Greek thought.

17 Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 394.

and Zeit to a large degree, and thus has not truly recapitulated the origins of Greek thought or enacted an other beginning.

Rosenzweig’s *Star*, while equally entangled in Kantian and post-Kantian debates (in *Star* 1, primarily), at least has the benefit of being openly and clearly entangled, as it were. Rosenzweig is refreshingly honest about his idealist tendencies (in his letters and elsewhere), and it is not particularly difficult to disentangle his insights from his vestigial neo-Hegelianism. So too, while both Heidegger and Rosenzweig retain Hegelian themes to an extent (though in different ways), Heidegger is more obfuscatory on this issue, for example in his insistence that *Überwindung* goes beyond dialectic, where in fact this is a distinction without a difference. Despite this claim, Heidegger ends up in a sort of Hegelian historicism, where previous possibilities (for religious life, e.g.) are negated and sublated into his own position. Like Hegel, Heidegger claims to be one of the first to see a clear shift in historical fate which has closed off previous historical possibilities to the West, and also claims that he alone among his contemporaries has perceived the true philosophical essence of religion (the ‘last god’) beyond merely institutional/traditional churches. As we have seen, Rosenzweig shares some of these Johannine Age tendencies, but ultimately he rejects this overall vision (rightly) as a bias of modern education and a turning away from the phenomena.

At the most clearly Hegelian points in the *Beiträge*, Heidegger apparently notices how he might be coming across and stops to note that “setting the beginnings into perspective also does not mean opposition, neither in the sense of crude rejection nor in the manner of [Hegelian] *Aufhebung* the first in the other. From a new originariness the other beginning assists the first beginning unto the truth of its history; and thus unto its inalienable and ownmost otherness, which becomes fruitful solely in the historical dialogue of thinkers.”

Heidegger wrestles with this issue in the 1940s, and

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19 GA65:187 (131).
20 One of the more fascinating passages in Heidegger’s work can be found in his 1941-43 notes appended to the published version of the 1936 Schelling lectures, written as he was completing work on the beyng-historical notebooks.
by the time of the 1966 interview in *Der Spiegel* he straightforwardly admits that the world of *Technik* “must be sublated [aufgehoben] in the Hegelian sense. Not set aside, instead sublated; but not by humans alone.” It is with the last god as given to the German people (in “dialogue with Hölderlin”), with their “special inner relationship” with “the Greeks and with their thought,” that this task can be accomplished.21

As I have mentioned, both Heidegger and Rosenzweig incorporate traditional theological positions into their philosophy (to a greater or lesser extent). Heidegger certainly does not include clearly defined dogmatic theological claims into his work, as Rosenzweig does, though certain distinctions that he uses privilege a particular (roughly Lutheran) understanding of theology. The difficulty here is that this predetermines the relationship of philosophy and theology and leaves both disciplines without the resources of the other, in stark contrast to Rosenzweig’s combination of the two. Heidegger then attempts to point toward a new sort of post-metaphysical “theology” and thinking/philosophy (both rethought from *Ereignis*, with the last god as somehow at the root of...
both), but as we have seen, he is thus unable to incorporate divine personhood or in fact any positive theology whatsoever, which undermines his Pascalian critique and renders his futural religion rather vague.

Rosenzweig may not think being as *Ereignis* in Heidegger’s sense, but he certainly thinks God without metaphysics as Heidegger defines it, thus making the shift into rethinking God in terms of *Ereignis* unnecessary. God has not always been conceived merely in Greek metaphysical terms as *ousia* and *causa prima*, or even as constant presence in the crude sense that Heidegger implies. God was not conceived in this way by, for example, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysus the Areopagite, Proclus, Maximos the Confessor, Eriugena, and many others. God understood as presence, etc., has not typically been external to what Heidegger considers orthodox, but has usually been assimilated into it. So too, Heidegger (following Luther and Nietzsche) drastically overstates the extent to which transcendence is dualistic and drawn from Platonic and neo-Platonic metaphysics. There is obviously some overlap between western theology (whether Islamic, Jewish, or Christian) and Neo-platonism, but the Scriptural sources—not to mention an encounter with the living God, as Rosenzweig is right to point out—are vitally important, and are not totally corrupted simply when expressed in terms borrowed from Greek philosophy.

Even if we grant that Heidegger fails to understand theology to some degree, one might respond that his real concern is etiological—that he is still correct, at least, in his diagnosis of nihilism in late modernity, even if he fails to get all the details of the history of ontotheology right. Yet Heidegger’s misunderstanding and underestimation of the tradition of Judeo-Christianity is precisely the problem, as he misses the possibility for renewal and strengthening of this tradition, which is not in fact as caught up in ontotheology as he claims. Further, in subordinating theology (as

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22 What Heidegger is really thinking of is someone like Hegel, e.g., who thinks the eternal as “absolute presence [*Gegenwart*]” (GA31:109 [77]); Heidegger then misreads this conception back into pre-modern theology.
ontotheology) to his own supposedly deeper theology, Heidegger reduces faith to a cultural and subjective phenomenon. It is not just Heidegger’s own faith that falls outside of ontotheology, but in fact the majority of theology. The deeper issue here is that Heidegger persistently fails to grasp the second deep source of the West (apart from Athens)—i.e., Jerusalem, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Many of the aspects of God that Heidegger attacks as ontotheological are in fact drawn verbatim from the Old and New Testaments, and their later expression in Greek or Latin terms does not somehow obviate this fact, as Rosenzweig makes clear. There is a theological case to be made, perhaps, that Greek philosophy completely corrupted Christian thought, but Heidegger does not make that case.

As noted in Chapter 2, it may indeed be the case that recovering Greek *theos* is arguably how Heidegger wants to enact a Pascalian critique of Christendom, where the Christian God could be rethought in line with German *theologia* as expressed in German Romanticism. However, so much of Christianity is jettisoned, and so much of pagan Greece incorporated—filtered through Hölderlin as Greco-German national/cultural myth, where divinities are local deities, related to the *ethos* of a particular *polis*—that it is difficult to see how this possibility could be left open. As Powell rightly notes, Heidegger’s articulation of the divine can “in a sense be seen as anti-Christian; indeed it sometimes seems as if the ‘god,’ the ‘last god,’ is, in its love of beyng rather than of heaven, something more akin to the Christian ‘devil,’ in the sense of Mephistopheles and the dionysianism of Nietzsche.” Any Christian God recovered by means of beyng-historical thinking will apparently be unrecognizable as Christian to anyone but Heidegger.

While Christian faith as it existed at his time could not (in his view) replace the cultural project of Christendom as a leading force for culture, Heidegger does point toward a German

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23 While parts of the New Testament were originally written in Koine Greek, Greek *philosophical* terms have a somewhat different tenor.

24 Powell, 139n17.
religion of the soil, where the last god is a god of strife and struggle (as opposed to the soporific atmosphere of democracy), enacting a unity of the German university and the German state, led by the few who could truly risk the question of beyng, raising the German people to their destiny as saviors of Europe and the West. In the mid-1930s especially, there are strong hints of, as Bambach puts it, “German redemption as futural historical homecoming for the Volk, a homecoming that could be achieved only through a reclamation of the German’s autochthonic affinity with their earliest Greek ancestors,” which is a “model of redemption” set explicitly against the Judeo-Christian tradition, despite Heidegger’s claims to abstain from theological issues.  

Heidegger writes in the Beiträge that the last god “will set up the simplest but utmost strife over its people as the paths on which this people wanders beyond itself”—i.e., the German people, those who are equal to the Greeks, as opposed to the Jewish people, the French people, Europeans in general, etc. The Beiträge’s ones to come will “rescue the Germans” in particular, “by urging them into the distress of their ownmost.” After the mid-1930s, Heidegger referred less and less often to this strife and struggle. The rhetoric was softened, but much of the substance remains, though framed more (as mentioned above) in the direction of Heimat, Bodenständigkeit, dialogue with eastern religion, and so on. Yet even after Heidegger’s political involvement, Hölderlin remains the poet of the Germans, the cultural God of Christendom remains inadequate, institutional religion is still

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25 Bambach, “Athens and Jerusalem,” 283. This echoes Nietzsche’s second ‘untimely meditation,’ among other texts. There are troubling parallels here; Philipse overstates only slightly when he writes that Heidegger’s goal was to “replace the Christian God of love with a German God of strife and war, to which individual Germans might be willing to sacrifice themselves” (Herman Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998], 299). This is misleading in that Heidegger did at times talk about, even in the 1930s, the need to recover the holy as part of a Pascalian critique of Christianity (i.e., clearing away Christendom to create a space for a possible renewal of a truer relation to God), but in 1933-1935 and even in GA65 there are definitely overtones of a Germanic god of strife and war to replace the ontotheological Christian God—though, to be sure, many commentators have overemphasized these aspects of Heidegger.

26 GA65:399 (280).

27 GA66:61 (50).
hollow and nihilistic,\textsuperscript{28} and much of the framework of the beyng-historical notebooks is still in place. The difficulty here is that the last god is at least partially determined as historically national, local, finite, and immanent, despite Heidegger’s claims that this is entirely other than all pagan or theistic conceptions of deity.\textsuperscript{29}

Heidegger’s predetermined definition of the last god explains why the beyng-historical notebooks fail to achieve clarity on this issue. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the last god is in some sense a photographic negative of Heidegger’s misconstrual of metaphysics and ontotheology, an empty signifier, a tautologous patchwork negation of every metaphysical concept and theme—the denial of God as creator, person, cause, object, truth, \textit{telos}, presence, being, love, etc. The last god must avoid (in good Nietzschean fashion) any hint of Platonism or anything that interferes with radical freedom, which for Heidegger includes virtually all properties typically ascribed to deity, which are now erroneously equated with bourgeois liberalism.

The last god remains a photographic negative because, as Heidegger seemed to implicitly realize, once he adds any content, this content immediately becomes pagan or Christian, as this is the tradition he is clearly working within. Heidegger cannot escape history, and he cannot create wholly new content for the divine out of thin air. Such content will always exist in reference to a culture, a language, and a history. His vagueness and formal indication—he writes that the last god is “neither

\textsuperscript{28} Heidegger writes to his wife (in 1949): “At any rate the organization of the church governance has been reinforced incredibly; a lot has been learned from Hitler. But the whole thing is accordingly hollow too” (FE 209).

\textsuperscript{29} For example, see Polt: “Heidegger is attempting to think of gods in terms of existential possibilities … involving an entire people. He is not theorizing about the essence of gods as the range of ways in which it is possible for gods to be present; he is thinking about the gods’ “essential happening” in terms of the existential possibilities that inform a people’s interpretation of itself and of the world around it. The gods bring to life the most important existential possibilities that inform a people’s interpretation of itself and of the world around it,” yet adds that “these possibilities cannot be converted into pure actuality, they are irreducibly possible, so they remain open to question” (\textit{Emergency}, 208). The difficulty is that this sense of religion, as a cultural possibility for the German people, provides no way to transcend that context. The example that Polt provides to explain the last god is fitting, and telling: he refers to a fictive “tribe’s gods allowing it to be a people,” where the gods can never rise above a pagan quasi-animist “source of the import of beings” (\textit{Emergency}, 212). As Polt rightly states: “Could any people revere a god that they did not believe to a being separate from them? The gods seem to become nothing but a totemic symbol” (ibid.).
‘a being’ nor a not-being; and also not commensurate with beyng—obfuscates the fact that there can be no new divinity. The last god will inevitably recover Judeo-Christian tradition, or Mahayana Buddhist tradition, or Taoist tradition, or German Romanticism, etc., which cannot be (and do not need to be) thought from Ereignis in the way that he imagines. Despite his insistence that the last god is free from tradition, Heidegger in fact cannot help but unconsciously import into this philosophical god various aspects of Christian and pagan conceptions of the divine drawn from a bewildering combination of thinkers.

To be fair to Heidegger, if pressed on this issue after the 1930s, he may have responded that while he is embedded in various contexts, he is trying to rethink divinity as understood by the tradition and point toward something new which cannot yet be expressed. To be sure, Heidegger very well might be right, and this new turning in thought, rooted in Ereignis, may be the only way to save the West. However, given the enormity of the task, he provides far less guidance and content than one would hope, and his misunderstanding of the tradition indicates that his etiology may be flawed.

The difficulty here is Heidegger’s use of the word Gott to bring in a patina of religion, but then distancing the last god from anything recognizable as concretely religious. This is ultimately a philosophical theology (in a non-beyng-historical sense) which claims to transcend both philosophy and theology as normally understood. In fact, formal indication for Heidegger turns out to be “something of a ruse,” as Dahlstrom puts it, as his concepts are “far from being agenda-free or neutral, and are sufficiently rich in content to yield criteria for further determination of their meaning.” This is especially the case when formally indicating something as fraught with meaning as Gott, where it is essentially impossible to avoid smuggling in theological positions.

30 GA65:263 (185).
31 Dahlstrom, Truth, 247.
This would not necessarily be a problem in and of itself, as long as the person undertaking the analysis was clear about his or her preconceptions, but Heidegger is exceedingly vague and unclear on such issues in the 1930s. Again, the underlying issue here is Heidegger’s lack of hermeneutic openness about his own origins. Rosenzweig has a forthrightly autobiographical system, almost to a fault, truly appropriating Nietzsche’s insight into the philosopher as the form of the philosophy. Heidegger grasped this in the 1920s, but his later appropriation of Nietzsche elides the latter’s playfulness, humor, and emphasis on autobiography. Instead, Heidegger presents Nietzsche as a stern metaphysician. A more balanced reading of Nietzsche, such as that of Rosenzweig in Star 1, might have allowed Heidegger to look more closely at his hermeneutic situation.

As noted in Chapter 2, in his earlier years Heidegger (to his credit) had asked readers to be critical of him, to help show where his preconceptions had distorted the content of his thought, but by the 1930s this hermeneutic openness is absent. By the time of the beyng-historical notebooks, Heidegger claims that among his contemporaries, only he transcends mere historical influence and cultural/societal norms. Indeed, as he writes in the Beiträge, “beyng-historical thinking is outside any theology and also knows no atheism, in the sense of worldview or a doctrine structured in some other way.”32 What he really means, in passages such as this, is that his own understanding of God and philosophy is not mere worldview, i.e., that others lack his own deeper understanding of godhead as thought from Ereignis. However, this really just illustrates Heidegger’s misunderstanding of the resources of theology and of the tradition, and as we will see below, his quest for recovering the holy is hindered by this misunderstanding.

We have seen the ways in which Heidegger and Rosenzweig differ in their understanding of God and philosophy. While both share the idea of moving beyond the denuded God of

32 GA65:438 (309).
179

neo-Kantianism and the philosophical fixation on wonder, their solutions differ. Both turn to the
divine as a way to restore objectivity to philosophy (either with the Judeo-Christian God for
Rosenzweig, or the last god for Heidegger), but Heidegger makes this transition in a muddled way.
He misapplies the ontotheological critique to Christianity, underestimates the tradition, and fails to
recognize the extent to which he remains within modern debates, which is detrimental to his
understanding of the issues that he hopes to solve.

_The Fourfold and the Everyday_

Heidegger and Rosenzweig have a shared goal, informed by their understanding of
philosophy and theology, for which _Beiträge_ and the _Star_ are meant to prepare the way—the
restoration of wholeness for the West. For both thinkers this wholeness is in some sense related to
the divine, whether understood (in Rosenzweig) as the healthy common sense of simple relations to
God, man, and world, and of the everyday as coterminous with the miraculous, or (in Heidegger) as
a non-representational relationship to beings, i.e. _Gelassenheit_ (releasement), in the “holy” fourfold of
gods, mortals, earth, and sky, recovering a _Heimat_ by way of a poetic response to the uncanniness of
the absence of divinity which will prepare a space for any future revelation. Both are trying to
overcome abstractions of reason in favor of life, particularly in their critique of cultural religion (as
Christendom or liberal Judaism). Both thinkers aim to recover the whole, but in which sense? Which
“everyday” is this? Both thinkers agree with Nietzsche’s claim that God is dead, but the precise
nature of the God that has died and the possibilities that may or may not be closed off to the West
by this death are understood very differently.

I begin by noting the commonalities between the two. There is 1) a sense in which
Heidegger and Rosenzweig both hope to restore a basic wholeness, followed by 2) a deeper sense in
which they develop more specific religious content on the basis of this wholeness—and here their
views begin to diverge. Both reject the neo-Kantian and modern representational relationship to reality and the abstractions of academic philosophy. Accordingly, both attempt to recover a relationship to existence, though notably Heidegger views this as a nearly impossible task, as being at home (in a religious tradition or any other tradition) is simply not possible in late nihilism, whereas Rosenzweig claims that one needs simply to return to the continuity of religious life.

Yet the first stage of their argument is roughly similar. Rosenzweig’s account of the incipient, general sense of the basic reality of man, God, and world found in all pre-modern and most modern cultures (and correlated to Star 1) correlate with Heidegger’s more general formal indicative descriptions of the fourfold regarding the basic space for any divinity, for any relation to the earth, and so on. How
tever, this issue quickly becomes more complex. As we saw in Chapter 3, for Rosenzweig there is an ambiguity regarding common sense as this basic receptivity of man to divinity and the more specifically Biblical and Judeo-Christian version of common sense in Star 2, where he implies that Judaism and Christianity have an understanding of God, man, and world which goes beyond paganism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism (all of which are critiqued in Star 1). So too, Heidegger’s developed version of the fourfold privileges Greek theos as being truest to Ereignis and therefore superior to other manifestations of divinity. While Rosenzweig is clear about the reasons for privileging Judeo-Christian common sense, Heidegger is somewhat misleading and unclear in his account of theos and the fourfold (which has deeper implications for his thought), and so I begin with a critique of Heidegger’s account.

In his attempt to avoid metaphysics and ontotheology, Heidegger creates an abstract philosophical construct of the holy and of god, thus remaining within Greek philosophical and

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33 Heidegger’s clearest expression of this basic wholeness is probably the following: “[T]he] essential relations within which humankind stands are [the] relation to world, the relation to earth, the relation to gods and to alternative gods and false gods. These relations are not, however, simply added on to ‘human beings.’ … [T]o be human is in itself to be the unity of this configuration. The becoming homely of human beings thus in itself comprises this full essence of being human” (GA53:52 [43]).
German Romantic categories without fully coming to terms with these influences. As Westphal rightly argues: “By virtue of his own attempts at overcoming metaphysics, he seems to side with Luther, Pascal, and Barth in their attempt to overcome the Babylonian captivity of faith to philosophy; but this is only to substitute a new philosophical master for the old ones.” As we recall from Chapter 2, Heidegger arguably takes his account of holiness to be _ur_-phenomenological, in the sense of providing a transcendental account of any possible manifestation of divinity. The last god is the _Gottwesen_, the essencing of divinity in general, a space in which a particular God or gods could appear; the last god is what allows God to become God, to _sich ereignen_, come into its own. As Heidegger puts it, citing Eckhart, “Being _istet_ God, that is, being lets God be God. ‘Is’ speaks here in the transitive and the active.” Being, thought as _Ereignis_, is above God. Heidegger would famously refer to this _ur_-phenomenological account of the holy as “already present in the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching of Jesus,” which in fact shares some features with Rosenzweig’s account of the new thinking, the anti-metaphysical recovery of common sense which can be discovered by Jew, Christian, and pagan alike (though Judaism still represents the highest truth, for Rosenzweig).

Heidegger’s account of _Ereignis_ as above God is true in the limited sense that for traditional theology, in the order of knowing, there must be an open or clearing in which God appears. But this issue of the order of knowing is not particularly interesting or relevant for the subject matter of theology. In the order of reality, God would give the open (though not in a crudely causal sense). Purely in terms of man as a finite being, from the human perspective, the _Da_ functions as a super-transcendental deduction of the categories, the condition for the possibility of any experience at all, of humanity as dative of manifestation. Yet while the last god may be Heidegger’s theological

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34 Westphal, 19.
35 GA65:406 (285); see also GA15:63 (34).
36 GA7:182 (PLT 182).
attempt to reform theology, to clear away Christendom to make room for true Christianity, it is
difficult to see how this true divine could appear when Heidegger's implicit theological requirements
for this divinity are so sharply limited. Despite the fact that his conception of holiness is drawn from
Hölderlin's hymns, Heidegger does not even allow for Hölderlin's own understanding of the divine.

We recall the paramount importance of Hölderlin for Heidegger's project from Chapter 2.
Heidegger states that he wants Hölderlin's poetry to be “a ground-word, a poetic word that leads to
the ground of Dasein, to its openness before any specific comportment toward it,”37 i.e., the
ur-phenomenological. And as we saw in Chapter 2, Heidegger takes over the terminology of the
absent God, last God, flight of the gods, etc., from Hölderlin (though with overtones of similar
phrases in Nietzsche and Schelling). Yet this reading of Hölderlin is one-sided, to say the least,
emphasizing Romantic Greco-Germanic themes (and even ontotheologizing them) at the expense of
Christian personalist themes. Heidegger's misreading of Hölderlin's understanding of holiness and
silence is of the utmost importance because this poet is Heidegger's primary source for the last god
and for the bulk of the beyng-historical notebooks in general, yet Heidegger shows very clearly here
that he consistently overlooks his unwitting involvement in the themes and ideas of German
Romanticism. Heidegger continually claims in the beyng-historical notebooks and concurrent
lectures that the most essential aspects of Hölderlin are free from cultural influence,38 and

37 Figal, 204.
38 He writes that there is “little use” in “literary-historical and poetic-historical manners of observation” of Hölderlin
(GA65:463 [326]) and insists that though Hölderlin is “in the midst of the metaphysics of German idealism,” this
movement is in fact “separated from Hölderlin by abysses” (GA42 [190]). Heidegger insists that Hölderlin is not “just
another composer of poems, dramas, and novels” and that only those who, unlike Heidegger, “do not want to be
touched by it” are unable to see that Hölderlin's work is actually “a decision over the final flight or new advent of the
gods” (GA45:126 [110]), regarding which “the essence of art and of metaphysics are not sufficient to lend this poetry the
essential space appropriate to it” (GA45:30 [26]). In other words, anyone who fails to understand Hölderlin in terms of
Ereignis is “in an unwitting rebellion against whatever turns counter to our habitual representations, wishes, and
pretensions” (GA53:31 [27]); other readings of Hölderlin are dismissed as coinciding “with the realm that metaphysics
has laid down for some two thousand years now” (GA53:38 [33]), for “despite all appearance of dialectic that his essays
might exhibit, had already gone through and broken the speculative dialectic” (GA15:24 [10]).
Heidegger’s desire to lift Hölderlin out of world-history is paralleled with his futile desire to free himself from history, to transcend academic debates or historical influences.

Heidegger ‘ontotheologizes’ Hölderlin’s hymns, as it were. He transforms the personal gods of Hölderlin into denuded philosophical concepts, which is precisely the sort of thing one would expect Heidegger to avoid assiduously. The holy and last god as described by Heidegger are ontotheological in the sense that they usually convey a purely conceptual God abstracted from actual lived religion, reduced from a person (Christ, Zeus, Heracles, etc.) addressing another person (Hölderlin, the poet) into a philosophical construct, an impersonal event of appropriation or projection of the self. The translation of Hölderlin’s God into a general philosophical construct of Da or the holy is ontotheological insofar as this is a God “before whom we can neither pray nor dance,” as Heidegger said of the ontotheological God. Ultimately the holy begins to look suspiciously like the Absolute of German Idealism, which (accordingly) comes to language in poetry.

Heidegger’s account of the holy is disturbingly similar to a preconceived neo-Kantian framework imposed on religious phenomena from above, which is precisely what the young Heidegger (and Rosenzweig) sought to avoid. Heidegger overlooks the actual religious experience of Hölderlin, of Christians, and of Greeks—indeed, of anyone besides Heidegger himself—that elevating theory over concrete revelation. God enters philosophy only as Heidegger sees fit, and only in the way that he sees fit, and is always subordinate to thought, i.e., to a predetermined philosophical schema. Any interpretation of Hölderlin’s holy or divine as a philosophical construct

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39 Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin brings to mind his concurrent reading of Schelling’s freedom essay in the 1936 lectures, which somehow leaves out Schelling’s constant (and vitally important) references to Christianity.
40 Rosenzweig’s private vision of the star, mentioned above, also falls prey to this tendency.
41 To be fair, while Heidegger claims to give the only true reading of Hölderlin, he has not claimed to give an accurate reading of Hölderlin according to any normal standard. As he writes, “Researchers in literary history will inevitably see the dialogue [i.e., Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin] as an unscholarly violation of what they take to be the facts. Philosophers will see it as a baffled descent into mysticism [ein Abweg der Ratlosigkeit in die Schwärmerei]. However, destiny pursues its course untroubled by all that” (GA5:274 [204]). This is a general principle for Heidegger; see also GA3:250 (175): “Discovering ‘Kant in himself’ is to be left to Kant philology” and Aristoteles: Metaphysik IX 1-3. Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft, ed. H. Hüni (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), translated as Aristotle’s Metaphysics Theta
(the quintessence of manifestation) is precisely and utterly opposed to the singular, personal God that Hölderlin evokes; the Father, the Most-High.42 As Michel Haar points out, the idea that the holy is above the gods in an ur-phenomenological sense relies entirely on a single passage, the only in Hölderlin’s *oeuvre*, where the holy is identified with nature and is described as “prior and superior to the gods.”43 Heidegger takes this single passage out of context, ultimately leading to his claims in the Hölderlin lectures (i.e. “the holy, which is beyond the gods, determines the gods”44) and the elaboration of this in the “Letter on Humanism.”45

Heidegger’s misconstrual of Hölderlin explains why he cannot allow for Rosenzweig’s deeper personalist sense of the everyday, which is in fact far closer to the world described in Hölderlin’s hymns. Heidegger’s “sigetic,” the reticent speaking/thinking of the last god which is drawn largely from certain passages in Hölderlin, is in fact the opposite of Hölderlin’s silence. Many of Hölderlin’s poems emphasize, rather, the sense of silence in Rosenzweig’s *Star 3*; i.e., God’s awe-inspiring presence, the idea that we cannot find the words to possibly express the plenitude of

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1-3: On the Essence and Actuality and Force, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 102 (86); hereafter “GA33”: “The Leibnizian comprehension of Aristotle is admittedly not correct, but by no means in the sense that it is incorrect, for ‘correct and incorrect’ is no standard at all when it comes to true historical knowledge.” So too, for Heidegger to ignore and ontotheologize various aspects of Hölderlin’s work may seem defensible at first, as he is only looking at the ‘philosophical’ significance of Hölderlin, but this is a very porous boundary that Heidegger has no trouble transgressing at other times—and in any event, the problem is that for Hölderlin in particular, ignoring these aspects of his thought is to distort utterly the content and meaning of his poetic work.  


43 Haar, 90.

44 GA53:173 (138).

45 As Haar writes, this is a “threefold distortion of Hölderlinian ‘theology’ … first of all there is a translation of names such as ‘God of heaven’ or ‘Father’ into abstract, neuter ontological terms; correlative there is an effacement of the personal character of this god, and finally a voluntary disregard for the filiation between the gods and the ‘Father’” (92). He continues (95-96): “Looking more closely at the Heideggerian doctrine of the holy, it actually seems closer to a traditional metaphysical theology than does the Hölderlinian quest for God. In effect, the holy as Heidegger describes it is a reprise of the definition of God as the ‘all-powerful,’ the ‘alpha and omega,’ simply stripping from this all reference to a personal identity. The holy is the principle (the original beginning), the eschaton (the final end) and is what governs every interval between the two. … ‘Nothing more primordial can be thought’, like Anselm … and again, as the God of St. Anselm, the holy is not able to not exist, since it is immediately, before all beings … can one really claim that the ‘poetry of Hölderlin holds fast to the command of the holy’ and, without saying a word about it, put to one side the explicit personal relation of the poets to God as well as of God to men? Is it not strange (without any textual support) to suppose that the Father is preceded by the Sacred in spite of every indication to the contrary?”
God’s majesty. This is negative theology only in the sense that all words fall short, an Eckhartian silence that the young Heidegger was quite familiar with.

As Haar writes, it is not a matter of a contrast “between the immediate evidence of the Holy and the melancholy of the ‘default of God’ or the nostalgia of the ‘flown gods,’ but rather between the joyous feeling of the continual return of the heavenly ones, the incontestable and overabundant presence of the supreme God and the extreme difficulty of celebrating them, the difficulty of poetic naming.”\textsuperscript{46} God the Father as described in Hölderlin has far more in common with the God of Rosenzweig, the God of the Old Testament (albeit conflated by Hölderlin with the Johannine Age, chiliasm, the Greek pantheon, etc.), but above all an emphasis on the \textit{personhood} of divinity. Heidegger cannot allow Rosenzweig’s God, the personal God of tradition and of Scripture, because this is (supposedly) lost in ontotheology, and hence a philosophized “godding” must give a dispensation to any lower merely theological God. Even if Heidegger hopes for the Christian God to be rethought from \textit{Ereignis}, this God must appear under the auspices of impersonal \textit{Gottwesen} in order to appear at all, and this is an implicit theological position which predetermines what will count as wholeness in Heidegger’s fourfold.

One important consequence of the limited scope of Heidegger’s fourfold is that it remains self-enclosed in finitude. As Rosenzweig aptly puts it:

Belief in the One … is clearly opposed by the experience of life, which would have all of us believe in a variety of powers. Their names change, but the variety remains. Culture and civilization, people [\textit{Volk}] and state, nation and race, art and science, economy and class, ethos and religiosity—this is an overview, and surely not a complete one, of today’s pantheon. Who will deny the reality of these powers? Surely no ‘heathen’ has ever served his gods much differently, or more piously and sacrificially, than we today serve those powers.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Haar, 99.
\textsuperscript{47} GS4.1:64 (45).
With his limited conception of the holy and the fourfold, Heidegger is unable to escape finitude in the sense of “Volks and state,” as Rosenzweig puts it. Any future faith built on the basis of God (whether Christian or otherwise) thought from Ereignis cannot escape the limitations of the whole as Heidegger describes it. In rejecting all religious experience except for a general sense of the absence of deity, Heidegger (like Hölderlin) retreats to immanence and hence focuses on the Boden and the German people. We can see this most clearly in his attempt, in the beyng-historical notebooks, to move beyond worldly and cultural contexts, to disassociate himself from worldly affairs in an attempt to lift himself and Hölderlin into a mythologized, ethereal history of beyng.

As we have seen earlier, this all clearly falls within the wider context of Heidegger’s lack of hermeneutic openness about his German Romantic influences, the telos and worldview that he has taken over from Hölderlin—though, to be sure, this is a one-sided reading of Hölderlin restricted to the purely ‘Hellenic’ aspects of German Romanticism. Heidegger elides the personalist aspects of Hölderlin yet adopts the nature mysticism and Greco-German nationalism, the retrieval of a mythical Greece, reconciling German culture with itself, brushing aside institutional religions, and so on.48 Heidegger claims that his own project is a retrieval of the ancient Greek beginning, free of modern obfuscations, but he cannot so easily free himself from modern debates, which he fails to work through.

Rosenzweig, on the other hand, takes a very different lesson from the 20th century, and rejects worldly politics altogether, in stark opposition to Heidegger’s overemphasis on nationality, Volks, and Boden. With his focus on the Jews as liturgically pulled out of history, he is more able to clearly see the dangers in any human collective rooted in soil (am Boden) rather than the eternal, a stance which inevitably fails as there is no true eternity in the state. Part of Rosenzweig’s point in his

48 See Bambach: “Back behind Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics lay a concealed Greco-Germanic ‘ontology of glory’ smuggled in under the name of Hölderlin. In place of the unique and singular, the Heidegger of the 1930s and early 40s embraced the myth of collectivity associated with the Volks and the Gemeinschaft” (“Athens and Jerusalem,” 285).
writings on the Johannine is that nations forget their universal calling (to convert the world)\textsuperscript{49} and now forget, tragically, that “nationalism … is nothing more than ethnicism, paganism.”\textsuperscript{50} Rather, the human “needs bonds that bind the whole human being.”\textsuperscript{51} He added in a letter to Victor Ehrenberg: “The ship nationality hasn’t sufficient draught to navigate the ocean of world history. It can only acquire this by placing the cargo of Christianity in its hold.”\textsuperscript{52} Without the trans-political, the common sense of Judeo-Christian tradition, Europe cannot be saved in the way that Heidegger wants the last god to save it. The last god is too small, as it were, and the space that this god will open up is too limited.\textsuperscript{53}  

Modern nationalism, even in its sublimated Heideggerian form, is merely a secular substitute for messianism and election. As Rosenzweig writes, the focus on “pagan myth” leads the nations “away from God and their neighbor.”\textsuperscript{54} When individual nations have a sense of election, this is in fact borrowed from Christianity, where “in certain exalted moments” nations have “a festal garb in which they like to dress up.”\textsuperscript{55} Heidegger’s vision of Germany is just such a secular eschatology. The Germans are the chosen people, and will lead Europe to wholeness again. Heidegger is in this sense  

\textsuperscript{49} This is a somewhat complex issue in Rosenzweig. He does not claim that the universal Christian empire will be an end in itself, and allows a sort of political theology for the Christian Church, while Judaism stays apolitical. Rosenzweig emphasizes (GB 175-76; letter of October 30, 1918, to Gritli Rosenstock) that Germany and Europe are merely finite and temporal. He has doubts about Rosenstock’s utopian idea of Europe, and ultimately views the German state as such, taken as end in itself, a ‘bad infinity’ in Hegel’s sense, though he still hopes for the Christian state to work towards the redemption of humanity (while Judaism works outside of the state, towards the same goal). \textsuperscript{50} GS3:419; partially translated as Cultural Writings of Franz Rosenzweig, trans. and ed. Barbara Galli (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 93; hereafter “CW.” \textsuperscript{51} GS3:419 (CW 94). \textsuperscript{52} GS1.2:993 (93), letter of October 19, 1924. He adds, for the apolitical Jewish people, “[what] remains to us as ballast … is our Judaism.” \textsuperscript{53} Rosenzweig writes that the Jews are pulled out of history by their blood, the continuity throughout the ages which provides Jews with something deeper than the mere temporality that governs the world, i.e., soil in the sense of state or politics. Rosenzweig writes of the “eternal” community of blood, versus “peoples of the world are not content with the bonds of blood. They sink their roots into the night of earth, lifeless in itself but the spender of life, and from the lastingness of earth they conclude that they themselves will last. Their will to eternity clings to the soil and to the reign over the soil, to the land” (Star 332 [299]). \textsuperscript{54} Star 365 (329). \textsuperscript{55} Star 366 (330).
a prophet, in the sense of the Hebrew Bible, trying to restore the people—20th-century Germans rather than the ancient Hebrew tribes—away from their profligate ways and to their deeper calling.

_Athens and Jerusalem_

Rosenzweig helps to illustrate that the underlying cause for these difficulties in Heidegger’s work is his overemphasis on the Greek and German roots of the tradition (a fixation on Athens, overlooking Jerusalem) which is integrally related to his inability to properly account for human and divine personhood. Heidegger’s account of the theological difference (first mentioned in Chapter 2) strictly demarcates theology from philosophy and claims that the word being cannot and should not be applied to God, and hence true speech regarding God must be free of any metaphysical or philosophical language. But what if Heidegger has misunderstood ‘being’ altogether?

Heidegger writes that “there is no doctrine of ‘being’ in the Bible,” and this is obviously true in the sense that the Hebrew prophets and early Christian apostles did not formulate a philosophical doctrine of being, but the being (Hebrew _hayah_) of God described in Exodus 3:14 and elsewhere has informed three millennia of discourse about being in both theology and philosophy. It is not that faith is somehow limited and trapped in metaphysics and needs Heidegger’s question of being to be deconstructed and founded anew. Rather, Heidegger is limited and trapped in philosophy, and in fact “faith” has a deeper and more profound understanding of being than Heidegger (or Luther) admits. For example, when medieval theologians write about being, they certainly do not only have metaphysical _einai_/ _ens_ in mind, but also the richer sense of being in Scripture which they knew from their everyday liturgical life.

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56 This passage, drawn to my attention by Vedder (307n62), is taken from Walter Strolz, _Martin Heidegger und der christliche Glaube_, ed. Hans-Jürg Braun (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 51; the letter is dated June 14, 1965.
Rosenzweig makes this point in a number of places, most notably in one of the last essays written (in July 1929) before his untimely death, “The Eternal: Mendelssohn and the Name of God,” which critiques Mendelssohn’s rationalist translation of Exodus 3:14 (in Hebrew, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, typically rendered as “I am that I am” or “I will be that I will be” in English) as “I am the essence that is eternal.” Rosenzweig notes that this clearly misses the meaning of the Hebrew, which emphasizes God’s personal presence in the world. Rosenzweig writes that the Hebrew *hayah* is, unlike the Indo-Germanic ‘to be’ that Heidegger examines so carefully, related to the person of God, the becoming, entering, and happening of God. The language of being in the Bible has nothing to do with metaphysics; rather, it denotes the event of love between man and God.

Rosenzweig notes the clear difficulty in translating *hayah* with the language of metaphysics. For Isaiah 57:15, which he translates as God’s “dwelling in man’s contrite heart,” Rosenzweig makes it clear that dwell is indeed the best word to use, rather than “the most abstract word imaginable; ‘being,’ this true philosopher’s term.” To say that God is in man’s contrite heart is precisely wrong. Rather, as Rosenzweig puts it, “The creator exalted above all the world establishes his ‘dwelling,’ while the most abstract God of philosophy has his ‘being’ in the contrite heart.” Thus we can see that a rejection of metaphysics or ontotheology does not entail rejecting the presence of God, for God’s being is not restricted to metaphysics.

Heidegger’s rethinking of being as dwelling is a partial breakthrough to this insight, but in general his account of *Seyn* in the beyng-historical notebooks is radically incomplete insofar as it forgets that being as used by Christian theology and philosophy is deeply informed by personalist *hayah*. The narrative that Heidegger presents regarding the theological difference and the need for the last god assumes that the history of being is now completely lost to nihilism, but Rosenzweig

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57 GS4:1:73 (59, 61). Conversely, Heidegger’s writings on dwelling tend to refer only to the fourfold rather than a true self/other relationship.
shows that this is not the case, as there is more to being than Heidegger admits. The personal God of Scripture is already beyond metaphysics and ontotheology but not thereby free of being, which is not only an index of finitude, as Heidegger claims. Where Heidegger writes that “all types of ‘theism’ exist only since Judeo-Christian apologetics, which has metaphysics as its intellectual presupposition,” we can say with Rosenzweig that this is simply mistaken.58

Rosenzweig goes on to illustrate that this point applies to more than just being. Among other examples (kabod for beauty, etc.), he mentions ruach and ebad, which have provided theology and philosophy with a richer definition of spirit and unity (respectively) than that provided by metaphysics. As Rosenzweig writes, ebad signifies a higher sort of unity than the Greek to ben, the unicity of God over against the idols—“of this the philosophy of unity knows nothing.”59 Ebad also has the advantage of being a participle, Einung (“one-ing”), against static metaphysical language.60 So too for spirit; in his translation of the Bible with Buber, Rosenzweig makes clear that spirit is not opposed to the body in a metaphysical dualism, but rather the Hebrew ruach signifies nature/spirit combined, the sensory and the supersensory.61

Where Heidegger’s account of the last god attempts to avoid any and all language that refers to being as presence, which would consign divinity to coarse objectivity, this overlooks the fact that the Hebrew language (and the history of theology) had already found a way to account for God’s presence outside of metaphysics. The presence of God is not coarse objectivity as Heidegger describes. He writes that “God is never a being whom man gets closer to in varying distances. Rather, gods and their godhood arise from out of the truth of beyng … the thingly representation of God and the explanatory reckoning with God as the creator are grounded in the interpretation of

58 GA65:411 (289).
59 GS3:621 (GMW 41).
60 GS3:621 (GMW 42).
61 See GA4.2 and Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger, 266.
beingness as produced.” The difficulty here is that in trying to ensure that God and the divine are not reduced to an object of consciousness commensurate with (and present to) discursive rationality, Heidegger denies all presence.63

Yet as Rosenzweig’s translation of the Hebrew Bible emphasizes, the meaning of the Hebrew (particularly the word hayah) lacks a rigid metaphysical dualism. Rather, the this-worldly and other-worldly are always integrally connected, as Heidegger had pointed out in his deconstruction of Christian “transcendence.” Rosenzweig writes: “Hebrew moans and groans in the face of a concept such as [Spinoza’s] natura sive deus, which the Latin deals with effortlessly. The lack of the sleek ‘or’ in Hebrew makes it impossible to coax the spirit of the language into combining a term from modern philosophy with a primordial word seething with the storms of creation.”64 Latin or Greek words cannot truly incorporate this experience. Rather, one needs Hebrew, the other deep source of the West apart from Greek.

As Heidegger knew so well, language gives to a culture the lineaments of what they can understand, and for this reason Heidegger was limited by Greek and German. Hebrew opens a richer world, and points to a different set of basic phenomena, the intersubjective common sense of Rosenzweig rather than the fourfold. The irony here is that, as Caputo and others have pointed out, the early Heidegger was perfectly aware of the importance of both *polis* and *ekklesia*, Athens and

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63 There are a few tantalizingly brief passages where Heidegger points to the importance of the Scriptural understanding of God as a tool to recover language and personhood from modern corruption; e.g., GA12:12 (PLT 190): “As against the identification of speech as a merely human performance, others stress that the word of language is of divine origin. According to the opening of the prologue of the Gospel of St. John, in the beginning the word was with God. The attempt is made not only to free the question of origin from the fetters of a rational-logical explanation, but also to set aside the limits of a merely logical description of language. … [T]he figurative and symbolic character of language is pushed into the foreground.” George Seidel (“The Last Heidegger,” *Idealistic Studies* 32:1 [Spring 2002], 66) also points out that Heidegger read the Gospel of John in 1924 with Bultmann and Gogarten, where Bultmann spoke of *logos* in John 1 as *Ereignis*, the Christ-event. Heidegger’s last god functions in a similar way; *Ereignis* is the word, the *logos*, come to its own in Dasein (GA65:470-72 and GA66:351-53 refer to John 1:1; GA65:263 refers to John 1:11).

64 KS 227 (Glatzer, 270).
Jerusalem, and understood both to be equally rich and equally originary. The young Heidegger was enacting something similar (though certainly not identical) to Rosenzweig’s project, “philosophizing” theology and “theologizing” philosophy, using phenomenology to deepen and rethink theology (and philosophy), yet by the 1930s he had closed himself off to this possibility.

**Personhood and Ereignis**

The most important consequence of the limitations of Heidegger’s fourfold in contradistinction to Rosenzweig’s common sense to which we now turn—their differing understanding of personhood—can be illustrated by an interesting parallel in their terminology. Bernhard Casper was the first to write about the “family resemblance” between Rosenzweig’s “ereigneten Ereignis” and Heidegger’s “Ereignis er-eignet.” Heidegger describes the purely finite, immanent play of Ereignis as abstract and ur-phenomenological, a fourfold which precludes the irruption of the God of revelation (as argued above), and Rosenzweig describes the “occurred event” of God’s real relation to man in the present day, which remains true even with the death of the metaphysical or ontotheological God.

The difficulty here is Heidegger’s deficient understanding of divine and human personhood. This deficiency is a consequence of his restrictive “Hellenic” reading of Hölderlin, delineated above, at the expense of the personalist and Judeo-Christian aspects of his poetry. Heidegger mistakenly believes that he is correcting Hölderlin’s supposedly metaphysical references to a personal

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65 Caputo, Demythologizing Heidegger, 4. See GA60 in general and GA56/57:18 (17).
67 Star 178 (156).
68 GA65:3 (3) and elsewhere. See also Der Satz vom Grund, ed. P. Jaeger (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), translated as The Principle of Reason, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 188 (113); hereafter “GA10”: “The fate of being, a child that plays … why does it play, the great child of the world-play Heraclitus brought into view in the aion? It plays, because it plays. The ‘because’ withers away in the play. The play is without ‘why.’ It plays since it plays. It simply remains a play; the most elevated and the most profound. But this ‘simply’ is everything, the one, the only … as the abyss it plays the play that, as fate, passes being and ground/reason to us. The question remains whether and how we, hearing the movements of this play, play along and accommodate ourselves to the play.”
relationship with personal deities. Hölderlin’s descriptions of such relationships is equated, by
Heidegger, with modern subjectivity and the corruption of true divinity and true humanity (thought
from Ereignis in accordance with Greek theos as the strife in the fourfold) with the foreign adulterant
of Roman (i.e., Catholic and modern) concepts of selfhood. As Heidegger writes, “Let one not
disfigure [verunstalte] Hölderlin’s poetry by the ‘religious element’ of a ‘religion’ [‘das Religiöse’ der
‘Religion’] which expresses the Roman interpretation of the relation between men and gods.”

Heidegger’s implicit theology will not allow a manifestation of the divine apart from a
spectral wholly other deity. Even if interpreted as Schelling’s esoteric “eternally becoming” Christian
God, this has almost nothing to do with God the Father or God the Son as usually understood. In
stark contrast to Rosenzweig’s vision of the dialogue between man and God, for Heidegger the poet
(who is not yet a self) is brought “face-to-face” with a faceless ontotheological holiness, an
impersonal event. The “human being is the neighbor of being,” and not of the other. Heidegger’s
fourfold depersonalizes the selfhood of Ereignis, against Rosenzweig’s everyday interpretation of
Ereignis as a personal encounter which is hermeneutically prior to Heidegger’s account. The difficulty
is that in Heidegger’s sweeping rejection of the positive content of theology and philosophy and his
attempt to rethink the tradition anew, he also rejects any positive sense of selfhood, which is now
interpreted (along with everything else) as steeped in metaphysics and nihilism. The divinity and
humanity that are appropriated to each other in the strife of the fourfold, as described in the
beyng-historical notebooks, are bare Eigenheit without a proper name; in other words, bare self in
Rosenzweig’s terminology, falling short of the realized self of Star 2, Rosenzweig’s robust account of
the human person with a proper name, who lives in the first and second person, rather than in the
impersonals and formal indications of Heidegger.

69 GA4:114 (137).
70 GA9:172 (261).
Yet Heidegger should be defended to an extent, and I will now make an attempt to sympathetically utilize the resources of his thought to formulate a possible response to this critique.

First, Heidegger is quite right that the human being is the site of Ereignis, and he is right to point to the importance of the subject. He unnecessarily restricts this site to Da or Da-sein, as he erroneously understands “rational animal” and “human being” to be completely lost to metaphysics, but Heidegger does in fact point the way to personhood to a limited extent, a personal event which incorporates some of the insights of Rosenzweig. First, there is the basic sense of Ereignis as owning, appropriating what is appropriate to me, a constitution of self which parallels what Eckhart writes about the constitution of the soul,71 though Heidegger is vague on what a selfhood thought from Ereignis might look like.

There are other instances where Heidegger provides a possible answer, for example, in his writings on “the heart.”72 The heart is one of the most curious aspects of the later Heidegger, and at first it appears to be yet another example of his entanglement in the complex debates of modern

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71 See GA65:245 (173). Caputo (see also Van Buren) points out that just as the soul must stay open, God must take initiative, etc., so too for Da-sein and beyng: “Dasein, like the soul, must make a clearing in itself by detaching itself from beings, in order to ‘let’ being itself come to pass ‘unrefracted’ and undistorted by human subjectivity. Dasein must prepare an open place, not for God, but for being … “[a]n extensive and even startling analogy can thus be built up between the ‘birth of god’ in the ‘ground of the soul’ in Eckhart and the Ereignis of truth in Heidegger’s later thought” (Mystical Element, 144 and 152). Heidegger also borrows the idea that there is something deeper than man, a hidden ground from which we become man (Mystical Element, 156). Caputo also notes the clear parallels with Eckhart’s theology: “The great being of the soul is to be the ‘birth place’ of the Son, the ‘clearing’ in which the Father engenders his Son” (Mystical Element, 162). There is also the word Gelassenheit, borrowed from Eckhart, changed from theological “loving trust in an impenetrable mystery” to the merely finite “openness of thought to an inscrutable play” (Mystical Element, 281). F.-W. von Herrmann suggests, correctly, that in taking over the structure of Eckhartian Gelassenheit, Heidegger is possibly preparing a space in which an Eckhartian revelation could happen (Wegs ins Ereignis, zu Heideggers “Beitragen zur Philosophie”[Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1992], 386).

72 See also GA40, where Heidegger makes a tentative step into something approximating Rosenzweig’s grammatical thinking. Heidegger decries the linguistics-based rigidity of the tenses, “stuck in these rigid forms as if in a net of steel,” and states that we need a “real revolution in our relation to language” (GA40:56 [41]) beyond this limited interpretation of Greek and Latin. He gives the example of the Greek infinitive hegin, which can be understood such that “one no longer even thinks about voice and tense but only about what the verb in general means and makes manifest” (ibid.). Like Rosenzweig, he bemoans the “priority” of the “third person singular of the present indicative,” adding that “we do not understand ‘being’ with regard to the ‘thou art,’ ‘you are,’ ‘I am,’ or ‘they would be,’ although these all represent verbal inflections of ‘being’ that are just as good as ‘is.’ We take ‘to be’ as the infinitive of ‘is.’ To put it the other way around, we involuntarily explain the infinitive ‘to be’ to ourselves on the basis of the ‘is,’ almost as if nothing else were possible” (GA40:96 [70]). Heidegger comes very close to something like Rosenzweig’s position here, but due to his reliance on the tools of Greek and German (and his insistence that the I-thou is based in modern subjectivity), he misses the real possibility for grammatical thought, i.e., using the first and second person in philosophy.
anti-rationalism. Uncharacteristically for Heidegger, he declines to engage in the usual etymology or analysis of what he means by this word, but peremptorily states a number of things about the heart without any explanation or justification. This reticence is surprising insofar as the heart seems to be roughly equivalent to soul (and Rosenzweig’s realized self), and is the one instance where Heidegger provides a positive account of immanent presence outside metaphysics:

At about the same time as Descartes, Pascal discovered the logic of the heart in contrast to the logic of calculating [rechnenden] reason. The interior and the invisible of the heart’s space is not only more inward than the interior of calculating representation, and therefore more invisible, but at the same it also reaches further than the realm of objects that are merely produced. Only in the invisible innermost of the heart does man tend toward that which is to be loved. … Admittedly, this presence, like that of the conventional consciousness of calculating production, is a presence of immanence. … The widest compass of beings becomes present in the inner space of the heart. The entirety of the world attains here a presence in each of its relations that is essentially equal. … [The heart] is another name for the open; this other name comes from thinking the open itself from out of the immanence of calculating consciousness and into the inner space of the heart, which means that the representing-producing turning away [vorstellend-herstellende Abkehr] against the open has been reversed.\(^73\)

Perhaps surprisingly, given the general tenor of the beyng-historical notebooks, Heidegger seems to be correlating the heart to man as Da-sein, the open, which indicates a more or less theological position in alignment with Pascal and Eckhart—Heidegger mentions the heart in relation to “Eckhart’s spark of the soul [Seelenfünklein].”\(^74\) It would appear, then, that Heidegger attempted to

\(^73\) GA5:306 (229-30). See also GA8:143 (139), where Heidegger refers to Pascal and the “thinking of the heart.” He continues: “The heart, the heart’s core [is] … man’s inmost mind, [the] innermost essence of man which reaches outward most fully and to the outermost limits, and so decisively that, rightly considered, the idea of an inner and an outer world does not arise … we ourselves are the gathering … [which] we are committed to beforehand by being human beings”; we gather in memory, where “memory means as much as devotion, this word possesses the special tone of the pious and piety, and designates the devotion of prayer, only because it denotes the all-comprehensive relation of concentration upon the holy and the gracious” (GA8:149 [144]). See also GA42:53-54 (31): “The sole criterion of church doctrine for the whole ordering and forming of truth and knowledge breaks down … [and] criteria get turned around. The truth of faith and faithful knowledge are now measured in terms of self-certainty. … Pascal tried […] to hold fast to pure thinking and pure faith, both in their originality and acumen together and in one. Next to the logic of the understanding comes ‘the logic of the heart.’”

\(^74\) GA8:153 (149). See also Caputo, Mystical Element, 165: “[In Eckhart,] the heavenly Father speaks his eternal Word in the soul of the detached man; the Word that He speaks then is the divine Word itself. The soul in which the Father speaks becomes an ad-verb (beiwort) of the Word itself. Now since the work of the Father and of the soul is one work, the soul can ‘respond’ (entspricht) to God by speaking the eternal Word to the Father. We then have a ‘dialogue’ between the Father and the soul, like the co-bearing of the Son by the Father in the soul, and of the Son by the soul in the Father.
use ‘the heart’ as a way to incorporate the personalist side of the Western tradition. Using this decidedly unphilosophical term taken from both theology and everyday language and employing it as a precondition for the Da signifies a true irruption of the personal into Heidegger’s thought that he cannot fully account for within philosophy (which may explain why he does not attempt to do so).

For a further exploration of this issue, we turn to a letter that Heidegger wrote to his wife on August 12, 1952:

The essay by Buber is excellent and when you’re here we’ll have plenty to say about it. The diagnosis is very far-sighted and of great wisdom—but the healing must start even deeper than he suggests. And there remains a question of whether we mortals address our eternal Thou (Buber means God) through our mortal Saying-Thou to one another, or whether we aren’t brought into correspondence to one another only through God’s address. The question remains whether this ‘either-or’ is sufficient at all or whether both the one and the other have to be prepared even more primordially.75

There are a number of interesting implications that stem from this letter. Perhaps first and foremost, the fact that Heidegger is reading Martin Buber and praising his “great wisdom” may come as a surprise to many critics—presumably including Buber himself, who wrote that Heidegger “knows nothing of any essential relation with others or any real I-thou with them which could breach the barriers of the self.”76 It is also noteworthy that Heidegger writes this letter as a relatively straightforward Christian (“mortals,” correlated to the heart, in dialogue with God’s “Thou”), writing privately to his wife and apparently unconcerned with the death of the metaphysical God of Christendom—though, to be sure, he may have softened his remarks for her sake. It is interesting to note, as well, that Heidegger’s position is precisely equivalent to Rosenzweig’s in at least one respect, though Heidegger of course was not aware of this convergence. Namely, Heidegger held that Buber did not go deeply enough and that we are brought into correspondence with each other only

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75 FE 225.
through God’s prior address, which is precisely Rosenzweig’s critique of Buber in *Star 2* (and his letters).  

It is also striking that Heidegger implies that Buber (and correspondingly, Rosenzweig) cannot really get to the matter of I-Thou or the divine Thou without first rethinking the language that has been corrupted by metaphysics (which also makes one wonder how Heidegger is justified in using “I-Thou” language at all). Yet this is where my argument in the earlier sections of this chapter applies. Heidegger is mistaken in his position regarding the corruption of language by metaphysics, because words such as being, spirit, and self have roots in Biblical Hebrew as well as Attic Greek, and the Western tradition has always used these non-metaphysical resources (to a greater or lesser extent) when talking about supposedly metaphysical concepts.

Heidegger’s restrictive sense of the fourfold is the deeper issue at play here. In the 1950s, Heidegger addresses the “even more primordially” of the above-cited letter, writing that “we tend to think of face-to-face encounter exclusively as a relation between human beings.” One might expect Heidegger then to allude to the divine Thou, but in fact he returns again to the *ur*-phenomenological fourfold, writing: “Yet being face-to-face with one another [Gegen-einander-über] has a more distant origin; it originates in that distance where earth and sky, god and man reach one another.” The *Beiträge* echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the bare *Eigenheit* spoken of above: “Selfhood can be grasped neither from the ‘subject’ nor at all from the ‘I’ or the ‘personality’ but rather only from inabiding in the guardianship of belongingness to beyng.” This is the “even more primordial”

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78 To be sure, of these three terms, “being” has been more heavily indebted to Greek philosophy than Biblical Hebrew.

79 GA12:199 (103).

80 GA12:199 (104). See also GA9:54 (122): “Only because Dasein as such is determined by selfhood can an I-self comport itself toward a you-self. Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of being an ‘I,’ the latter only ever being disclosed in the ‘you.’”

81 GA65:489 (344).
preparation that Heidegger falsely assumes to be necessary. The bare pre-self of the fourfold is equivalent to Nietzsche’s “loneliest loneliness,” of which Heidegger writes:

[This is] where a human being is altogether himself, standing in the most essential relationships of his historical existence in the midst of beings as a whole. This ‘loneliest loneliness’ subsists prior to and beyond every distinguishing of I from thou, of I/thou from the ‘we,’ and of the individual from the community. In such loneliest loneliness there is no trace of individuation as isolation. It is rather a matter of that kind of individuation which we must grasp as authentic appropriation \[Vereigentlichung\], in which the human self comes into its own. The self, authenticity, is not the ‘ego’; it is that Da-sein in which the relation of I to thou, I to we, and we to ye is grounded; it is that on the sole basis of which these relationships can first be brought under control.\[^{82}\]

This self, Nietzsche’s self, is precisely what Rosenzweig describes as the chaotic non-self of Star 1. This pre-self is also equated by Heidegger with Buddhist non-self,\[^{83}\] which, again, Rosenzweig mentions in Star 1 as an example of the bare self before being called by God into true personhood.

Heidegger was analogously working out the equivalent of Rosenzweig’s account of philosophy in Star 1, the basis of a possible account for something like Rosenzweig’s account of theology in Star 2. In other words, Heidegger was trying to recover and rebuild philosophy (analogous to Star 1) as a basis on which any future thinking about faith (analogous to Star 2 and Star 3) could be built. Rosenzweig, on the other hand, offers a far more convincing solution which is in fact the precise inversion of Heidegger’s position—that wholeness (the holy, common sense) cannot be recovered if we do not hear God’s Thou first. Heidegger’s convoluted idea—that the ones to come must wait to hear a call from Ereignis which will occasion the last god’s passing by in order to restore a holiness which might then allow divinity to return—is unnecessary. The living God does not need to wait for German poets to recover an abstract holiness as a precondition for His revelation to man.\[^{84}\]

\[^{82}\] GA6.1:244 (2:24).
\[^{83}\] Petzet, 180.
\[^{84}\] Again, Heidegger: “The holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been
Even where Heidegger attempts to undertake a hermeneutics of the particular historical self, he remains in a philosophical construct, i.e., in the third-person indicative. Rosenzweig shows that one can have persons and I-thou relationships built on non-metaphysical, non-“Roman” sources—i.e., the language of liturgy and Scripture. Heidegger, as we have seen, partially approaches this position in his writings on the heart, but he is prevented from making the decisive leap by his reservations about using the “I-thou” in philosophy. Heidegger’s sense of bare selfhood thought from Ereignis precedes ‘I-self’ and ‘thou-self’ in the same sense that intentionality ‘precedes’ subject and object. Thinking in terms of Ereignis, selves cannot arise at all, as these come too late, as it were.

However, this not only prevents Heidegger from accounting for human personhood, but it also affects his understanding of God’s personhood. God becomes spectral, vague, almost Kantian (much like the God of Rosenzweig’s Star 1): “God must be utterly other.” The idea that God as the ultimate Thou is a subject to be deconstructed, that this is a merely ontic view of God mired in metaphysics which diminishes the divineness and wholly otherness of God, is misleading at best. The selfhood of God transcends this context, as Heidegger seems to acknowledge in his letters. It is confusing, to say the least, that Heidegger would understand Thou as trapped in ontology. In Christian theology, the idea of God as humanized is, obviously, drawn from the incarnation of God as a human being, and in Judaism, as Rosenzweig emphasizes, anthropomorphic descriptions of God are found throughout the Hebrew Bible (the eyebrows of God, etc.), and we should rather speak of theomorphism.

85 See GA26.
86 GA31:135 (94).
87 This is a rejection of the rationalist ontotheologizing of God, rejecting any human features for God, as if these were merely ‘anthropomorphic’ in a pejorative sense. Rosenzweig replies, rather, that man possesses divine features; man is theomorphic.
In his writings on Hölderlin, Heidegger explores the possibility of a future dialogue in which
gods and humans can “hear from each other,” but Rosenzweig shows that this dialogue already
exists in the everyday, as long as one does not ignore it. If Heidegger had written an explicit theology
(which he claimed in his later years that he “often thought” of doing), it is entirely possible that he
would have expressed the idea that God as ultimate Thou is not trapped in metaphysics, that the Da
could (or should) be primarily an openness to the other, to dialogue. We can imagine roughly what
Heidegger’s theology might have looked like—incorporating the heart as well as language from
Pascal, Eckhart and Luther, and thinking God from Ereignis in some sense.

Concluding Remarks

The young Heidegger understood, as we noted earlier, that the “spiritual world” of “what is
wrongly called Christian philosophy, patristics and scholasticism” is something that “modern
philosophy ever more sharply blocked itself off from.” Just three years later, Heidegger would argue
that Scholastic categories are an external corruption of Christian life, and that the relationship to
God described in medieval Dasein is closed off to our historical epoch. Decades later, when
Heidegger was asked to summarize his early thought, he stated that he was strongly interested in
“the relationship between the word of holy Scripture and theological-speculative thinking,” which
is a reasonably good description of Rosenzweig’s Star. If Heidegger had not been so unduly
influenced by Luther, Nietzsche, and Jünger, one could easily imagine a quite different Beitrag.e.

88 GA39:68-72.
89 GA15:437.
90 GA59:94 (75); emphasis added.
91 See Caputo, Mystical Element, 148-50: “In 1916 Heidegger possessed the key with which to unlock the depth dimension
in Scholasticism; sometime after 1919 he threw the key away … [his initial goal was to] illustrate both the detached heart
of Eckhart and the passive reason of Scotus, the same necessity of the subject to purify itself of its objectivity; reverence
and piety in both epistemology and life. The apparently abstract Scholastic categories are in fact rooted in the historical
life of the Middle Ages … Dasein is characterized as anchored in a transcendent primordial relationship to God; the
fluctuating world of sensible reality is just one kind of experience, and not the highest one.”
92 GA12:91 (9-10).
Yet Heidegger turned away into something akin to what Rosenzweig refers to as “the usual sanctimonious [scheinheiligen], and in truth merely lazy, pretense at sadness over the ‘meaningless’ or even ‘ungodly’ present.” As we recall from Chapter 2, Heidegger writes:

There is culture and cultural tendencies, church and society . . . [S]ome individuals might cling to them in personal honesty and remain satisfied, but from all of this as a totality nothing any longer arises, no criteria and creative impulses any longer come from [this totality], everything just continues to be carried on. Inner devastation and lostness increase beyond measure.

One can only say to this that Jünger and Heidegger are not necessarily correct. In fact, traditional forms of Abrahamic faiths are alive and well. Löwith reports that Heidegger was surprised and rather annoyed, in the 1930s, about the ‘vitality’ of the Christian churches, which were—according to his intuitions—supposed to be collapsing in nihilism.

Indeed, it may very well turn out that the death of God, instead of being the denouement and inevitable endgame of three millennia of the old thinking, is instead a curious detour—i.e., a description of certain Western Europeans turning away from God, for a few centuries, before humanity returned to its normal orientation, free of what Rosenzweig rightly calls the superstitions of modern education. The last god will simply not be needed in a world filled with vibrant faith. Whether or not one agrees with the content of such faiths, one can certainly see here the real wirkende Kraft to overcome nihilism and machination that is lacking in Heidegger’s vague philosophical prophecy of the last god.

And so too, the contortions of various Western philosophers in the past two centuries regarding the death of God or the inability to believe can be simply dissolved in the everyday life

93 GS4.1:16 (lviii).
95 Indeed, some secular thinkers have recently expressed concern about demographic projections for the coming decades which point to a rapidly shrinking minority of unbelievers. See, for example, Eric Kaufman, Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?: Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century (London: Profile Books, 2011).
96 This conversation is mentioned in Richard Wolin, ed., The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 142; the passage was drawn to my attention by Powell, 139n17.
that Rosenzweig describes, an everyday which is just as accessible as it always was. Pöggeler was critical of Rosenzweig’s emphasis on the Eastern European Jews, writing “we must ask if Rosenzweig’s idealization of East European Jewry was not an evasion of Western problems,” but this is precisely the sort of pessimistic historicist answer that Rosenzweig is attempting to refute. Rosenzweig’s point is that “Western problems” are not as all-encompassing as some have thought, and that a return to religious life is still possible.

The great irony here is that religious life in the Judeo-Christian tradition already contains all of the resources that Heidegger was attempting to provide in the last god. As Rosenzweig makes clear, theology already thinks the sensuous in the supersensuous; is able to think God as an object of experience which nonetheless transcends Vorhandenheit; contains an anthropology and epistemology that transcend the arbitrary limits of Kantian and post-Kantian thought; and has the wirkende Kraft to actually solve the crisis that is afflicting the West. Rosenzweig points to the possibility for a messianic transformation, love of neighbor as the real exception to modernity, and a recovery of the tradition which nonetheless remains cognizant of both the insights and shortcomings of modern thought.

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The profound commonality between the work of Heidegger and Rosenzweig—an affinity which many scholars have overlooked—affords a number of themes that could be studied in more

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97 “Rosenzweig and Hegel,” 123.
99 Heidegger consistently provides a straw man of the usual theological position, as if direct involvement with God is reducing Him to an easily graspable concept: “All those who wish for a direct involvement with gods and for something graspable and handy; those who ponder upon organizing ‘religions’; those who foster the visibility and intelligibility of gods’ worship and thereby refer to what is past,” as if this is merely “tying back man and his producing-representation on a superhuman object and a superhuman sphere” (GA66:243 [214]), but as we have seen above, this is thoroughly misleading, as ontotheology is not coterminous with theology.
detail. By necessity, a comprehensive analysis of *Sprachdenken* in relation to Heidegger’s post-beyng-historical writings on language could only be intimated within these pages, but there is surely more work that could be done here. Other scholars could also take into account Rosenzweig’s post-*Star* material (the writings on Halevi, the Lehrhaus lectures, and his Bible translation), which I unfortunately could not examine within the limits of this dissertation. A number of other topics could bear closer examination. Rosenzweig and Heidegger have a curiously complementary understanding of art, for example. It would also be very interesting to examine their complex appropriation of Kant, Hegel, and Schelling, which would have the added benefit of helping scholars to rethink the appropriation of German Idealism in 20th century philosophy. Finally, one could fruitfully examine the themes of Heidegger’s beyng-historical notebooks and Rosenzweig’s work in general as contributing to a new understanding of various areas in late 20th- and early 21st-century continental philosophy (e.g., alterity, God-talk, and post-metaphysical theology in thinkers such as Derrida, Marion, Kearney, Vattimo, Manoussakis, et al.).

In any event, we have seen that while both Heidegger and Rosenzweig attempt to transcend philosophy by way of a leap into a new thinking, Heidegger’s attempt falls short in ways which correspond to Rosenzweig’s strengths. Rosenzweig achieves objectivity by straightforwardly appropriating theology, whereas Heidegger attempts to remain strictly within thinking and strives to avoid theological dogmatism, but falls short in either ontotheologizing or unwittingly importing content (i.e., not formally indicating in any meaningful way) the content of philosophy, theology, ontotheology, and the last god. If Heidegger had read Rosenzweig’s work, in all likelihood he would have argued that Rosenzweig was merely a dogmatic metaphysician (just as Heidegger decried Schelling’s later work a relapse into theology and dogmatics), i.e., that Rosenzweig had not made the necessary leap into *Ereignis*. 
Yet Heidegger himself fails to make this leap—and ironically, the leap may be altogether unnecessary. So too, while Heidegger remains within the categories of traditional theology in a subtle and largely unacknowledged way, Rosenzweig has the virtue of openly and comprehensively relating philosophy and theology to each other and legitimately showing the limits of a type of thought (whether neo-Kantian or Heideggerian) that fails to incorporate his vision of liturgical everyday life, the first/second person, neighborly love, the proper name, and healthy common sense. Rosenzweig’s system is not entirely convincing, to be sure, and proof would be too much to ask for such a momentous topic, but at the very least he presents a more convincing and complete story than Heidegger.

To be fair, there are some areas where Heidegger has much to teach Rosenzweig. As we have seen, Heidegger’s care with philosophical terms, his sensitive (if largely one-sided) readings of the history of philosophy, and his careful deconstruction of the tradition (rather than Rosenzweig’s somewhat facile catch-all phrase for the old thinking, “from Iona to Jena”) could all add depth and breadth to Rosenzweig’s account of the history of philosophy. While Heidegger admittedly over looks hayah in favor of einai/Sein, I think it is fair to say that his nuanced understanding of being could improve upon Rosenzweig’s relatively less developed views on the topic. Heidegger could also help to deflate some of Rosenzweig’s Hegelian tendencies, such as his largely failed attempt at strict systematicity in the Star; the Beiträge shows a better way to do a ‘systematic’ yet unsystematic work. It would also be interesting to enrich Rosenzweig’s relatively undeveloped writings on hayah with Heidegger’s understanding of Seyn as Ereignis, rethinking it as a personalist or intersubjective Seyn.

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100 This is not to say, however, that Rosenzweig did not make the leap into Ereignis (as understood by Heidegger) in some sense. In my opinion—and possibly in Heidegger’s (purely hypothetical) opinion, if he had happened to understand Rosenzweig in the way that I do—Rosenzweig not only transcends the ‘old thinking’ but takes a further leap than Heidegger into a personalist Ereignis. My point above is simply that Heidegger’s “leap” attempts to arrive at a destination already reached by traditional religion.
Both Heidegger and Rosenzweig are absolutely right to point out the very real tendencies towards shallowness, metaphysical dualism, ontotheology, etc., in contemporary theology and philosophy. The difficulty is that Heidegger was blinded to the possibility (even in the 20th century) of simple religious life. Yet with his own goals and premises, and with the points that Rosenzweig elucidates, we can see that Heidegger unwittingly points to the only real solution that would solve the issues he wants to solve—holistic religious life, rooted in a tradition. With a deeper and more sensitive understanding of the history of the West, Heidegger may have followed Rosenzweig in returning to this living tradition rather than hoping for the dispensation of the last god.

101 See Heidegger’s letter of January 29, 1939, to his wife (writing of friends): “I envy—albeit not wholly in earnest—such people, who from the assurance of their faith somehow cope with everything and from this attitude can create free of care” (FE 160).
Bibliography

I. Primary Sources

Martin Heidegger

The following list of abbreviations refer to Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975-)

SS = summer semester
WS = winter semester
KNS = war-emergency semester


GA82 = Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen (soon to be published).


210


*Letters*


*Other*


Franz Rosenzweig


II. Secondary Sources


