

**MARTIN HEIDEGGER
AND MEISTER ECKHART**
A Path Towards *Gelassenheit*

Barbara Dalle Pezze

With a Foreword by
Timothy O'Leary

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used throughout the present work.

- BP Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982).
- BT Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- C Heidegger, Martin, *Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking*, in: *Discourse on Thinking*, trs. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
- CP Heidegger, Martin, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, trs. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
- D Heidegger, Martin, *Discourse on Thinking*, trs. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
- LH Heidegger, Martin, *Letter on "Humanism"*, tr. Frank A. Capuzzi, in: Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 239-276.
- TI Eckhart, Meister, *The Talks of Instruction*, in: Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, tr. and ed. M. O'C. Walshe, Vol. III (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1998), pp. 11-60.
- WiE Herrmann v., Friedrich-Wilhelm, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie"* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994).

FOREWORD

This book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the development of Heidegger's philosophy, especially as that thought worked itself out in relation to the thought of the fourteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart. However, more than this, Dalle Pezze here provides us with an indication of a path of thinking, which, by drawing upon these two diverse thinkers, leads in a direction that neither had themselves envisaged. The central motivating insight of Dalle Pezze's investigation is that there exists an affinity between the work of Heidegger and the writings of Christian mystics from Teresa of Avila to Meister Eckhart. The way in which she explores this insight, with patience, rigour and sympathy, is what ultimately gives the present work its lasting quality.

The book provides us with a careful exposition of Heidegger's shift from the "fundamental-ontological" form of thinking which characterises *Being and Time* (1927), to the "being-historical thinking" which is enacted in the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (1936-38), to the late work *Conversations on a Country Path About Thinking* (1959) in which the theme of *Gelassenheit* is finally and fully developed. The striking feature of Dalle Pezze's development of this exposition is that her style – not only of writing, but also of thinking – engages directly in, and in fact performs for the reader, what she calls the "experience of thought" that she is investigating. Far from the distanced and disengaged style of most academic writing, then, the current book draws the reader in to share, or at least to have a more direct understanding, of the shifts, turns and experiments of Heidegger's thought.

Very few books dealing with Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit* have been published in English. One of the strengths of Dalle Pezze's book is that it engages critically with the foremost of these books (John Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, 2000), while also introducing to an English-speaking audience the wide range of scholarship that has been published in German and Italian. This is truly a book that builds bridges across the national and

linguistic boundaries, which unfortunately carve up the world of academic scholarship. Once again, however, what sets Dalle Pezze's work apart is that it tries to move beyond these academic debates through an engagement with and an enactment of the modes of thought under investigation. In this regard, the striking feature of this book is that having established the form and role of the thinking of *Gelassenheit* within Heidegger's thought, it then dares to suggest that Heidegger's own evaluation of Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit* is flawed. In a final chapter that is full of potentially fruitful suggestions, Dalle Pezze argues that Heidegger is mistaken in ultimately dismissing Eckhart as a metaphysical thinker. Rather, according to Dalle Pezze, both Heidegger and Eckhart are thinking within a dimension that is beyond, or prior to, metaphysics as it is conceived by Heidegger. Crucially, she argues that it is at the level of an *experience* of thought that Heidegger and Eckhart can be said to find a common ground. Or rather, the suggestion is that it is in such an experience that we, the readers, can find a common ground between, on the one hand, the foremost modern critic of Western metaphysics and, on the other hand, the foremost medieval exponent of the true relation between man and god.

It is this combination of the ability to lead the reader through complex philosophical debates, with the ability to bring to life an experience of thinking, that sets this book apart as one which makes an important contribution to philosophical discourse.

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The realization of this work is indebted to a number of people. First of all I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Timothy O'Leary. His interest in my work, his patience and constant encouragement, made it possible for me to realize this study. I would like to thank Prof. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, to whom I am indebted a lot in my understanding of Heidegger's thought. Without his insights and his readiness to share his knowledge, I could not have undertaken this investigation. To him goes, therefore, my sincere gratitude. In addition, I am truly thankful to my friend Tiziana Salvi for her untiring encouragement throughout the whole process of this work. I further thank my sisters Sara, Elisa and Stefania, my dearest cousin Francesco, Andrea and my extended family that as always supported me also in this challenge. Finally, I wish to deeply thank my parents, Annalisa and Gianfranco, to whom I dedicate this work. Without their aid, their tireless support and their trust in me, I would have never finished this work.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Preliminary Remarks

The original idea for this work was to investigate the relation between Heidegger and mysticism. This idea dawned on me during my reading of the works of Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart, readings with which I was engaged in conjunction with my first attempt to tackle Heidegger's work *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*.¹ What captured my attention most of all was the impression that what these mystic figures present, in their writings, appears to have a certain affinity with Heidegger's philosophy. Both the mystical experience and the thinking of Heidegger seem to reach out to a dimension in which the essence, the core of human existence, appears to belong.

Fascinated by this, I began to read Heidegger's *Contributions* from this perspective, in order to test the possibility of my claim. Given the style used by Heidegger in the *Contributions*, my first approach was quite awkward. Indeed, it is not a book that reads easily, and what is conveyed therein is especially cryptic and obscure. Nonetheless, the depth out of which this incomprehensibility was coming, appeared to be somehow familiar. Captured by this experience, I became convinced that Heidegger and the mystics had something to say that goes beyond those metaphysical debates with which philosophy usually preoccupies itself.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, tr. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Von Ereignis)*. Gesamtausgabe Bd. 65. Hg. V.F.-W. v. Herrmann (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag 1989). Hereafter cited as *Contributions*. Quotes from this work will be indicated in brackets as CP, followed by the page number of the English edition and the page number of the German edition in square brackets.

I shared this intuition with Professor F.-W. von Herrmann, a leading scholar of Heidegger's philosophy. This intuition was not only supported by Prof. von Herrmann, but also began to take shape as a research project. In particular, *Gelassenheit* emerged as the key focus of this investigation and Meister Eckhart, as the one who introduced Heidegger to this concept, appeared to be the right interlocutor for this journey, which became a journey towards *Gelassenheit*.

The original idea was to disclose the paths which, starting from different origins and in different ages, led the two figures to conceive their respective concepts of *Gelassenheit*. Once this goal had been reached, the next task would have been to investigate whether and how these two experiences could come together, and whether these findings could still say something to us in the twenty-first century.

Thus I began my investigation into Heidegger's philosophy; but the more I became involved with his thought, the more I became aware of both its complexity and richness, as well as the manifold directions in which my work could have developed. So I started to glimpse the possibility of developing this first part of the investigation as a 'workshop'. I hoped that, in this way, I could follow a path that would both allow me to develop an understanding of Heidegger's thought and lead to an experience of thinking – not only of Heidegger's path towards *Gelassenheit*, but also of our own path.

In the present study, this first part is the only one that could be developed. Heidegger's philosophy, particularly as expressed in the *Contributions*, proved to be extremely enigmatic, and it took a great deal of effort and time to even begin to engage with Heidegger's thinking experience. The second part of this work, which would have dealt with Eckhart's path towards *Gelassenheit*, and which would have allowed a more detailed confrontation between the two figures, remains, at this stage, still a task to be developed. The only trace of it in the present study is the last chapter, in which the possibility of a confrontation is laid out. Having said that, let me now proceed to introduce my work.

What is this Work About?

The present work deals with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and his concept of *Gelassenheit* in particular. Beginning with the early work *Being and Time*² (1927), and then working through *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, written in 1936-1938, I attempt to delineate a thinking path that leads towards what Heidegger identifies and experiences as *Gelassenheit*, a concept which he develops in its essential trait in his later work *Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking*³ (1959). Amongst the vastness of Heidegger's production these will be the key works I will concentrate on in the present study.

We ask ourselves: why should one think about *Gelassenheit*? Why should somebody spend precious time in an attempt to understand this concept? What makes this concept worthy of investigation? Does *Gelassenheit* have any impact on our lives? And, above all, what precisely does Heidegger mean by *Gelassenheit*? What is 'being-historical thinking'? And, finally, why should we attempt to relate Heidegger and Eckhart on this topic? The task of the present study will be to address these questions, and the method employed will be an attempt to enact thinking turnings that would locate us on Heidegger's path towards *Gelassenheit*.

The chapters that follow in this work are conceived as signposts and turnings along the above-mentioned path, which attempts to be a path towards a

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 2001); Gesamtausgabe Bd. 2. Hg. v. F.-W. v. Herrmann (Frankfurt a. M., 1977). Quotes from this work will be indicated in brackets as BT, followed by the page number of the English edition and the page number of the German edition in square brackets.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking*, in: Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, tr. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). German edition: Martin Heidegger, *Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldgespräch über das Denken*, in: Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Stuttgart: Neske, 2000). Hereafter referred to as *Conversation*. References from this work will be indicated as follows: C, and the page number of the English edition, followed by the page number of the German edition, into square brackets.

transformation in thinking. The first step on this path consists in an investigation of the fundamental-ontological way of thinking as enacted in *Being and Time*. The particular aim of this investigation, carried on in Chapter Two of the present study, is to show how Heidegger thinks the essence of man differently, that is, existentially. Man as Dasein is that being who in fact carries on the journey towards *Gelassenheit*, that is, a journey towards a fundamental change in thinking which brings man closer to the nature of that "future thinking" that thinks the truth of 'being'.

In Chapter Three, we shall contend with the "being-historical thinking" enacted in the *Contributions*. Being-historical thinking is that type of thinking which endeavors to think being in a fundamentally different way than the metaphysical approach, as it engages with the understanding of being as "be-ing," that is, it thinks being as "*Ereignis*". Man, disclosed as Dasein, or in his ownmost possibility for being, is now open to prepare for "the leap of thought". At this point the investigation moves in the crossing from the fundamental-ontological perspective enacted in *Being and Time* to the being-historical thinking. The leap of thought designated here takes place in the "crossing" between the first and the "other beginning" of thinking, and the very moment of the leap is that in which this work attempts to rest.

In Chapter Four, we contend with the concept of "the last god," a concept that becomes available from the perspective opened by the leap. The last god does not belong to the realm of metaphysics. Metaphysics is in fact not only the epoch within which "the truth of Being falls from memory. It remains forgotten,"⁴ but also the history that developed the concept of god as *summus ens*, as the first cause of everything existing, whereas the last god is "totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God" (CP 283 [403]). The last god rather belongs to being-historical thinking. It represents the

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Word Of Nietzsche "God Is Dead"*, in: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, tr. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1997), p. 110.

possibility of authentically, that is, non-metaphysically, thinking the essence of that which is divine. The attempt to think the last god brings us another step closer to the deepest and most immanent transformation of our own way of thinking.

From Dasein to the last god, through the leap of thought, we shall be in a better position to engage with Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*. In Chapter Five *Gelassenheit* is investigated as the essence of thinking – not of representational thinking, but of “future thinking.” The essence of future thinking, towards which we attempt to turn, is now revealing itself. As the essence of thinking, *Gelassenheit* discloses itself as releasement to be-ing, “releasement to that-which-regions”. The possibility of experiencing *Gelassenheit* exposes man to his innermost way of being, and lets man dwell and rest in the openness of being's truth.

At the end of this path, once having gained an insight into Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, and reached the dimension out of which this experience is disclosed, we shall contend with the relation between Heidegger and the German mystic Meister Eckhart -theme of the last chapter of the present investigation. The experience of *Gelassenheit* opens to a dimension within which, I claim, Heidegger and Eckhart come together. My assumption, which I leave open to further investigation, is that the *experience* of *Gelassenheit*, as developed and introduced by Heidegger, points to and sheds light upon the dimension out of which Eckhart speaks of the true relation between man and God which, I suggest, could be said to be beyond and before metaphysics, despite Heidegger's belief that Eckhart still belongs within metaphysics.

Before actually beginning this investigation, however, it would be worthwhile to briefly recall the early years of Heidegger's life in which he mainly dealt with Catholicism. Indeed, during these years we find the deepest root of what I claim affected Heidegger's development as a man and thinker, that is, his relation to the faith of his youth, which Heidegger himself named the “thorn in his

flesh.”⁵ I mention Heidegger’s experience during those early years in the context of this work because I believe that the whole development of Heidegger’s quest for the truth of being, his life-long interest in the innermost being of man, and his restless search for the ‘truth’ behind our existence would not have been possible had he not been ‘displaced’ so effectively by his experience with the Catholic Church, to which he was prepared to devote his life. I would claim that these early years of Heidegger’s life were his ‘awakening’, the first turning that moved his path of thinking towards a completely otherwise way of thinking.

After contending with Heidegger’s thorn, I shall introduce *Gelassenheit*, propounding a preliminary interpretation of this concept. Having in this way set the backdrop for our investigation, I will then move on to examine the path of thought that brought Heidegger to his concept of *Gelassenheit*.

Heidegger’s “Thorn”⁶

As put forward by Hugo Ott, since his youth Heidegger had always lived in a “staunchly Catholic country.” Messkirch, Constance, Beuron and Freiburg were places of strong spiritual and intellectual life in which Heidegger grew up, and in which he always “felt at home.”⁷ Indeed, since Heidegger’s father was the sexton of St. Martin’s church, at the age of six Heidegger found himself living in the sexton’s house located on the church square.

Belonging to a family of humble origin, with insufficient means to financially support the son’s studies, Heidegger opportunity to study was given to

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Letter to Karl Jaspers* (1 July 1935), quoted in: Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*, tr. Allan Blunden (London: BasicBooks, 1993), p. 37.

⁶ The bibliography I rely on for Heidegger’s biography is mainly made up of two works: Rüdiger Safranski, *Heidegger e Il Suo Tempo. Una Biografia Filosofica* (Milano: Longanesi & C., 1996) and Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*. My special interest in Ott’s work is due to the fact that I found his interpretation of Heidegger’s early years – my main concern in this section – of particular interest and clarity, and especially in reference to my own perspective.

⁷ Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*, p. 43.

him by the Catholic Church. At first it was more a matter of 'cultural' support, in that the then parish priest of Messkirch, Camillo Brandhuber, seeing in Heidegger a talented pupil, offered him lessons in Latin in 1903, allowing him to enter the grammar school in Constance, "the only type of school that could be considered for a gifted boy of humble origins, destined as he was for a career in the church."⁸ Apart from this cultural support, the not so secondary role played by the Catholic Church in Heidegger's life was also of a financial nature: it was in fact the Catholic Church, in those days a "powerful organizing force in society,"⁹ that provided Heidegger with funds to pursue his studies since his first school years.

Being thus involved with the Catholic world, Heidegger thought about becoming a priest. He attended the seminary in Constance from 1904 to 1906, the year in which he transferred to Freiburg in order to complete his last years of schooling before graduating. His decision to transfer from Constance to the "Bertholgymnasium" in Freiburg was a strategic choice, for he could become eligible to receive the "Eliner studentship,"¹⁰ and thus to be in a position to pursue his theological studies.

After graduating in 1909, Heidegger entered the "novitiate of the Society of Jesus" at Tisis in Austria,¹¹ but after just two weeks he was dismissed from the order due to poor health. At this point Heidegger began his theological studies at the University of Freiburg, but during his second year, his health worsened again and he was advised to take a complete rest for several weeks. He was sent home to recover. He stayed in Messkirch for one semester, after which, upon the advice of his superiors, he abandoned his theological studies.

⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This studentship was established in 1575 by Christoph Eliner, who at that time served in Freiburg as dean of the Faculty of Theology, and one of the conditions to be eligible for the award was to have attended the grammar school in Freiburg. Cf. Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 56.

The abandonment of these studies was not so much Heidegger's decision, but was, as Ott indicates,¹² the decision of his superiors, who first forced him to terminate his studies for a certain period owing to health reasons, and who finally advised him to abandon his theological studies, the consequence of which was that he also abandoned the prospect of entering the priesthood. In his *curriculum vitae* submitted to the Faculty of Philosophy in 1915 on occasion of his "Habilitation,"¹³ Heidegger wrote: "I was suffering from the effects of severe overwork. My earlier heart complaint, brought on by too much sport, returned in such force that I was told there was very little prospect of my being offered a position in the Church."¹⁴

The year 1911 was a very tough one for Heidegger. Apart from his weak health, he had to bear the uncertainty of his future career which, until now, he had always thought would be within the Catholic Church. Moreover, having abandoned his theological studies, at that time "inseparably linked to the career aim of becoming a Catholic priest,"¹⁵ he was no longer eligible for the "Eliner" award, which had been his source of income during the previous two years. The situation between 1911 and 1912 was not an easy one. Heidegger was still resolute, however, in wanting to pursue his theological studies, but the actual situation of his life seemed not to agree with his desire. This caused difficulties not only regarding financial support, but was above all the source of strong conflicts within himself, particularly because of his expectation concerning his future in the church. No doubt this situation of conflict had a strong impact upon the man Heidegger. As Ott writes,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ In Germany, "Habilitation" is a postdoctoral degree that qualifies the recipient to become a university lecturer. It consists in writing a postdoctoral dissertation and delivering a trial lecture, after which one is authorized to teach in German universities. In 1915 Heidegger submitted his postdoctoral dissertation, *The Theory of Categories and Meaning in Duns Scotus*, to the Faculty of Philosophy and to the same Faculty he delivered his trial lecture, *The Concept of Time in the Science of History*. The same year he was awarded his postdoctoral degree.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Resume*, quoted in: Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*, p. 85.

¹⁵ Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*, p. 65.

perhaps a good few of Heidegger's later statements, even before 1933, which are suggestive of a profoundly anti-clerical attitude, together with many subsequent anti-Church pronouncements, are to be explained in the light of what happened in 1911. We must not lose sight of this possibility, bearing in mind that all his life Heidegger probably felt deeply equivocal, not to say caught in a dilemma, with regard to the faith of his birth: a fact that is centrally relevant to the subsequent course of his philosophy.¹⁶

Returning to Heidegger's financial situation, in 1913 he applied for and obtained a studentship from the "Constantin and Olga von Schaezler Foundation in honor of St Thomas Aquinas." The prerequisite to be awarded this studentship was the "strict observance of the doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas in philosophy and theology."¹⁷ Once again Heidegger was not only financially dependent on a studentship offered by a Catholic foundation, but was also forced – owing to the conditions relating to the grant – to accept the authority of the Catholic Church in philosophical and theological matters.

It is not difficult to agree on the fact that, during these early stages of his life, Heidegger experienced a complete sense of constraint, for which the Catholic Church was held responsible. This feeling of constraint especially worsened in 1914 when, as Hugo Ott states, Pope Pius X in his *motu proprio* declared St Thomas Aquinas to be "the sole and absolute source of doctrinal authority within the Catholic Church."¹⁸ This situation had surely a strong impact on Heidegger's life, and I agree with Hugo Ott's claim that "Heidegger's early experiences, particularly in relation to conflicts such as this, have to be seen as the background and foundation of his central and intellectual preoccupations."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁹ Hugo Ott refers here in particular to the fact that, concerning the question of "truth," the central concept in Heidegger's thought, the presence of the Catholic institution somewhat dictated the limit of how to interpret it, and has always been a cause of strong "vexation and irritation to Heidegger." Ibid.

In 1916 Heidegger met his future wife, Elfride Petri, who belonged to a high-class Prussian family of the Lutheran faith. They got married in 1917. Having married a person of a different confession did not move Heidegger any closer to the Catholic world, but on the contrary contributed to his progressive distancing from Catholicism, a distancing that soon became a rejection of the "Catholic circle."²⁰

The reason why I have expatiated on the early years of Heidegger's biography is due to the fact that I consider the experience of these years to be of primary importance for understanding not only the man Heidegger, but also the thinker. The facts of these years exhibit for us the roots from which Heidegger's great insight developed. The inner struggle he went through, the contradiction he probably experienced between what was taught by the church and the way he was deemed unfit to 'work' within the church, made him search for a meaning which his past experience not only failed to provide, but which also muddled the sense of certainty he formerly had. I would say that this experience enhanced his depth of thought, but at the same time drew a shadow, left a sign, a wound from which Heidegger would never be set free. What Heidegger went through during these years had "traumatic effects" on the man Heidegger, effects which would affect his whole future life. According to Ott, "these events presaged the first 'turn' or 'change of direction' [Kehre]: not a change of intellectual direction, but a turning-away from Catholicism, the Catholic system, or however else one chooses to describe it."²¹ What had always been for Heidegger not only a secure point of reference, but also a desired aim in life, ceased being a reference point and instead became a strong disturbing element.

At this point, I would like to quote the "farewell" letter Heidegger wrote in 1919 to Father Engelbert Krebs,²² who was an important figure during this stage

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²² Engelbert Krebs was a priest of the archdiocese of Freiburg and lecturer in dogmatics in the Faculty of Theology at Freiburg University. The close relationship with Heidegger became tense

of Heidegger's life. Written when Heidegger was at the beginning of his career as a thinker, these few lines, apart from stating his parting from Catholicism, gives us a glimpse of what will be increasingly enhanced in the course of his life: his passion and respect for philosophy as a search for the truth beyond any form of constraint, and his unceasing search for the meaning of existence and that sense of transcendence which, irrespective of how one calls it or not, is nevertheless there questioning us.

The letter to father Krebs reads:

Dear Professor,

The past two years in which I struggled for a fundamental clarification of my philosophical position and put aside all specialized academic tasks have led to conclusions I would not be able to hold and teach freely, were I bound to a position outside of philosophy.

Epistemological insights extending to a theory of historical knowledge have made the system of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me, but not Christianity and metaphysics – these, though, in a new sense. I firmly believe that I – perhaps more than your colleagues who officially work in this field – have experienced what the Catholic Middle Ages bears within itself regarding values and that we are still a long way off from a true appreciation of them. My investigation in the phenomenology of religion, which will draw heavily on the Middle Ages, should show beyond a doubt that in transforming my basic philosophical position I have not been driven to replacing objective judgment of and deep respect for the life-world of Catholicism with the angry

in 1915 for reasons relating to an appointment as lecturer to the vacant chair of Christian Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy. The theologian, Dr. Krebs, had been proposed as a candidate for that position since Winter Semester 1913/1914. Heidegger himself, at that time still supported by Heinrich Finke – an internationally respected scholar and member of Freiburg's Faculty of Philosophy – expected to be appointed to that position, once he had been awarded his postdoctoral degree. Neither Krebs nor Heidegger were appointed – the chair went to Josef Geyser at the beginning of 1917 – but Heidegger considered Krebs' unofficial approach to government authorities responsible for this matter, as a "personal attack upon himself." The friendship between the two did not end, as Krebs attended Heidegger's wedding in 1917, but after that, their relation became less cordial because of the different paths of they took in life. Cf. *ibid.*

and coarse polemics of an apostate. Thus it will in the future be important to me that I not lose the benefit of your invaluable friendship... It is difficult to live as a philosopher – inner truthfulness regarding oneself and in relation to those for whom one is supposed to be a teacher demands sacrifices, renunciation, and struggles which ever remain unknown to the academic technician. I believe that I have the inner calling to philosophy and, through my research and teaching, to do what stands in my power for the sake of the eternal vocation of the inner man, and to do it for this alone, and so justify my existence [Dasein] and work ultimately before God.

Sincerely and gratefully yours,

Martin Heidegger...²³

In this letter Heidegger states his confessional and philosophical turn.²⁴ As we can see, he affirms that he parted with the system of Catholicism for the sake of philosophy and that inner freedom which he felt necessary to pursue its call. But he remained within Christianity, within the New Testament; and if by the time he wrote this letter there was still somehow a spark of something positive with respect to his earlier conviction and devotion to the Catholic faith, the way Heidegger will address the issue of the Catholic Church in subsequent years is, as Ott puts forward, characterized by “a tone of ill-tempered, not to say malice.”²⁵ This discloses an unsolved question, a wound still open or, as Heidegger states in a letter to Karl Jaspers dated 1 July 1935, and which addresses the faith of his birth, “a thorn” in his flesh.²⁶

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Letter to Father Engelbert Krebs (1919)*, in: Martin Heidegger, *Supplements*, tr. and ed. John Van Buren (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 69-70.

²⁴ In this letter, Heidegger announces to Krebs “the definitive loss of his faith.” Cf. Stefano Poggi (2000), “La medievistica tedesca tra Ottocento e Novecento, la mistica e il giovane Heidegger,” in: AAVV, *Quaestio 1/2001. Heidegger e i Medievali*. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale Cassino 10/13 Maggio 2000. A cura di Costantino Esposito e Pasquale Porro (Bari: Pagina, 2001), pp. 339-359, 26.

²⁵ Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*, p. 121.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 37.

Heidegger asserts that to be a philosopher means being free from all "extra-philosophical allegiances."²⁷ Not surprisingly, he felt the Catholic system was for him something which restricted this possibility. The Catholic system was a limit. Indeed, Heidegger did not reject Christianity *per se*, but the system systems into which it organized itself. The idea of a system Heidegger considered limiting; and with respect to religious matters, he said "the system totally excludes an original and genuine experience of religious value."²⁸ During his whole life the problem of freedom played an important role. It concerned not only freedom from external situations of constraint, as we have seen. It was much more than that. What was at stake was his innermost freedom, his innermost peace. His decision to depart ways with Catholicism (with all it meant for the man Heidegger) was perhaps the first turn that led him to a restless search for a depth in which he could find innermost rest, a rest that he seemed to seek and perhaps found in his restless thinking.

In the last part of the present work, we will consider how Heidegger, whose past was so strongly effected by his relation to the Catholic world, might have something in common with the mystical figure Meister Eckhart, who lived his whole life serving the Catholic Church. But for the moment, let us turn our attention to the concept of *Gelassenheit* in order to get a preliminary understanding of what we are about to deal with.

²⁷ Heidegger, *Letter to Father Krebs*, quoted in: Safranski, *Martin Heidegger. Between Good and Evil*, p. 107. The statement "extra-philosophical allegiances" is a different translation of the sentence "were I bound to a position outside of philosophy," reported in Heidegger's letter to Krebs and translated in *Supplements* (Cf. note 19 above).

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Unpublished 'Loose Note'," quoted in: Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 73.

Gelassenheit

Gelassenheit is a German word that has its root in the verb “*lassen*” which means to let, to allow. In the ordinary usage *Gelassenheit* means calmness, composure, but for the purpose of the present study, when we refer to this word, we do not intend to recall this contemporary meaning. When we question *Gelassenheit*, we refer to the word that names a concept first employed by Eckhart in his vernacular sermons, and which indicates something characteristic of man in his relation to God. *Gelassenheit* is a “fundamental word of the Christian speculative mysticism,”²⁹ and therefore, originated from within a religious context. Heidegger initially came across this concept of *Gelassenheit*, during his early studies, when through Catholic culture he first approached the philosophical debate of his time. Later, the term became the key concept in his work *Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking*, which will be investigated in greater depth in Chapter Five of the present work.

In the literature, *Gelassenheit* has been translated in many different ways.³⁰ Since every translation is the result of an interpretation, I will postpone my final translation of this word to a later stage. The concept which this word is supposed to articulate is one we are not familiar with, and to anticipate a definite translation at this stage would entail giving a direction that conditions everything that follows according to a set and definite interpretation. Contrary to this, I propose that we should keep our minds open, as much as possible, to those hints and suggestions which can lead us to an understanding of this concept beyond the framework we are accustomed to think within. Having said that, we nevertheless

²⁹ Carlo Angelino, “Il Religioso nel Pensiero di Martin Heidegger,” in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, tr. Fabris Adriano (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983), pp. 11-24, p. 11.

³⁰ J. M. Anderson and E. H. Freund translate “releasement.” Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, tr. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York, Harper and Row, 1966), p. 60. Alfred Denker translates “acquiescence.” Cf. Alfred Denker, *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger's Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland, and London: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), p. 41. J. D. Caputo and Reiner Schürmann translate “letting-be.” Cf. John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 118; Reiner Schürmann, *Wondering Joy* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), p. 190.

require a starting point, a preliminary translation, that supplies us with an idea of the region we are about to explore, whilst at the same time not being too compromising with respect to our attempt at remaining open to that 'difference' we would like to experience. This difference is a different kind of thinking we can begin to experience by enacting a suspension of those judgments, which usually tend to reassure us by defining the framework we are accustomed to think within.

A first approach to the concept of *Gelassenheit* is the one that interprets it as "letting-go," wherein the intended meaning is that of ceasing to hold onto something, giving up something, the letting-go of an attitude that could prevent us from being open to an 'otherness' whose echoes we try to hear. Thus I suggest, in commencing our efforts to understand this concept, that we think of it as an attitude, which needs to be learnt, to "let-go" of a way of thinking that keeps us entrenched within a reality in which we cannot encounter the 'essence' of our being.

This initial interpretation of the word *Gelassenheit* as letting-go, represents a first step that encompasses two different approaches that in different and contrasting ages, have been proposed by the two figures we will bring together in the last chapter of this study. This preliminary interpretation of *Gelassenheit* is the starting point for both these authors, in spite of the fact that, for Eckhart, this word is a basic term used in a religious framework, whereas Heidegger speaks of *Gelassenheit* in a context of what he designates as the 'essence' of thinking. It should be noted, however, that *Gelassenheit* does not refer to the essence of that general philosophical concept of thinking, which Heidegger calls "calculative thinking,"³¹ that is, the "style of thinking which characterizes the mathematical-technical sciences and modern technical philosophy."³² Instead, *Gelassenheit* is the essence of what Heidegger calls "essential thinking" which, in opposition to the calculative mode of thought which is proper to metaphysics, "heeds the

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Postscript To "What Is Metaphysics?"*, tr. William McNeill, in: Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), pp. 231-238, p. 235.

³² Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 59.

measured signs of the incalculable and recognizes in the latter the unforeseeable arrival of the unavoidable."³³

According to Kettering,³⁴ as reported by Jürgen Wagner,³⁵ Heidegger's way of intending *Gelassenheit* is completely different to the one held by mysticism. It has nothing to do with passivity, since it is a "high form of activity."³⁶ Kettering claims, in fact, that, for the mystic, "Gelassenheit" is a process in which the mystic "closes his eyes to the world and becomes totally absorbed in himself,"³⁷ withdrawing from the world. Heidegger, Kettering continues, sees *Gelassenheit* as a "way of being" [*Seinshaltung*], while Eckhart intends it as a "moral, i.e. religious virtue, bound to a metaphysically-understood God, still connected to the ambit of representing proper to will."³⁸ In accordance with Kettering, Wagner³⁹ considers Eckhart and Heidegger as opposing one another.⁴⁰ He admits the contrast between the two conceptions of *Gelassenheit*, but in spite of this recognizes a common element which both share, and that is the "discovery of the conscious 'letting-go' and 'letting-be'." This "to let" [*Lassen*] is "the practice of an inner attitude that is acquired through a long and critical process of experience." This process and the result achieved in this process are interpreted by Wagner as the "phenomenon of the 'Gelassenheit'."⁴¹

³³ Heidegger, *Postscript To "What Is Metaphysics?"*, p. 237.

³⁴ Emil Kettering, *Nähe. Das Denken Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen: 1987).

³⁵ Wagner Jürgen, *Meditationen über Gelassenheit* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 1995). English translation is my own, if not differently specified.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ As we shall see later in this investigation, I do not agree with this claim that identifies *Gelassenheit* as a metaphysical concept that can be spoken of in terms of passivity or activity, and on the base of which Heidegger and Eckhart are considered to be in opposition to one another. My claim is that Heidegger and Eckhart are not in opposition, in that they both speak from out of a thinking dimension that is beyond and before metaphysics, that is the dimension of the "other beginning". Cf. Chapter Six of the present work.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

As suggested by Carlo Angelino,⁴² Heidegger's thought after the "turning" – that is, the experience of thought delineated by Heidegger from the *Brief über den "Humanismus"* (1946) to *Zur Sache des Denkens* (1969) (which in the present study we will investigate as unfolded in the *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*) – is the way that opens to the mystery of be-ing, and in this sense it is the experience of *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* is

Stimmung, determining mood of man, which recognizing his being mortal let himself open to things and to the mystery... *Gelassenheit* is the way that leads the mortal on being's tracks, it is the path that leads the most universal of man's knowledge, that is, philosophy, to let go of its will to master reality, in order to reach that threshold of *Difference* beyond which the non mortal clearing of be-ing opens up. Finally, *Gelassenheit* is that which leads the philosopher to the *Origin*, i.e. to that dimension of the *Religious* that Metaphysics, during its history, pretended now to remove by taking its place, now to master by making of itself the foundation of it.⁴³

On Angelino's account, the *Religious* in Heidegger is "be-ing"; it is the dimension of be-ing with which one is originally linked.⁴⁴ Religious in Heidegger does not refer to the god of philosophers, nor is it the God of Abraham or Jesus, as they belong to the domain of beings such as things, animals, men. Rather, the religious belongs to that domain that is beyond even the "ontological difference" of beings and being, and primarily because it belongs to a completely transformed dimension, which is opened up to us in *Gelassenheit*.

The use of the word religious within the context of be-ing could sound quite odd, especially if one considers from one side Heidegger's continuous attempt to free his language from the language of metaphysics, and from the other side the fact that the word religious carries within itself a world of meaning that have always been related to the supernatural, to god, to the *summum ens*, the

⁴² Angelino, "Il Religioso nel Pensiero di Martin Heidegger," op. cit.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 20. Translation mine.

⁴⁴ The word "religious" comes from the Latin "*religare*", that means to link, to bind, to unite.

supreme being. Despite this, it is my view that the use of this word to indicate the dimension of be-ing conveys the feeling of respect and the sense of mystery - that used to be proper to the realm of god-, from the dimension of the divine to the dimension of be-ing. Even if this use could generate some perplexity and perhaps some confusion, I believe it still serves the purpose of moving us closer to the dimension of be-ing as thought anew by Heidegger. How it does this, is by recalling and opening up a depth of thought that has always been linked the thought of the divine, but that now is turned towards be-ing. I would venture to say that Heidegger himself instigates this approach when, for instance, he thinks "the last god", that despite being the "totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God" (CP 283 [403]), nevertheless it remains "god".

Now, before proceeding with the investigation, allow me to recall that, for the moment, I will continue to use the word *Gelassenheit* in its original form, in spite of the fact that an English translation has already been suggested. As mentioned before, in order to deal with this investigation in its first steps, we need a region in which we can orient our thought, while attempting to gain some knowledge about *Gelassenheit*. And that is why a first interpretation has been propounded. The fact that, during the development of the present study, I will continue to use the German word, alternating with interpretations of it, is due to the fact that *Gelassenheit* is not 'something'; it is not a clear, well defined and delimited concept. *Gelassenheit* is a 'state' of being, an attitude, a relation, an experience. It is the result of a process that transforms. Indeed, it is this process of transformation itself. Since *Gelassenheit* encapsulates all this, and perhaps much more, the space of uncertainty that the word *Gelassenheit* can create when not translated, and therefore not interpreted for the reader, becomes and reveals itself as something that opens and transforms our way of thinking, and in so doing it draws closer to the very nature of *Gelassenheit*.

Gelassenheit belongs to the origin, to the 'essence' of human being, and belongs to that transformed dimension in which, for Heidegger, the truth of be-ing

rests, and in which, for Eckhart, God can be encountered. Now, can it be that the truth of be-ing rests where and when God is encountered? But which god? In an attempt to address these questions, let us now move on and focus on the paths along which Heidegger moves towards *Gelassenheit*.

CHAPTER TWO

The Fundamental-Ontological Way

Preliminary Remarks

Heidegger in his philosophy has always addressed the question of the meaning of being. He was always involved in a restless attempt to give back to man the awareness of the meaning of being. To do that he never disregarded the philosophical tradition and its achievements. Rather, by engaging with the tradition and being in dialogue with it, he found the way to point out and show a different awareness of the essence of human being and of being itself. *Being and Time* represents the first step in this direction and it is the work we shall contend with in the present chapter.

The dimension of thinking that we shall attempt to enact throughout this work, is not a newly discovered dimension. It emerges from a dialogue with the past, that in our context is represented by Heidegger's work *Being and Time*. The purpose of this chapter is therefore, to recall those moments in Heidegger's thought, as presented in *Being and Time*, that will move towards a different understanding and awareness of the essence of human being. This means that we are moving towards a "disclosedness" in which the relation with being is revealed. By saying this I do not mean that we are moving closer towards a new form of knowledge before not existing -although this might be true in some sense. What we should keep in mind is that the steps of thought we are about to take lead to being-historical-thinking, but these steps are at the same time already an experience of this type of thinking. This means that we are projecting ourselves into a possibility of being, that is, a possibility of thinking towards, through which we keep ourselves open. Within this disposition we tune in towards what we expect, that is already "there," where we are and where we think we are going.

In the present chapter this attempt will be carried out through an analysis of the concept of human being as *Dasein*, as determined by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Through an analysis of this concept a new "space" of thinking will be made available, in which a first "turning" of thought will be disclosed and being-historical-thinking will become closer as a conscious experience. As Kisiel affirms, *Being and Time* is not a "halt in the journey," but "one more station along the way," and he continues referring to Heidegger's "indicative 'terms'," according to which

every station is a transition, every work is a way. The Here and Now of Heidegger's "human situation" incorporated in the publication of 1927 is itself ever an "out toward," still underway toward a can-be, ever unfinished.¹

As Heidegger states at the beginning of the *Contributions*, we are in the age of the "crossing" from metaphysics to being-historical-thinking. During this time we can just try to think the question of the truth of being from the most original "stance." This "future thinking" is the kind of thinking that thinks the truth of being. At the same time, it provides access to and is the way through which the "essential-swaying" [*Wesung*] (CP 3 [3]) of being, which has remained hidden in metaphysical thought, is brought to light in its own character, that is, in its being "enowning" [*Ereignis*]. Heidegger's *Contributions* do not give contributions to philosophy in the sense that he adds new theories or ideas to clarify what already belongs to the history of philosophy. Heidegger does not want to contribute to an increase of the pool of objective and well-established philosophical theories. Instead, the contribution given is an attempt to open up a space of thinking wherein "future thinking" is disclosed. The *Contributions* are a possibility open to the reader to get closer to the essential being proper of his or her own being. They are an attempt to give back man his innermost being which,

¹ Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 424.

in Heideggerian terms, means letting the human being be “enowned” [übereignet] by the “enowning.”

Now, in order to understand what this means, we first of all need to enact a thinking transformation. *Being and Time* is the tool we use to engage with this change. One approach to this transformation is to think in a different way the traditional concept of the essence of human being, which the traditional metaphysical approach portrays as *animal rationale*. In the transformed perspective staged by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and later in the *Contributions to Philosophy*, the essence of human being is to be understood in terms of what he calls “ek-sistence” [Ek-sistenz], “being-there” [Dasein]. This German word literally means “being [sein]-there [Da],” and is ordinarily used in the German language to refer to human existence.

Before proceeding with the investigation, I would like to make a preliminary remark. In the present work I will use the German word Dasein without a hyphen when referring to Heidegger’s meaning in his first elaboration of the question of being, that is, *Being and Time*. When Dasein refers to the context of being-historical thinking, I will use the hyphenated form “Da-sein.” The English translator Joan Stambaugh² chose to use the hyphenated version in her translation to distinguish Heidegger’s meaning from the “orthodox translation” of Dasein as existence. The translator states that Heidegger suggested that future translations of *Being and Time* should use the hyphenated word “Da-sein,” and she refers to Heidegger’s use of the hyphenated Da-sein in Chapter Five of Division One – wherein the hyphenated Da-sein deals with the “existential constitution of the there” (BT 126 [134]) – as a “practice” instigated by Heidegger himself.

Given that in the German edition of *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger mainly uses the word Dasein without a hyphen, and despite Heidegger’s later suggestion, I believe that the direct use of the hyphenated form would “hide” one important

² Joan Stambaugh, *Translator’s Preface*, in: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. xiv.

step that Heidegger himself went through in his path towards the leap of thought into the truth of being. Since in the present study I attempt to point out the “immanent” changes in the way of thinking, as well as the changes the concept of Dasein undergoes in Heidegger’s thought, I believe it easier to use Dasein (without a hyphen) when I refer to the fundamental-ontological perspective of *Being and Time*, which transforms the previous metaphysical concept of human being as subject. I will use, instead, the hyphenated word Da-sein to indicate and hint at the further transformed understanding of the concept, as it is experienced in the context of being-historical thinking.³ When I quote from the English translation of *Being and Time*, I will therefore use Dasein instead of the hyphenated form chosen by the translator, in order not to allow hints of the crossing to pass by and get lost. Let us now proceed in the investigation.

Animal Rationale or Dasein?

As Albert Hofstadter states,⁴ in German we find three words we can use to translate the concept of existence. One of these is “Dasein.” The other two are “*das Vorhandensein (die Vorhandenheit)*” and “*die Existenz.*”⁵ In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*⁶ Heidegger refers to Kant’s use of the term Dasein and points out that Kant indistinctively uses the term when he refers to God, things or nature. Dasein, in Kant’s usage, corresponds to the way of being of something extant. In Kant, “existence” corresponds to what scholasticism called “*existentia*,” which means “*objective presence*” (BT 39 [42]).

³ Cf. Daniela Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion* (Berlin: Duncker und Humboldt, 1997), p. 113 (note 92).

⁴ Albert Hofstadter, *Translator’s Appendix. A note on the Da and the Dasein*, in: Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Quotations from this work will be referred as BP followed by the page number.

Heidegger wants to detach himself from this tradition. As he explains in *Being and Time* and in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, what he means when using the word Dasein has nothing to do with the way of being of natural things in the sense of objects present in front of me, existing in an outer world. Dasein, Heidegger states, does not name a way of being, but "designates... a specific being which we ourselves are, the *human Dasein*" (BP 28). Dasein as human being is therefore not to be understood as a determinate subject in the Cartesian sense, of that which stands in front of an object. As Heidegger clarifies, the need to choose this term, and what exactly it refers to, was "to characterize with a single term both the involvement of being in human nature and the essential relation of man to the openness ("there") of being as such."⁷ What this "openness" is will become clear when we discuss the "existential constitution"⁸ of the "Da" ("there") of Da-sein ("being-there"). For now let us just think the "openness" as a fundamental character of Dasein, which signifies the fact that the being of Dasein "bears in its ownmost being the character of not being closed. The expression "there" means this essential disclosedness" (BT 125 [132]). And disclosedness means that Dasein is in itself this openness. Dasein is structurally open to understand its own being.

What was the problem in letting man be man? Why did Heidegger need another word to name who we are? The need to use Dasein rather than "man" has to do with how Heidegger thought the essence of man. Speaking of man means to remain in the realm of metaphysics, in which the essence of the human being is

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Way Back Into The Ground Of Metaphysics*, quoted in: Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 13.

⁸ Heidegger uses two adjectives to distinguish two different ways in which Dasein understands itself: "existential" and "existentiell." "Existential" refers to the understanding that attempts to investigate the *ontological structures* of existence, that is, it attempts to understand existence – as the being of Dasein – in its fundamental structures. "Existentiell" refers, instead, to the understanding that Dasein has of itself as it is, as it appears according to the possibilities of being that Dasein chooses or in which it can find itself, and which determine the way Dasein simply is. "Existentiell" is often used in connection with "ontic," which refers to a kind of investigation that is concerned with beings, and not with being as such, whereas "existential" is often linked with "ontological" – in the Heideggerian sense of "pre-ontological" – and refers to a kind of investigation concerned with being itself and its modes of being.

expressed in the fact of man being "*animal rationale*." The essence of human being is kept by metaphysics "in the dimension of *animalitas*" (LH 246).⁹ To think human being as *animal rationale* means to understand man as a creature that has "ratio," owing to which the human being distinguishes himself from the animal. The human being is an animal to which is added reason. But he remains still in the realm of *animalitas*, and in so doing he is deprived of his humanity in the sense that, as Heidegger poses it, "the essence of human being is too little heeded and not thought in its origin, the essential provenance that is always the essential future for historical mankind" (LH 246).

In *Being and Time* Heidegger asks about the meaning of being. This question remained unasked throughout the history of philosophy because of a presupposed understanding of what being "is." It is a fact, Heidegger affirms, that we have an "*average and vague understanding of being*" (BT 4), but it would be difficult "to determine conceptually what the 'is' means" (BT 4). Heidegger in *Being and Time* attempts to say and disclose the meaning of being, giving a conceptual form to our "vague and average" understanding of it. Metaphysics investigated the being of beings, but did not look into the being of being, that is, the truth of being. Metaphysics did not go deep enough to be in the position of being aware of the being of being. Heidegger affirms

metaphysics has not only failed up to now to ask this question, the question is inaccessible to metaphysics as such. Being is still waiting for the time when it itself will become thought-provoking to the human being. (LH 246)

Since in the metaphysical tradition the being of beings has been presupposed as a something clear in itself, are we sure, Heidegger asks, that the essence of who we are is to be thought in this metaphysical dimension, in which

⁹ LH followed by the page number, refers to Martin Heidegger, *Letter on "Humanism"* in: Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), pp. 239-276.

the human being is "one living creature among others in contrast to plants, beasts, and God?" (LH 246). The interpretation of the human being as *animal rationale* does not reach the essence of the human being, because it does not "realize the proper dignity... of the human being." The metaphysical interpretation does not "set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough" (LH 251).

If man as *animal rationale* does not express the fundamental essence of the human being, which other word can recall or express this essence? Dasein is the word chosen by Heidegger. It is the "ontological subject," the existential name for that human being which, in his essence, is "ek-sistence." With Dasein, Heidegger wants to detach from the metaphysical tradition and wants to give back to man his own essence, his own "dignity." Indeed, the essence of Dasein does not lie in being *animal rationale*, but as Heidegger states, "the essence of the human being... lies in its ek-sistence" (LH 247). What does Heidegger mean by this? How are we to understand the 'essence' of Dasein as ek-sistence? How we intend to address these questions is by investigating Dasein's fundamental modes that constitute its "existential structure."¹⁰

Dasein's Existential Structure

Being and Time deals with one question from which the whole analysis takes its first step. This is the question of the meaning of being. At the beginning of Part One of *Being and Time*, we read: "What is primarily interrogated in the question of the meaning of being is that being which has the character of Dasein" (BT 37 [41]). Dasein is that to whom first the question of being is directed. Dasein

¹⁰ The analysis of the fundamental structure of the being of Dasein is called "existential" because the "characteristics" of the being of Dasein investigated are not "properties," as we intend those referred to objects simply present in front of us in an "ontic" way. The characteristics investigated are "essentially existential ways to be" (BT 126 [133]), that is, they have to do with the being of Dasein, with its ontological and ek-sistential way of being.

is that which is interrogated. The "being which has the character of Dasein," that is asked the question about the meaning of being, and whose being is the "task" of the analysis, is "we ourselves"(BT 39 [41]).

In the attempt to understand the meaning of Dasein, we are not expected to have a definition that explains, in one specific way, what Dasein is. In determining the meaning of Dasein what we find are many perspectives from which the "existential subject," Dasein, can be approached and grasped. Since Heidegger's analytic of Dasein is extremely vast, I intend to proceed in my attempt by taking into account those existential modes of being of Dasein which I claim to be particularly enlightening for the purpose of my investigation.

The word Dasein is translated as "being-there." If our knowledge of the meaning of being is just an "average and vague understanding" of it, how do we understand the "being" of Dasein? One way to think of it is to consider what Heidegger names *Jemeinigkeit*, which is one moment of the existential structure of Dasein. *Jemeinigkeit* means that the being of Dasein has the character of "always-being-my-own-being" (BT 40 [42]). The being of Dasein is "always mine"(BT 39 [42]). What does it mean that the being "is always mine"? It means that it has always to do with myself; it is always "my own" being, for which I am always responsible. It concerns me always, as it is always my own being. Dasein in its being "ek-sistence", is never a "genus of beings as objectively present." If so, the relation between such being and myself could be also a matter of "indifference." Dasein's being is "always mine." I am always involved, despite my will, with it. The being of Dasein "'is' in such a way that its being can neither be indifferent nor non-indifferent to it" (BT 40 [42]). In spite of my decision, I am always involved with this being. The fact that I could be indifferent to it, in the sense that I could not be involved with the question of the meaning of being, is still to be involved, albeit in a possible different way, which is the way of indifference.

Keeping in mind this first fundamental character of the being of Dasein, how do we understand the meaning of the "there" which constitutes the being of

Dasein? In Chapter Five of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger investigates the "existential constitution" of the "there" [Da] of Da-sein, he mentions "two equiprimordially constitutive ways to be the there" (BT 126 [133]). These two ways are "attunement" and "understanding." They are ways to be the "there" of Da-sein and we will investigate them in greater detail later in this chapter. But before that, when Heidegger says "there," what does he mean?

The existential constitution of the "there" has to do with that fundamental constitution of Dasein which is "being-in-the-world," a "unified phenomenon" that, even if cannot be decomposed into single parts, nevertheless can have "several constitutive structural factors" (BT 49 [53]). "Being-in-the-world" is not a composed structure, but is a "structure which is primordially and constantly whole" (BT 37 [41]). One of its "several constitutive factors" is what Heidegger calls "being-in as such" [*Das in-Sein als solches*]¹¹ (BT 50 [53]), that is, "the being of the there" (BT 125 [133]).

The existential analytic of Dasein in its preparatory part relates to the fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. The aim of Heidegger's analytic is to reveal, in a phenomenological way, "the unitary primordial structure of the being of Dasein by which its possibilities and ways "to be" are ontologically determined" (BT 123 [130]). Heidegger calls "facticity" the particular way in which "actually every Dasein is" (BT 52 [56]). Indeed, Dasein's way of being-in-the-world is different from other entities objectively present in the world. This is because Dasein understands being, and is itself the understanding of being. Now, there is a distinction between the ontological "being-in" the world of Dasein and the "insideness" of "innerworldly" beings, that is, the "useful things" that Dasein encounters in the world, taking care of them. The way of "being-in-space" of Dasein differs from the way of being in space of useful things. The latter is understood as an "ontic characteristic" of things objectively present in the world, whereas the "being-in" of Dasein is an "existential"; it is understood in relation to

¹¹ Emphasis original.

its being existence. This means that being-in is not a quality added to the concept of Dasein, and so can also not pertain to Dasein. Dasein as being-in-the-world is "always already outside itself"¹² in-the-world. Being-in indicates the "existential spatiality" (BT 53 [56]) of Dasein. When referring to "existential spatiality," Heidegger rules out the metaphysical concept of human being as "initially a spiritual thing which is then subsequently placed "in" a space" (BT 53 [56]). But how is the existential spatiality of Dasein different?

It is different in the sense that Dasein is not simply inside a space. Dasein is always already in a state; it is always already in a mode, it is always already attuned towards its being, and it understands its being. Dasein does not exist in the world without being already related to the world, whether that which it is related to are "things at hand" or other Dasein. This "existential spatiality" of Dasein has the mode of being of "taking care of" things and being "concerned" with others. "Taking care of" and being "concerned" indicates the fundamental way of being-in-the-world of Dasein, and they constitute the fundamental structure of the "care" that Heidegger tells us is the unitary structure of the being of Dasein, the "primordial"¹³ being of Dasein itself (BT 123 [131]). But let us now have a closer look at the existential spatiality of Dasein, its "there."

When we say "being in," we are accustomed to think the relation of something being in a certain place in space, such as the example of saying that a pen is in a bag. This use of "in" relates to the way two objects that occupy a space relate to each other with regards to their positions in space. The shirt is in the closet. The shirt and the closet are in a certain location, and the way in which they relate to one another, that is, they are in respect to one another, is that one is "in" the other, inside the other. This way of being "in," Heidegger states, pertains to objects, to things "objectively present" within the world, which means that this way of thinking their relation belongs to the metaphysical context.

¹² Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 163.

¹³ "Primordial" in the sense that it cannot be deduced from other concepts.

When Heidegger thinks the "being-in" as a "constitutive factor" of the existential constitution of being-in-the-world, which is what Dasein is, he thinks the meaning of "in" differently. "Being-in" is to be understood as an "existential" and a "constitution of the being of Dasein" (BT 50 [54]). As Heidegger tells us, the existential meaning of "being-in," has its root in "innan," where "an" means to be "used to," to be "familiar with," to "take care of something." "Innan" recalls the "dwelling," the *habitare*. Being-in carries the meaning of dwelling, being familiar with the world and represents the "*formal existential expression of the being of Dasein... which has the essential constitution of being-in the-world*" (BT 51 [54]).

The fact that the being of Dasein is primordially being-in means that the Dasein which we are can never be in-the-world in the same way that a stone is in the world. Dasein's particular way of being-in-the-world, which Heidegger calls "facticity," is a being-in that is also a being-with, on account that, in itself, it carries a relational structure. But again we do not have to think metaphysically. Being-with does not mean being somewhere in space next to other subjects that are in turn next to others. Dasein is existentially being-with, owing to which it is possible for Dasein to encounter and relate to others. Dasein is "in" the world as "being-with." Dasein's being-in-the-world "is in itself a being-with-others-in-the-world."¹⁴ The fundamental structure of Dasein as "being-in-the-world" brings into play a constitutional social dimension proper to Dasein's being. Dasein, being "existence" and "being-in-the-world," is in its being relationship; "being-with is an aspect of being-in-the-world that makes possible all encountering of particular others whose way of being Heidegger calls Dasein-with."¹⁵ Dasein is not a subject, an isolated "I" that relates to an object. It is always and already in a relationship. Since Dasein as being-in-the-world is also in its structure

¹⁴ Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. John Llewelyn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 76.

¹⁵ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 149.

"*MitDasein*"¹⁶ (BT 107 [114]), because of this one's own Dasein, as "*MitDasein*", is "encounterable by others" (BT 113 [121]).

Dasein is in-the-world "taking care of" things, "being concerned with" others. Accordingly, "being-in" as the structural moment of Dasein, as being-in-the-world, tells us that the human being is never simply in the world like water is inside a glass. Human being is always already in some specific circumstance, and is always situated in the "there" of its "being-there," which Heidegger calls the "clearing," the "disclosedness" of being. "Being-in as such" means "the being of the there," the "there", that is the "essential disclosedness" (BT 125 [132]), that is Dasein itself. The "mode of being" of Dasein is to be this "disclosedness." Dasein is the being it is because, "by its very nature," it "brings its there along with it... *Dasein is its disclosure*"¹⁷ (BT 125 [133]).

Now, a different perspective from which we can think Dasein's being in terms of its "there" is to think Dasein in its essence, that is, as "ek-sistence." The human Dasein that we are has its own way of being. This "specific way of being" of human Dasein Heidegger calls "Existenz," "existence" (BP 28) or "the essence of Dasein" (BT 40). As Heidegger explains in *Letter on Humanism*, when he asserts in *Being and Time* that "the 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence" (LH 248), the meaning of this sentence is

the human being occurs essentially in such a way that he is the "there" [*das "Da"*], that is, the clearing of being. The "being" of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of being. (LH248)

The different hyphenated form of writing ek-sistence intends to enlighten the transcendence of Dasein that is always being-in-the-world. As Neu states,

¹⁶Being-there-with. Translation mine.

¹⁷ The "everyday way" in which Dasein is its there, its disclosure, is the way of "entanglement" [*Verfallen*: also "falling pray"]. Mainly and for the most part, Dasein is in an inauthentic way, and is therefore far removed from the awareness that can reveal its being to itself.

transcendence "names the way in which the disclosedness occurs."¹⁸ Being-in-the-world is the fundamental determination of Dasein. Dasein exists as being-in-the-world. Dasein does not exist in a dualistic world of subject and object, but exists as always already in-the-world, in the openness. On Neu's account, the ek-sistence, the being of Dasein, takes place existentially as "crossing over." Dasein as being-in-the-world is ek-sistence; it is transcendence in the sense that it does not relate in a dualistic way to things and other human beings. Dasein as transcendence, is *always and already* "crossing over" [*Überschritt*] in the world.¹⁹ Transcendence is a fundamental determination of the being of Dasein, of ek-sistence as being-in-the-world.

The concept of ek-sistence, therefore, is not to be thought of in terms of "attributes," but in terms of different modes of being – or as Heidegger says, "possible ways for it to be, and only this" (BT 40 [42]). When Heidegger talks about Dasein, he does not refer to the "what" of this being. He indicates instead the being of it; not the "thatness" (BT 40 [42]), but its being. Existence is "standing out and perduring the openness of the there: ek-sistence" (BT 125 - note† [442, note c]). Ek-sistence is being out, "standing out" in the clearing. The "standing out" that is ek-sistence is not to be intended as a being outside in some outer space in opposition to an inside. "Standing out," as Heidegger specifies, means out "into the 'out' of the 'out of one another' of the difference (the 'there'), not 'out' out of an interior."²⁰ Does this mean the space of relation? Space as the dimension in which the difference occurs? Space in which the thought that thinks the truth of being "remains purely in the element of the truth of [...] being and lets the simplicity of its manifold dimensions rule" (LH 241)? This is the first hint towards a transformation of thought, towards a leap into a truth of being conceived differently. It is a hint on which we can let our thought linger. This is a first "resting" moment that deepens our thought, in the sense of letting it rest upon

¹⁸ Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion*, p. 59.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁰ Cf. LH, Note "a," p. 249.

a new sense of how we can think our “essence” in terms of something “ek-sistent.”

So far we contended with the existential being of Dasein. We considered being in its *Jemeinigkeit*, in its being-in-the-world, in its being-with, and we tackled Heidegger’s concept of Dasein’s essence as ek-sistence. In order to grasp the “existential constitution” of the there, for which we are now perhaps more prepared, let us now focus on the two “equiprimordially [*gleichursprünglichen*] constitutive ways to be there” (BT 126 [133]): “attunement” and “understanding.”

Attunement and Understanding

Attunement [*Befindlichkeit*] and understanding [*Verstehen*] are existential ways of being of the there. They refer to the way in which Dasein as being-in-the-world inhabits the world. The notion of world here refers to the whole gamut of relations that occur between Dasein and useful things at hand encountered in the world as environment, as well as to the relations among Dasein.

Attunement is the ontological term used by Heidegger to name what in our daily life we call mood. According to Heidegger, we change moods just because Dasein in its essential structure is “always already in a mood” (BT 126 [134]). Mood is an aspect of our daily life; it is something we experience in the ontic reality in which we live. Mood is defined as a way we feel, at a particular time, about things or about ourselves or others. Sometimes it happens that we do not seem to have feelings, we simply seem to spend our time doing something or even just exist. For Heidegger, the fact of not being in any mood is – ontologically speaking – not nothing. When I am in a situation in which it seems to me that I lack a mood, this is when the Dasein which I am “becomes tired of itself.” The persistence of this situation of lack of mood, in which we often find ourselves, makes Dasein “tired of itself.” In this situation the being of the there reveals itself as a “burden” [*Last*] (BT 127 [134]), even if we do not know the reason for it.

The fact that Dasein experiences this burden, and so does not know what this is about, is linked to the fact that knowledge, according to Heidegger, does not have access to this "disclosure" that reveals the being of the there as a burden. Here we are dealing with a "primordial disclosure" which is not accessible to our knowledge,²¹ as it fails to reach the existential and primordial dimension wherein the disclosure of the being of the there becomes accessible.

We have defined the there of Dasein as disclosure. We will now try to ontologically determine this disclosure as attunement. To better orient ourselves in this attempt, we can think this disclosure, the clearing of Dasein, as a "capacity to encounter entities as the entities they are,"²² and therefore it is potentiality for a different existential dimension, in the sense of being capable of being and therefore experiencing this different existential dimension. One way to access this existential dimension is to question what appears, for which we do not have apparently any explanations. To linger on what appears to be nothing, and to try to consider it as a manifestation of something, is the first step towards an existential understanding of the being of the there.

That the being of the there is a burden to us is shown by the fact that, from an ontic point of view, it seems as though we do not feel anything – at least this is what seems to be the case at first. Then it does happen that we lack feelings. The being of the there also appears as a burden when our mood is in a positive stance, when it is "elevated"; for it is by being elevated that it shows its effort to ease the burden of being. The "possibility of mood," says Heidegger, tells us something about the "burdensome character of Dasein" (BT 127 [134]). The being of the there that Dasein is, and which is always my own being, is a reason to worry, and has the character of being a worry. "How one is and is coming along" (BT 127 [134]) is made evident by mood, and the way one is in the mood, or the way one is not, recalls and bring closer Dasein to the being of its there. The being of the

²¹ Knowledge here refers to metaphysical knowledge as the appropriation of attributes and qualities which belong to the object we want to know.

²² Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 75.

there, manifesting ontically as mood, makes evident its ontological being as attunement [*Befindlichkeit*], as being always there in a certain state. We could easily misunderstand this "certain state" for a particular psychological state of mind. This would be a mistake.

Since Heidegger in *Being and Time* is conducting a fundamental, ontological analytic of Dasein, we do not have to refer too much to sets of mind that can limit our accessibility to this ontological dimension within which the being of the there is revealed. Thinking the being of the there 'simply' as mental state would prevent the disclosure of its existential being. But since we need to refer to something we know something about in order to tend to something different from what we know, we can think being in a certain state (attunement) as a primordial awareness about the being we are, as an awareness that needs to be awakened. The fact of being in a certain state or not – or better still, the fact that it appears to us that sometimes we are in a certain mood and sometimes we are not – is a matter of awareness, but it does not affect the being. Our being is in fact always already attuned.

In the ontic "being in a mood" of Dasein, the being of Dasein is revealed as "that being to which Dasein was delivered over in its being as the being which it, existing, has to be" (BT 127 [134]). The human being as Dasein is entrusted with its being, has been made responsible for its being. The kind of being Dasein is committed to is that which Dasein itself has to be by existing. It is a task that Dasein has to fulfill, that of being its being. Dasein is "always already" in a mood. Existing in a mood, the being of Dasein that is its there, reveals itself as "that it is and has to be" (BT 127 [134]). What remains hidden is the "whence and whither," the origin of what appears. For the most part, Dasein does not follow what is unveiled in the mood. Dasein tends to avoid 'listening' to that something which is disclosed in moods. This kind of dealing, which is an "evading," discloses and asserts the onus that belongs to Dasein in its relation with its being.

The ontological way of being in the mood of Dasein, and its ontic way of not dealing with its being,²³ which is disclosed as a burden, unveils that fundamental character of the being of Dasein that Heidegger calls "thrownness" [*Geworfenheit*] (BT 127 [135]). The thrownness of the being of Dasein "into its there" (BT 127[135]) discloses the fact that Dasein "is thrown" into its there, that is, is thrown into being responsible for that being which Dasein, by existing, has to be. That Dasein is thrown into its there means that it is thrown into the possibilities of its authentic way of being-in-the-world. The being of Dasein as thrown into its there reveals the ontological being of Dasein as attunement.

How Dasein finds itself thrown into its there, into its being-in-the-world, is not to be thought of as a discovery made by Dasein. This is not the result of a search. Dasein in attunement "is always already brought before itself, it has always already found itself" (BT 128 [135]). Dasein is always before itself, thrown before its being. The mode of this being thrown is unveiled not through seeking but in the way of "turning toward and away" (BT 128 [135]). Ontologically, this turning toward and away is in respect to being. But turning towards and away is a dynamic that we also adopt in our daily lives. We are attracted to something and we would take a step towards what we want, but at the same time we draw back from this moving towards. We turn away easily. The justification we consciously or unconsciously give to ourselves is a loss of interest or a different priority at the moment. Anything justifies the instinct to withdraw instead of turning towards. Turning away and withdrawing, and turning towards, constitute an "essential," primordial characterization of our being, of the way we relate to the center of who we are. Being close to our being means being clearer on what we are dealing with. It means facing the possibility of being open to a choice – the choice of being responsible for our being, where being responsible means being in a position of making a decision in response to an awareness that is now there and which demands that we deal with it.

²³ For the meaning of the adjectives "ontic" and "ontological," cf. note 12 of the present work.

In attunement Dasein is brought before itself, before the responsibility of its being. Phenomenally, Dasein deals with moods and with the fact that they "bring Dasein before the that of its there, which stares at it with the inexorability of an enigma" (BT 128 [136]). The there of Dasein is an "enigma" because it is accessible to experience, but it remains concealed to knowledge conceived as "rational enlightenment," which cannot find and be sure about the "nature" and the "whence" of the there, and therefore cannot be sure about itself. It is an enigma because it does not give assurance about itself to our will of mastering existence. Ontically, we are accustomed to control our moods through our will, giving ourselves reasons and motivations for the way we feel or perceive situations. But the fact that we can control our moods does not have to let us dismiss mood as revealing an ontological way of the being of Dasein. Attunement is a "primordial kind of being of Dasein" (BT 128 [136]). In attunement the being of Dasein is revealed to itself *"before all cognition and willing and beyond their scope of disclosure"* (BT 128 [136]).

In attunement, Dasein finds itself before the possibility of the openness that is the there. We could perhaps say that the there is a 'space' of experience that can be chosen or not. It can be ontically avoided, but it still remains ontologically Dasein's matter. Whereas if chosen as the ontological task of letting being be by existing, the openness of the there is appropriated and gained as a dimension of authenticity in which Dasein can be according to its ontological being, that is, its being-in-the world.

The being of Dasein, which is always mine and which is understanding of being, is the condition of possibility of what Heidegger calls "authenticity" or "inauthenticity" (BT 40 [42-43]). These are "modes" in which Dasein "always exists." These are fundamental possibilities of existence that do not intend to give any moral judgment: Inauthenticity does not mean a "'lesser' being or a 'lower' degree of being." These two words need to be understood in their etymological meaning. Authenticity [Eigentlichkeit] and inauthenticity [Uneigentlichkeit] have their root in the adjective *eigen*, which means "own." For Dasein to be authentic

means that Dasein is "owned" by itself; it understands itself in its being and it belongs therefore to itself. When Dasein exists in an inauthentic way, it means that Dasein is "disowned," has not yet "grasped itself, or has lost itself." Dasein has "not yet won itself at all as its own, it has not yet found its way to itself."²⁴

"Dasein exists always in one of these modes, or else in the modal indifference to them" (BT 49 [53]). This "modal indifference" is what Heidegger calls "averageness" [Durchschnittlichkeit] (BT 41 [43]). It names the "everyday indifference" in which Dasein relates to its being. Mainly and for the most part, Heidegger says, Dasein finds itself in a situation of "everyday indifference." This is another way of "fleeing from" being and "forgetting it" (BT 41 [44]), in which Dasein also relates to its being. "Authenticity" and "inauthenticity" are the "modes" in which Dasein always "exists" (BT 49 [53]), whereas "averageness" is the "modal indifference" to those modes, in which Dasein can also exist.

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each Dasein itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities. (BT 10 [12])

Now, before dealing with the other fundamental mode of being of the there, let me sum up what we have covered thus far. The first "ontological characteristic" of attunement is that it manifests Dasein as thrown, and the thrownness of Dasein becomes clear "initially and for the most part in the mode of an evasive turning away" (BT 126 [136]). A second characteristic of attunement is that it discloses Dasein as being-in-the-world in its being-there-with, which is an "equiprimordially disclosedness of world." Dasein is in the world in a way in which it primordially encounters other entities that are in the world as useful

²⁴ Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Carlton, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 23.

things at hand. But as being-in-the-world, Dasein is always already there-with other beings, which is the reason why Dasein can encounter other beings and relate to them. What characterizes this encounter is the fact that Dasein is "affected," is "moved," by other beings. Dasein "matters." This is possible because Dasein is primordially that disclosedness thanks to which humans that inhabit the world encounter things and matter to others.

When we think attunement we do not have to think of it as a psychological disposition, as a "psychical condition" [seelischen Zustandes] (BT 128 [136]); for it is a primordial characteristic of the being of the there, and it is before and beyond anything referred to as psychological or psychical. The feeling of being in a mood, of being moved, of situations having a psychological impact on us, is due to the fact that the human being as Dasein is primordially already attuned. It is always already thrown before its there, the disclosedness in which the world and other Dasein can be encountered. Dasein can never be "not in a mood" because it is always already being-in-the-world, being-there-with; it is already the openness of its there. In its existential mode of being, in its existence, Dasein is already relational, in a mode of interaction. We could say that Dasein is that "network" that its existence, existentially interacting, is. Dasein exists dealing with things at hand, encountering these things and taking care of them, making them be what they are by using them and enhancing their "what-for." But Dasein is also that which is always concerned with other beings, as it is always already there-with other beings. Dasein is existentially "social" in the sense that it is existentially there-with, primordially in relation with other beings. On this point, Heidegger notes that "it belongs to the nature of the Dasein to exist in such a way that it is always already with other beings" (BP 157).

The other fundamental way in which Dasein is its there is what Heidegger calls "understanding" [*Verstehen*]. Understanding is an "equiprimordial" structure with attunement. They both constitute the being of the there. Interpreted ontologically, understanding is not a possible way in which we gain some knowledge. Existentially, understanding is a "fundamental mode of the *being* of

Dasein" (BT 134 [143]), whereas the existentiell interpretation of understanding is "derivative of the primary understanding which constitutes the being of the there in general" (BT 134 [143]).

What does it mean that the being of Dasein is "understanding"? Let us start by saying that understanding discloses the existential way in which Dasein relates to the world. But what do we understand by saying "world"? On this point, Heidegger gives an ontological interpretation of world that we need to recall. Let us first summon up the ontic meaning which, on Heidegger's account, we usually attribute to this word. As Heidegger tells us, ontically we consider world as the "totality of beings that can be objectively present within the world" (BT 60 [64]). It is considered as something spatial, an extension that contains those beings which can be encountered by Dasein. Formally, Heidegger in *Being and Time* refers to this concept using the word "world" in quotation mark. Another way to intend world ontically is to consider it in relation to Dasein, that is, to consider the world as "that 'in which' a factual Dasein 'lives'" (BT 61 [65]). This meaning, says Heidegger, can refer to a variety of possibilities such as the "public world," where political life as social life occurs; or it can refer to the "domestic" world, in which a human being customarily conducts his or her own life, surrounded by what is familiar not only in terms of material objects or environment, but also as "surrounding world" in which one feels at home, the kind of world we refer to when saying "this is my world." Heidegger in *Being and Time* refers to this ontic understanding of world by using the word world without quotation mark.

The existential concept of world is called by Heidegger "worldliness" and it refers to the structure of that "constitutive factor" that is world in the fundamental determination of Dasein as being-in-the-world. Dasein existing as being-in-the-world relates, existentially and fundamentally, to the world as a totality of "relevance and significance" (BT 77 [83]) of things at hand, encountered within the world, that constitutes the worldliness of the world. This is the world referred to when we say that Dasein is being-in-the-world.

Dasein existing is its there. The there of Dasein is its being-there in-the world. The spatiality of being-in is that "for-the-sake-of-which," according to which Dasein is. In its being, Dasein as being-in-the-world is disclosure. It is disclosure towards things encountered in the world, towards other Dasein, towards itself. This disclosure that Dasein is, is what Heidegger calls understanding. Dasein as disclosure is understanding: "existing being-in-the-world as such is disclosed in for-the-sake-of which, and we call this disclosedness understanding" (BT 134 [143]).

Dasein is not a subject that has added to itself the capacity of doing something, in this case the capacity to understand, as if understanding is an ability that Dasein could have or not have. Dasein, existentially, is understanding. This means that it is understanding by virtue of existing. The being of Dasein is understanding. This is not to be thought of as being able to handle something because you figure out how it works, its properties and attributes. In understanding, considered as an existential mode of the being of the there, it is not a matter of being capable of something; it is a matter of the potentiality of being. In understanding the matter is being. It is not that in understanding, as an ontological structure, I say something about my ability to do something. Instead, I refer to the potentiality of being that I already am and can be. It is not a matter of ability, but relates to the potentiality to be. To "understanding," as existential, belongs that way of being of the being of Dasein, that Heidegger calls the "potentiality of being" [Seinkönnen]. Dasein is "primarily being-possible," and its "essential possibility... concerns the ways of taking care of the 'world'... of concern for others and, always already present in all of this, the potentiality of being itself, for its own sake" (BT 134-135 [143]). Dasein as being-in-the-world is existentially concerned about itself. The fact of being concerned about itself belongs to its being.

The existential possibility of Dasein is something different from possibility conceived as the eventuality of something that happens or does not happen. If we consider the potentiality of being as a category, a way of being

belonging to the ontic reality of what is simply there, present at hand in front of me, it refers to what is just possible, but is not yet actualized in reality and therefore it is not yet. It is just possible. This is not how the potentiality of being is meant by Heidegger. For him, the potentiality of being as existential is a fundamental mode of being that Dasein, as understanding, always already is.

Dasein as the disclosure is understanding. Being understanding, it is the potentiality of being. "As essentially attuned, Dasein has always already got itself into definite possibilities" (BT 135 [144]) that make it be that human being that we meet. At the same time, there are possibilities of being that Dasein ontically is not, as it did not choose them. Dasein chose to "project" itself onto certain possibilities and not others. This means that Dasein understands the world and itself in a certain way, and chooses to project itself into certain possibilities. The fact that Dasein projects itself means that it has "always understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities" (BT 136 [145]). Dasein projects itself into those possibilities according to which it understands itself. But Dasein is not only those possibilities it chooses to enact. Dasein is also at the same time "more" than what it is considered in an existentiell way. Existentially, in its being, Dasein is the potentiality of being, that is, it is also those possibilities it did not choose to actualize. It is not the actuality of a potentiality, but is "existentially that which it is *not* yet in its potentiality of being" (BT 136 [145]).

The being of Dasein is its there. Understanding is one mode of being of the there. It speaks of Dasein in terms of the potentiality of being, of possibilities that Dasein did or did not choose according to which it ontically becomes the Dasein that it is. As Stephen Mulhall states,²⁵ understanding recalls that

active side of Dasein's confrontation with its own existentiell possibilities. For if Dasein's being is an issue for it, then each moment of its existence it must actualize one of the possibilities

²⁵ Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*.

which its situation makes available to it, or fail to do so and thereby fall into one of those possibilities.²⁶

Therefore, Dasein has to decide for one or another possibility of being. Dasein must "project itself into" one of these possibilities. This "projection," as Mulhall continues, is the "core of what Heidegger means by understanding."²⁷

On Heidegger's account, "Dasein is the possibility of being free *for* its ownmost potentiality of being. Being-possible is transparent for it in various possible ways as degrees" (BT 135 [144]). Dasein as understanding, and therefore existentially comprehending its being as the potentiality of being, can choose how to be. Dasein understands not because it observes and then knows, but because it is understanding. Understanding belongs to its being, to the how which it is. And being understanding, it can choose to be authentic or inauthentic; it can lose itself in respect of its ownmost being or it can choose to be authentic, that is, to be in accordance with the understanding it has of its ownmost being. As Mulhall points out, an authentic understanding is that "projective understanding" that allows Dasein's individuality to "find proper expression," which means that Dasein "projects itself upon a mode of existence through which... it can 'become what it is'."²⁸ Dasein's way of being can be inauthentic when it chooses to actualize those possibilities that lead it to a loss of itself, mainly and for the most part having lost the awareness of what it is. Dasein can project itself in an inauthentic way and

'fail to find itself', perhaps by allowing the they-self to determine its choices, perhaps by [mis]understanding itself in terms of the categories appropriate to entities within its world — so that it loses its sense that finding itself is even a possibility.²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Being understanding and being always already attuned, Dasein is the potentiality of being, thrown into its possibilities of being. Dasein is always already entrusted to itself and the possibility of being itself. That Dasein is understanding means that, in its there, it is disclosure. It sees the world in its network of relations and significance. Dasein understands the potentiality of being of that which is in the world, and being disclosure it lets things be in their 'essence.' But Dasein is also disclosure for itself, for the comprehension of its own being, for being the being that it is.

The fact that Dasein as understanding discloses the existential being of that which is in the world, and of itself in terms of possibilities, is due to the fact that to the being of Dasein as understanding belongs the "existential structure" which Heidegger calls "project" [Entwurf] (BT 136 [145]). Dasein, revealed as thrown by attunement, is thrown in such a way that it projects itself according to possibilities. But this does not mean that it has an idea of itself and shapes its being by choosing possibilities according to this idea, and therefore to an expected result. This would mean that, once reached, the scope of Dasein would stop projecting itself. On the contrary, Dasein never ceases to project itself. It is projecting. It is always and already a thrown project. Dasein understands itself in terms of possibilities and projects itself into these possibilities; but it is never just those possibilities into which it is projected. This would be the case if we consider Dasein from an ontic perspective. Ontologically, the being of Dasein, is always already also those possibilities it did not choose. In this sense Regina interprets the being of Dasein, considered in the totality of its being the potentiality of being, as a "non-dualistic being-beyond."³⁰

"Understanding", considered from the perspective of its being "project", Heidegger calls "*sight*" [Sicht] (BT 137 [146]). "Sight" is Dasein itself in its authenticity, in its being its ownmost potentiality of being with respect to itself,

³⁰ Cf. Regina Umberto, *Servire l'essere con Heidegger* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1995), p. 21. Translation mine.

the world and other Dasein. The "sight" that can 'see' Dasein's existence (Dasein's being "ek-sistence") Heidegger calls "*transparency*" [Durchsichtigkeit] (BT 137 [146]). This is the ontological name of what we know as "self-knowledge." Using the term "transparency," Heidegger wants to stress the point that knowing oneself does not mean observing something identified as 'self' and, through perception, finding qualities that pertain to this self. According to Heidegger, knowing oneself means the ability to

grasp and understand the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world *throughout all* its essential constitutive factors. Existent beings glimpse "themselves" only when they have become transparent to themselves equiprimordially in their being with the world, in being together with others as the constitutive factors of their existence. (BT 137 [146])

Now, how can we glimpse ourselves in our ownmost being? How can we "become transparent" to ourselves in our being "existence"? How do we understand our existential being-there in its whole? To address these questions entails engaging in what Heidegger calls Dasein's "being-toward-death."

Being-Toward-Death and the Selfhood of Dasein

According to Heidegger, in ordinary life the human being does not live up to his deepest nature as Dasein. Dasein is not according to its inmost being. As Heidegger tells us, Dasein is "a being which I myself am, its being is in each case mine" (BT 108 [114]). Having said that, though, it does not follow that, as Dasein, I am according to my innermost self. Dasein initially and for the most part is lost in the inauthenticity of the "they." What does this mean? Who are the they? According to Heidegger, Dasein's "being-with," in everydayness, is expressed by the average and everyday being-with-one-another. In everydayness, Dasein

ascertains and understands itself, and thus it owns or loses itself, through the way it understands its relation with others; and the way Dasein understands itself in relation to others is through differences (in terms of opinions, behavior, life style and so on) which distinguish who I am from others. Dasein either attempts to eliminate the differences, and thus conforms itself with others, or attempts to avoid conformity and tries to be different. Heidegger, in this sense, talks about a "distance" between Dasein itself and others, and states that "being-with-one-another is, unknown to itself, disquieted by the care of this distance [Abstand]. Existentially expressed, being-with-one-another has the character of *distantiality*" [Abständigkeit] (BT 118 [126]).

The more Dasein does not notice this distantiality -the more Dasein does not realize that it is this dealing with-one-another which determines its being- the more it is this confrontation with one another that determines its individuality. This is so, insofar as Dasein does not look for its own identity, and does not search for a peculiar way in which it is, and thus distinguishes itself, but somehow determines itself by reacting to the way others are.

Dasein stands in *subserviance* to others. It itself is not; the others have taken its being away from it. The everyday possibilities of being of Dasein are at the disposal of the whims of the others. (BT 118 [126])

These others, though, are not specific others, not "definite others." The others are those who are just there, in the everyday being-with-one-another. The "who" of the others is not a determinate one, but is the "neuter, *the they*" [das Man] (BT 119 [126]). The they is that to whom we refer to when we say: "they say," "they think," "they judge." The they is an entity recognized by everybody, but nobody actually knows who they are. On this point, Mulhall writes:

The they is neither a collection of definite Others nor a single definite other; it is not a being or a set of beings to whom mineness belongs, but a free-floating, impersonal construct, a sort of

consensual hallucination to which each of us gives up the capacity for genuine self-relation and the leading of an authentically individual life.³¹

The they is that which "prescribes" the way of being of Dasein in everydayness. What the they is concerned about is "averageness," that is, the existential way of the being of the they. The they, as Heidegger states, "maintains itself factically in the averageness of what is proper, what is allowed, and what is not." In averageness "every priority is noiselessly squashed. Overnight, everything primordial is flattened down as something long since known... Every mystery loses its power"(BT 119 [127]). Dasein, in its being lost in averageness, is subject to the "leveling down" of its possibilities of being. Averageness, distanciality and leveling down, Heidegger tells us, are modes of being of the they, and they make up what we know as "publicness." Publicness is what has power over the way in which Dasein and the world are perceived and understood. And this is not because publicness has a particular insight into how 'things' are, but on the contrary,

because it does not get to 'the heart of the matter', because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness. Publicness obscures everything, and then claims that what has been thus covered over is what is familiar and accessible to everybody. (BT 119 [127])

The publicness of the they "*disburdens*" Dasein of its being; the they, by 'disburdening' Dasein, supports, strengthens, backs up Dasein's inclination to "take things easy and make them easy. And since the they constantly accommodates Dasein, it retains and entrenches its stubborn dominance" (BT 120 [128]). This is what we mean when we say that Dasein is lost in the inauthenticity of the "they" and it needs to choose to gain its deepest self for itself once more. When Dasein decides to free itself from the they, it decides for its authenticity, it

³¹ Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, p. 69.

decides to choose itself and not the they: Dasein "becomes *authentic* being-one's-self" (BT 248 [268]).

Now, "Initially and for the most part,"³² Dasein lives the relation with death in an inauthentic way, that is, it seems as though it does not have any relation with death. What Dasein seems to be concerned about is 'just' that one dies and that one day death will happen to its life. Heidegger deals with the concept of death in the first chapter of Division Two of *Being and Time*, and his concern is to show the ontological meaning of death and its authentic relation to Dasein's being. Death becomes, for Heidegger, the most intimate possibility of Dasein's authentic being, as it makes it possible to grasp Dasein's being as a whole. In this chapter, through an interpretation of Heidegger's account of Dasein's death, I will attempt to show that death, existentially conceived, is to be understood as a turning point in the perspective towards the authenticity of human being.

When Heidegger speaks of the death of Dasein, he does not refer to the biological end of Dasein. Instead, Heidegger is concerned with the fundamental ontological interpretation of Dasein's death. In his view, Dasein's death is not meant as "the ending of what is alive," as could be the case for a plant or an animal, for which Heidegger uses the word "perishing" [Verenden] (BT 229 [247]). Dasein, being a biological organism, can also perish; but as Heidegger points out, Dasein does not just perish. Dasein's perishing is an "intermediate phenomenon" called "demise" [Ableben] (BT 229 [247]), whereas the term "dying" [Sterben] refers to "the *way of being* in which Dasein *is toward* its death" (BT 229 [247]).

To investigate the death of Dasein means investigating the end of Dasein as being-in-the-world. Heidegger calls Dasein's death "being-toward-death." What does being-toward-death mean? What does being-toward-death reveal to

³² Heidegger uses this expression throughout *Being and Time* to indicate the way in which Dasein reveals itself in the immediacy of everydayness.

Dasein about its existence? How does Dasein relate to its death as being-toward-death? To address these questions we first need to recall how man in everydayness relates to death.

What man knows about death is that it is an event that will happen to his life, but which for the moment does not concern him. Indeed, if man is in a position to think about death, then it is because he is not yet dead. Man can experience death through the fact that somebody else dies and he witnesses this death; but man is never in a position to experience his own death and then reflect on it later. The common understanding of death is that death is the termination of life; it is a fact, an event in the future, that cannot be forecast and which will inevitably effect our lives. This notion of death depends on the phenomenon of death as it appears to our average understanding of it. Death defines man as a finite being, as mortal, as walking towards death since his birth. Now, Heidegger provides us with a different interpretation. In the existential analytic of Dasein, death is understood as Dasein's being-toward-death, and as such it unfolds a meaning hidden within our average idea of death. Understanding death existentially means the ability to understand death as belonging to Dasein's own being. Death as being-toward-death is for Dasein a way to be; it is not an event occurring in the future, but a possibility, a possible mode of its being.

The idea of death as possibility has to do with a conception of Dasein's being. According to Heidegger, to Dasein's being belongs a "not-yet" [Noch-nicht], something "constantly outstanding" [der ständige Ausstand] (BT 225 [242]). This something that belongs to Dasein's being, but is still "lacking," should not be interpreted as a missing element which, at a certain point, can be added to Dasein's being and which will then make it complete. The "outstanding" belonging to Dasein's being, Heidegger affirms, is not something that "comes in," as could be the case for some money needed to liquidate a debt. Rather, Dasein "always already exists in such a way that its not-yet belongs to it" (BT 226 [243]).

To understand the being of this not-yet, Heidegger suggests that we think the process of the ripening of a fruit. When a fruit ripens, this does not mean that

elements or components are added to the fruit that was unripe, and now with these elements it becomes a ripe fruit. The process of ripening belongs already to the fruit; it is the fruit that "ripens itself." If this were not so, there would be nothing that would make it ripen: "the fruit ripens itself, and this ripening characterizes its being as fruit" (BT 226 [244]). The ripe fruit is already there in the unripe fruit. "The not-yet is already included in its own being," and the same applies to that something which is outstanding concerning Dasein's being. Dasein "is always already its not-yet as long as it is " (BT 227 [244]), and since this not-yet belongs to Dasein's being, Dasein always is and has to be this not-yet.

But seen differently from the fruit that has its end in the ripeness which completes – so to speak – the meaning of the being of a piece of fruit, Dasein does not find in death, as the end of life, its fulfillment. We can say that, with death, Dasein terminates "its course," but this does not necessarily mean that Dasein has fulfilled its possibility of being at the moment of death. Even if Dasein did not fulfill itself it can die. Therefore, Heidegger affirms, the end of Dasein's course, its death, does not imply its fulfillment. The end of Dasein is not conceived, therefore, as its completion, as a fulfillment that would make it something complete, a whole "available as something at hand." Rather, Heidegger continues,

just as Dasein constantly already *is* its not-yet as long as it is, it also always already *is* its end. The ending that we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify a being-at-end of Dasein, but... rather a *being toward the end* of this being. Death is a way to be that Dasein takes over as soon as it is. (BT 228 [245])

As Heidegger states, what we commonly refer to as the death of a human being is ontologically referred to as "being-toward-the-end. The most extreme not-yet has the character of something *to which Dasein relates*" (BT 231 [250]). Death, existentially speaking, is not an "outstanding element," an event that we

have not experienced yet. It is not an “external and objective phenomenon.”³³ Death is related to us, and not just when it happens in the sense we know, that is, when we die. We know that death is something “imminent” (BT 231 [250]), but its being imminent is not like the imminence of something ready at hand. Death, in its imminence, is

a possibility of being [Seinsmöglichkeit] that Dasein always has to take upon itself. With death, Dasein stands upon itself in its *ownmost* potentiality-of-being [eigensten Seinkönnen]... When Dasein is imminent to itself as this possibility, it is *completely* thrown back upon its ownmost potentiality-of-being. (BT 232 [250])

This potentiality-of-being is *the* possibility to be taken, since in this possibility what is at stake is Dasein’s potentiality of “being-there,” of “being-in-the-world,” of existing as Dasein. This existential possibility that is death is a continuous possibility of being in accordance with my being Dasein. Here we find the first ontological determination of death as Dasein’s “ownmost potentiality-of-being.”

As Heidegger affirms, death is not only the “ownmost potentiality-of-being.” It is also “nonrelational” and “not to be bypassed.” That death is “nonrelational” implies that Dasein understands that it alone must take charge of its ownmost possibility-of-being, since what is at stake is always its own being. Dasein is the one which has to project itself according to its own possibilities and choose these possibilities. No one else can perform this on its behalf. Death, Heidegger affirms, is “not to be bypassed,” which means that it is the “extreme possibility” of Dasein, being the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein. Being it its ownmost possibility, death, as being-toward-death, can never be bypassed: “Dasein is unable to bypass the possibility of death” (BT 232 [251]).

³³ Calvin O. Schrag, *Existence and Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961), p. 100, quoted in: Paul Edwards, *Heidegger’s Confusions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 64.

The ownmost possibility of being proper to Dasein that is being-toward-death is not something that Dasein creates. As soon as Dasein is, it is already this possibility; for "when Dasein exists, it is already *thrown* into this possibility" (BT 232 [251]) of being-toward-death. The way Dasein becomes aware of its being thrown into death as its extreme possibility is through "Angst." Angst is a "fundamental attunement of Dasein, the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown being-toward-its-end" (BT 232-233 [251]). Angst is not to fear or to be anxious about something existing, in the sense of something objectively present in front of me. It is not Angst in the face of demise. Angst is Angst "in the face of death" (BT 232 [251]); it is Angst in the face of Dasein's death as the "possibility of the impossibility" (BT 242 [262]) of the being of Dasein itself. Angst concerns Dasein as being-in-the-world; it concerns the whole of its being.

Being-toward-the-end is a phenomenon that pertains to the fundamental-ontological structure of being-toward-death. Being-toward-the-end "belongs essentially to the thrownness of Dasein which reveals itself in attunement (mood) in various ways" (BT 233 [251]). The fact that, initially and for the most part, human beings are not aware of death as being-toward-death does not indicate that death belongs to the being of Dasein; but it does indicate that people in their unawareness are "fleeing *from*" their being-toward-death. This fleeing from is evidence of the fact that Dasein "covers over its ownmost being-toward-death" (BT 233 [251]).

The way in which Dasein "factically"³⁴ dies, the way Dasein is factically related to death, is initially and for the most part seen in the way of "falling prey" [Verfallen] (BT 233 [251-252]). Falling prey is the term Heidegger uses to indicate the everydayness of Dasein; falling prey, as Vicari suggests, indicates how Dasein is its openness in everyday life.³⁵ How Dasein initially and for the

³⁴ Factically refers to the way (proper to Dasein) in which Dasein is in-the-world, which is different from how animals or things are in the world.

³⁵ Cf. Dario Vicari, *Lettura di Essere e Tempo di Heidegger* (Torino: UTET Libreria, 1998), p. 184.

most part is in its everydayness is in the mode of fleeing from its ownmost possibility of being. By the way of falling prey, Dasein keeps itself away from its being-toward-death, and this is made possible by Dasein's being lost in the "they." Dasein tells itself "yes, people die," but in so doing it keeps itself distant from its ownmost possibility of being-toward-death. It seems as though dying never pertains to Dasein, as experience tells it that it is always the other who dies. This is the temptation to cover over what death actually is. Heidegger states, on this point, that "the they justifies and aggravates the *temptation of covering over for itself its ownmost being-toward-death*" (BT 234 [253]).

"Temptation" is one element which, according to Heidegger, constitutes the being of falling prey. Another element is constituted by "tranquillization." Indeed, the they takes care to "tranquillize" Dasein regarding death by keeping it distant from the idea that death could occur to Dasein itself. The they gives comfort to a dying person, or to those who have lost a dear one, by saying that soon it will get better. The painful situation will pass and everything will be back to 'normal'. The opening towards the authenticity of Dasein enhanced by death as demise, that is, the moment when we actually realize that we are being-toward-death, will soon be covered over again. And we will be able to carry on with our lives, that is, with the avoidance of taking responsibility for the extremely demanding existential being that we are. The meaning of the experience of death is erased. It is covered over. The they prevents Dasein from pausing and considering death as belonging always and already to its own existence and reality.

Tranquillization prevents the possibility of experiencing Angst in the face of death: "*the they does not permit the courage to have Angst about death*" (BT 235 [254]). Angst in the everydayness of falling prey becomes fear of something that is going to happen in the future. Having Angst, Heidegger observes, becomes inappropriate behavior, whereas what is suitable is an "indifferent calm" regarding the fact that "one dies" (BT 235 [254]). It becomes a practice of indifference in the face of Dasein's being-toward-death.

This consistent attempt to be indifferent "estranges Dasein from its ownmost nonrelational potentiality-of-being" (BT 235 [254]). "Estrangement" constitutes the third element of the being of falling prey. In the indifference of everydayness, Dasein flees from its being-toward-death. Dasein consistently attempts to escape from its ownmost potentiality of being. But this attempt testifies that Dasein *"even in average everydayness... is constantly concerned with its ownmost nonrelational potentiality-of-being not to be bypassed"* (BT 235 [254-255]). And the way Dasein does this is *"in the mode of untroubled indifference toward the most extreme possibility of its existence"* (BT 235 [255]). Again Heidegger affirms that "this evasion bears witness phenomenally to the fact that death must be grasped as the ownmost nonrelational *certain* possibility not-to-be-bypassed" (BT 238 [258]). Here "certain" means that there is no possibility of escaping it. Even if there is a strong attempt to evade and escape from it, it still remains certain. The certainty pertains to the being of Dasein as being-toward-death. I would like to point out that the certainty of death does not mean just that death will inevitably happen one day or another. The certainty of death, being perhaps the only fact we can absolutely be sure about, means also the fact that death belongs to the nature of human being, but not just as an 'external' event. Death, in the sense of being-toward-death, creates space for existential choices. The fact that death is certain means that it belongs to the being of Dasein, the fact of being capable of an authentic relation to death. In this sense death becomes a consistent, "extreme" possibility for authentic being.

We have just mentioned that death is the "ownmost possibility of Dasein"; it is "nonrelational" (BT 243 [263]), "not to be bypassed" (BT 243 [264]), is "certain" (BT 244 [264]). Though man in his living is always resolute regarding his relation with death, and though man, according to Heidegger, initially and for the most part has an inauthentic relation with death, as he lives in the mode of falling prey, man can nevertheless choose a different mode of being in the face of death, that is an authentic understanding of the phenomenon of death. How can we distinguish an authentic way of comprehending death, according to which

Dasein can live? How does Heidegger characterize the *authentic* being-toward-death of Dasein as an "existentiell possibility for Dasein"?³⁶

Heidegger begins to unfold the authentic being-toward-death by describing being-toward-death as "*being toward a possibility*" (BT 241 [261]). To be toward a possibility can be interpreted as taking care of the realization of this possibility; but this would lead to the abolition of the possible as possible. This mode of being toward a possibility is proper to the way we take care of things, and does not pertain to Dasein's being-toward-death. Being-toward-death is not a possibility that tends towards an accomplishment. Indeed, conceiving possibility in this sense would involve the demise of Dasein. The ontological meaning of being-toward-death does not lie in this. And, Heidegger continues, it is not a matter of thinking this possibility just as a possibility that will happen some time in the future; this "kind of behavior would amount to 'thinking about death', thinking about this possibility, how and when it might be actualized" (BT 241 [261]). Heidegger does not want to suggest that the authentic being-toward-death is tantamount to an obsessive thinking process that pretends to calculate a time when the event of death could happen. Death, Heidegger points out, must be understood as a possibility "*as such*" (BT 241 [261]), a possibility that remains open as a possibility and does not aim at any conclusion:

If being-toward-death has to disclose understandingly the possibility which we have characterized as *such*, then in such being-toward-death this possibility must not be weakened, it must be understood *as possibility*, cultivated *as possibility*, and *endured as possibility* in our relation to it. (BT 241 [261])

That "death is the ownmost possibility of Dasein" (BT 243 [263]) means that death is Dasein's possibility of being aware of the fact that it can withdraw from the influence and temptation of the they. Dasein can take charge of its authentic being. Comprehending this "ability" (BT 243 [263]), Heidegger says,

³⁶ Ibid., p. 188. Translation mine.

makes it clear to Dasein its everyday mode of being as falling prey. Once revealed in the inauthentic way of being in everydayness, Dasein is set free or liberated for its ownmost possibility of being-toward-death. The disclosure of Dasein's falling prey at the same time also discloses the possibility for an authentic relation to death, as it reveals the nature of death as being-toward-death.

How does Dasein relate to being-toward-death as possibility "as such"? One way we could think about it, states Heidegger, could be to think of it as "expecting" [*Erwarten*] (BT 241 [261]). But expecting death as possibility risks a shift back to consider it as a possibility for an actualization, which in this case would mean the demise of Dasein. Contrary to this, the authentic relation to death lies in "anticipation," which means "running ahead of death."

We have said what being-towards-death, as possibility, is not: it is not looking for an actualization; it is not calculative thinking; it is not expecting. The authentic mode of relating to death, as Dasein's ownmost possibility, Heidegger names "*anticipation of this possibility*" (BT 242 [262]), anticipation of the possible that the possibility of being-toward-death discloses. Anticipation of the possibility of death does not mean that we anticipate it as a possibility in the sense of "making something real available" (BT 242 [262]). For Heidegger, the possibility that death is for Dasein is "as far removed as possible from anything real" (BT 242 [262]). Understood as possibility as such, being-toward-death withdraws from any actualization. Being-toward-death becomes the "possibility of the impossibility of existence in-general" (BT 242 [262]). It is the impossibility of "every way of existing" (BT 242 [262]), not only in the biological sense, but also existentially (and thus ontically); death becomes the possibility of the impossibility of the inauthentic being of Dasein, since it opens and keeps open the existential possibility of Dasein's authentic being, that is, its possibility for being in accordance with Dasein's ownmost being. Dasein is existentially capable of authenticity. Authenticity is Dasein's task. On this score, Heidegger writes that "anticipation shows itself as the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and

extreme potentiality-of-being, that is, as the possibility of *authentic existence*" (BT 242 [263]).

Anticipation of the possibility of death means understanding one's ownmost potentiality of being. Being-toward-death discloses to Dasein its fundamental constitution, that is, that of being possibility-of-being, of being constantly understandingly open towards its ownmost being. "Running ahead of death as possibility," says Michel Haar, "means excessively intensifying its possible being."³⁷ It means bringing death closer not as actualization, but as intensifying the possibility of being which Dasein is. "Through running ahead... Dasein is free from everything, including itself,"³⁸ where this being free from itself entails Dasein being free from the inauthentic relation with its ownmost being.

Through anticipation we become aware of the fact that the possibility of being-toward-death is "not to be bypassed." This fact makes it clear to Dasein that it carries with itself an "extreme possibility of existence," that is, that of "giving itself up" (BT 243 [264]). The inauthentic mode of being-toward-death, of falling prey, evades this 'task' of giving itself up, whereas the anticipation of death as the authentic being-toward-death frees Dasein from inauthentic evading in the face of its most extreme possibility. Anticipation keeps Dasein open to its ownmost possibility of giving itself up, whereas in the everydayness of falling prey Dasein remains closed to this possibility of its being. Anticipation is the possibility of Dasein not remaining fixed on achievements already reached throughout its existence. In running ahead of death, and in being aware of death as its ownmost possibility not to be bypassed, Dasein realizes that its freedom lies in letting go of possibilities that could take it far from authentic being. Dasein gives itself up to be free, to be authentic; the anticipation of death discloses to Dasein this possibility that is its existential task.

³⁷ Michel Haar, *Heidegger and the Essence of Man* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), p. 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

Thinking death as Dasein's ownmost possibility of being points to a possible new perspective about death and its role in human life. Death is not just an 'external' fact; it does not resolve in a nihilistic void towards which the human being is moving. Death is not the end of a life which starts a number of years ahead. Death, as existentially belonging to the being of Dasein, can be interpreted as the turning point towards a new interpretation of human nature. Why should death be a moment and not a consistent possibility of remaining open for fundamental choices? Why do we think of death as something negative, as it seems to be the cause of privation? The common view presents death as the ultimate privation of life, and it seems to avoid thinking about death. Could it be that death, being the only unquestionable event of life, is, if intended in a not one-sided way, a key element towards a whole, different, disclosing interpretation of the nature of human being? In relation to this, Heidegger writes from the dimension of being-historical-thinking, that

running ahead into death is not will-to-nothing in the trivial sense but on the contrary: the highest *Da-sein*, which draws the shelteredness-concealedness of the there [*Da*] into the inhabiting of sustaining truth. (CP 228 [325])

The path towards *Gelassenheit* that we are trying to enhance in the present study goes through death, a concept of death that gathers and gains a positive and broader account. Death tells us that the experience of losing, of giving up, of letting go, belongs to the being of human being. The ontological death, as the ownmost possibility of being, is inherent in the nature of human being as Dasein. The "running ahead into death" is actually the "highest *Da-sein*," which is the deepest and most fundamental being of Dasein. And as we shall see in the next chapter, in *Da-sein*, Dasein becomes the "time-space" for the disclosing and sheltering of the truth of being revealed as *Ereignis*.

Now, before turning to the next chapter, in which we will contend with being-historical thinking, let me sum up what we have covered thus far. In *Being*

and Time, man as Dasein is ontologically determined as the understanding of being, as attunement, and as being-toward-death. These aspects of Dasein's being imply that man, in his nature, is open to the question of the meaning of being. Man as Dasein is fundamentally involved with the question of the meaning of being, and is responsible to it. The characterization of man as Dasein in *Being and Time* reaches its "turn of the screw" in the identification of being-toward-death, as the ownmost possibility of the being of Dasein. It is my view, that Dasein, being mortal, can die in the sense that it is capable of sacrificing its point of view, putting itself at the service of an unconditional search for the truth. The fact that man is mortal shows that the possibility of giving itself up, which man is capable of doing, is actually a task. It is the task of being "radical," which entails the task of reaching out to a fundamental questioning of the truth of being itself. The fundamental meaning of Dasein's being mortal carries within itself the possibility and the temptation of inauthenticity, a temptation to which Dasein initially and for the most part succumbs, but to which, nevertheless, Dasein can decide not to surrender.

The attempt to conceive man differently was the challenge of this chapter, and this challenge also implies an experience of a first turning in our thinking towards another way of thinking, which first of all needs to distance itself from a well-established knowledge – such as, for example, knowledge about the nature of human being – in order to be open to that otherness that we attempt to grasp in its diversity. But let us now move on to the next chapter, in which we will tackle the turning active in thinking. We will endeavor to understand some of the changes in Heidegger's thought as found in the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. We will thereby make an effort to determine how Heidegger's thought transformed itself from within, and thus allowed the truth of being as *Ereignis* to emerge from concealment.

CHAPTER THREE

Being-Historical Thinking

Towards the Turning

In the previous chapter, our understanding of who we are had been challenged by a different approach to thinking. Instead of looking for a definition of man that would leave us satisfied and fulfilled in our need to have a clear idea of who we are, this approach pauses, observes, questions, doubts and hesitates as it attempts to grasp 'something' other than the customary way of perceiving man and his being in the world. In so doing, our thinking remains open to a difference perceived, but not yet made conscious, between who we know we are and the possibility of being that we also are.

In the present chapter we will attempt to deal with the being-historical thinking enacted in the *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*. Being-historical thinking is that type of thinking which endeavors to think being in a fundamentally different way than the metaphysical approach, as it engages with the understanding of being as be-ing, that is, it thinks being in its "holding sway" [Wesung] as "*Ereignis*". The fundamental ontological way of interpreting man as Dasein already engages with a different way of thinking, but it still attempts to grasp the meaning of being through Dasein and its relation with the world. Being-historical thinking, on the other hand, struggles with understanding be-ing in its truth; it attempts to grasp the unfolding of be-ing as "enowning".

As probably noticed, in these few lines I have used a different spelling to refer to "being." In the *Contributions*, Heidegger uses two different spellings for the word "being": "*Sein*" and the older spelling "*Seyn*." This diversity in Heidegger's work plays a role which is not simply a matter of style. The presence of these different spellings "suggests, even enacts, two different (divergent) forms

of saying and thinking, two diverse languages.”¹ These two languages are the language of metaphysics, which questions the being of beings [Sein] and takes for granted the meaning of being itself, and the language of the history of being, which questions the meaning of being itself [Seyn]. When I speak of being [Sein], bearing in mind the concept of being as beingness, as the being of beings of metaphysics, I indicate being with the spelling “being”. When I intend to indicate being as “Seyn” – that is, as it is thought in the context of the enowning, by a thinking which is not “calculative” but “inceptual thinking,”² and which thinks being in its truth as historical event, – I indicate it with the spelling “be-ing” [Seyn]. With regard to quotations from other secondary works, I have left the form used by the authors. Sometimes in quotes be-ing as “Seyn” is referred to as “Being” with capital letter. At other times, be-ing is indicated as “being,” followed by the German translation “Seyn” in brackets.

By using the two different spellings, Heidegger does not want to suggest that he is talking about two beings. The older spelling introduced by Heidegger suggests and stresses a different way of thinking being; it hints at an attempt to think being in a completely different way from the way it is thought in the philosophical tradition. To this purpose Heidegger also uses words other than being to indicate the different meaning of being, and this seems to be a strategy that prevents us from succumbing to the temptation of fixing one word or one concept for being. With regard to the use of the two different spellings for being, I have decided to keep using both of them, though sometimes it could be confusing,

¹ George Kovacs, (1996) “An Invitation to Think Through and With Heidegger’s *Beiträge zur Philosophie*,” *Heidegger Studies*, 12, 17-36, p. 30.

² Heidegger uses the adjective “inceptual” to indicate the thinking that thinks the *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*. As Vallega-Neu pinpoints, the word inceptual translates the German word “*anfänglich*” which has its root in “*fangen*”, “to capture”. The “-ceptual” of “inceptual”, Neu continues, refers to the latin word “*capere*”, “to catch”, so that “inceptual thinking is a thinking which, as it were, ‘catches’ what is thrown to it. It ‘catches’, or takes over, the ‘throw’ (*Zuwurf*) of be-ing, and in doing so inceptually unfolds this throw. So, inceptual thinking is given to think the truth of be-ing as...it thinks this truth. In other words, inceptual thinking finds itself enowned by the truth of be-ing as it (thinking) occurs”. See: Vallega-Neu Daniela, *Heidegger’s Contribution to Philosophy: an Introduction*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 33.

because I think they nevertheless help us in our effort to think differently, as every time we face a different spelling we shall be encouraged to reflect on the fact that a change in thinking is thereby enacted.

In the context of being-historical thinking, the comprehension of man as Dasein deepens, as it is enriched by Dasein's relation with be-ing as event of appropriation. In this context, Dasein is revealed as Da-sein, as the time-space in which the unfolding of the truth of be-ing is made possible. Da-sein, as Neu suggests,³ is not to be thought primarily in relation to man, but is to be thought in relation to be-ing. Da-sein becomes the "grounding grounded time-space" for the unveiling of be-ing as *Ereignis*. Dasein, through the safe keeping of its deepest openness in Da-sein, remains open for be-ing itself. By being the "*Da*", by being the "*t*/here", the opening in which be-ing "holds sway," Dasein is brought back to its innermost determination. As Neu attests,

in the *Contributions* Heidegger thinks humans not primarily as entities but rather in their being and in determinations that arise out of their *being* the *t*/here. By abiding in the clearing of the withdrawal of be-ing, humans *are* the *t*/here, they make possible the being of the *t*/here in being *t*/here. And this, in turn, first brings humans to their essential determination.⁴

In the *Contributions* Heidegger speaks of Da-sein as "the preserver of the thrown projecting-open, the grounded founder of the ground"⁵ (CP 169 [239]). This means that man, in Da-sein, becomes the preserver of the time-space in which the truth the truth of be-ing in its essential swaying holds sway. In the *Contributions* man is not just "thrown" in his life, having the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity. Man is now 'projected' in his ontological task of being the "seeker", "preserver", "guardian" of the truth of be-ing. The fact that

³ Daniela Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1997), pp. 19- 20. Translation mine.

⁴ Vallega-Neu Daniela, *Heidegger's Contribution to Philosophy: an Introduction*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 74.

⁵ "Der Wahrer des geworfenen Entwurfs, der gegründete Gründer des Grundes."

man is projected into this task implies that man discovers that he belongs to being, he is 'at the service' of being, and not of his own will.

As F.-W. v. Herrmann states, "thrownness" in the *Contributions* is revealed as a "being appropriated [er-eignet]" of Dasein, in Da-sein, by the "call" [Zuruf] of being. The call of being, this appropriation, is also a "throw cast toward Dasein" and "inasmuch as thrownness is experienced as being-appropriated, projection, as thrown, is in each case an appropriated projection."⁶ The *Ereignis*, is the truth of being as the event of appropriation, that in its swinging-movement holds sway in the opening, in the t/here that opens up as such, in the "counterswing of need and belonging" proper to the interplay between being and Dasein. Von Herrmann very clearly express this dynamic, stating:

The whole of the interplay between *appropriating* throw and *appropriated* projection Heidegger calls *das Ereignis*, the event of appropriation... Both the need as the appropriating call and the human being's belonging to Being as appropriated projection swing in a counterswing that Heidegger calls *die Kehre im Ereignis*, 'the turn in appropriation' (BzP 262). The turn, the counterswing of 'need' and 'belonging', of appropriating call (*Zuruf*) and appropriated projection, is not something added to the *Ereignis* -to the event of appropriation- but it is appropriation itself, i.e., the way in which Being ever and ever presences historically in its truth.⁷

After *Being and Time* the problem of the truth of being becomes "the nodal problem on which everything hinges and where the direction of the enquiry must turn around so that Being is no longer approached by way of Dasein but proceeds from the truth of being to the nature of man."⁸ This is the "turning" which, in *Being and Time*, could not be expressed because what is said there

⁶ Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann, "Technology, Politics and Art," in: Harries Karsten and Jamme Christoph (eds.), *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art and Technology* (New York, London: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. 58

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mehta, Jarava Lal, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), p. 333.

remains caught up in the language of metaphysics, whereas what reveals itself in the turning, be-ing itself in its truth, occurs before and beyond metaphysics.

The truth of Being has not been questioned throughout metaphysics. How be-ing reveals itself, and if it does in the history of metaphysics, remains a non-addressed question. The question of the truth of be-ing becomes the question about foundations, about the ground of metaphysics. This question is asked by what Heidegger in the *Contributions* will name "future thinking," a type of thinking which, *made* conscious of this lack of questioning, "poses" the question. The question of the truth of be-ing is not asked by man as Dasein. This question of the truth of be-ing is actually an answer to a venture of be-ing itself that first moves towards man. The fact that man asks the question indicates that man is "t/here", and in Da-sein is responding – by asking – to a call, that is, the call of be-ing.

That be-ing moves towards man constitutes "the turning" [die Kehre] which is officially announced for the first time in the *Letter on Humanism* (1946), but is already operative in *Being and Time*, though without Heidegger himself being aware of it. The mindfulness of the turning operative in *Being and Time* is retrospectively visible because light is drawn upon it by the turning itself. As Heidegger writes:

The turning is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in the thinking that was sought first arrives at the locality of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced in the fundamental experience of the oblivion of being. (LH 250)

The *Kehre* is defined by Sheehan as "the radically inverted meaning of being, ...that stands over against the metaphysical idea of being as full presence

and intelligibility.”⁹ The turning is another name for the core of Heidegger’s search; it names the way be-ing gifts itself, while Dasein, in Da-sein, opens up towards this gift. The turning, that we could say to be “the inner movement” that belongs to the *Ereignis*, needs to be carefully distinguished from the change in thought that Heidegger underwent during the 1930s. Indeed, this latter change speaks of a change in the way in which Heidegger articulates the turning.

Thinking about the turning means thinking about *Ereignis*. The turning is in fact “turning in enowning” (CP 286 [407]). The turning can be considered the way in which *Ereignis* ‘acts’, operates; it can be considered “the inner movement of *Ereignis*.”¹⁰ To understand the turning means, therefore, to understand the meaning of *Ereignis*, the name with which Heidegger in his later thought indicates the way in which be-ing “holds sway” [west] or, expressed in a more metaphysical way, the way of being of be-ing. With Magris we could say that “*Ereignis* is the backdrop from out of which be-ing emerges and on the ground of which be-ing is to be thought.”¹¹

The transformed perspective active in the turning brings about a concept of Dasein that is enriched, deepened, by the different dimension of thinking. By saying this, I do not mean to say that, with regards to the fundamental characteristics of Dasein’s being as developed in *Being and Time*, Heidegger adds some newly discovered existentials ‘after’ the turning. What we investigated in the previous chapter as belonging to Dasein’s being remains acquired. What changes, however, is the scene and the source from out of which the concept of Dasein is lit. As Mehta asserts, in *Being and Time*

⁹ Thomas Sheehan, “Kehre and Ereignis: A Prolegomenon to *Introduction to Metaphysics*,” in: Polt Richard and Fried Gregory (eds.), *A Companion to Heidegger’s Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Aldo Magris (1989), “Pensiero dell’Evento e Avvento del Divino in Heidegger,” in: *Annuario Filosofico*, 5, 31-83, p. 32. Translation mine.

the way Dasein understands itself and its relationship to Being before the 'reversal' is... the self-assertion of Dasein in its impotence and finitude...¹²

After the turning "there is an abdication of this will, of this self-assertion in the face of Being."¹³ According to Mehta, Heidegger's study of Nietzsche's "will to power" and its identification with the "nihilistic culmination" of what belongs to the nature of the history of metaphysics, shows that the realization that this metaphysical will was still operative in *Being and Time*, and was therefore "standing between" Dasein and be-ing, caused a downfall of will and led to "a complete surrender to the 'voice of Being'."¹⁴ In the turning in enowning, thinking gives up its will to be free for the truth of be-ing. In accordance with Mehta's view, this "renunciation" is what Heidegger refers to when he says: "Abandonment does not take. Abandonment gives. It gives the inexhaustible power of the simple."¹⁵ The abandonment of will does not indicate a lack of strength in thinking, but is induced by the call that be-ing, in its be-ing enowning, directs towards Dasein.

If in *Being and Time* man as Dasein feels *Angst*, feels anxious in the face of death as its ownmost possibility of being (as the impossibility of its existence), with the turning, 'giving up' will – since it is now be-ing itself calling Dasein and not Dasein's will that moves Dasein to question the truth of be-ing – Dasein discovers its deepest disposition towards its own nature. The essential way of being of Dasein is not centered on itself as agent, but is brought about by its relationship with be-ing. The disposition that makes this relationship possible is not *Angst*: it is "reservedness" (CP 11 [15]), that is, "the composure of releasement" (C 81 [59]), a "composed steadfastness" (C 81 [59]) that is the style

¹² Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and The Vision*, p. 337.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger (1949), "The Pathway," tr. T. F. O'Meara, in: Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York-London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 77-79, p. 79.

of those who are in the crossing, those who think be-ing from out of the *Ereignis* and recognize the passing of the last god. But we shall see in greater detail what this means, in Chapter Four of the present investigation.

The turning as "turning in enowning" is operative in the *Contributions*. Now, since the turning is not something but it shows itself through its happening, to understand how the turning happens requires that we understand those moments in which the turning as transformed awareness is revealed and becomes clear. The backdrop against which we can identify those moments, affirms Heidegger, is the history of philosophy as the history of metaphysics. The way we identify these "historical" [geschichtlich] moments is by re-interpreting metaphysics, which Heidegger in the *Contributions* identifies with the "first beginning" of thinking, from the perspective of the "other beginning" of thinking, that is, from the perspective opened up by be-ing itself. The thinking that thinks the "other beginning" reveals the historical occurring of be-ing which is underway.¹⁶

In the *Contributions* the crossing from metaphysical thinking to "future thinking," from the first beginning to the other beginning, occurs. The crossing from metaphysical thinking to future thinking has its first step in the experience of "distress of lack of distress" (CP 75 [107]) which characterizes the modern age. This distress of lack of distress is due to the "forgottenness of being" (CP 79 [113]), as determined by the "abandonment of be-ing" (CP 79 [113]). Worth stressing here is the fact that in both expressions forgottenness of being and abandonment of being, the genitive "of be-ing" is to be understood in its subjective and objective meaning. The forgottenness of being does not just imply the forgottenness of being by beings, but also indicates the forgottenness that belongs

¹⁶ A distinction needs to be made between history as "*Geschichte*" and history as "*Historie*." For Heidegger, "*Historie*" indicates a series of facts or events that happened in the past, about which historiography writes and which are recorded throughout history. "*Historie*" is history as a branch of learning, as a discipline, as historiography. History as "*Geschichte*," on the other hand, is "what is enowned by being," and indicates the history that 'happens', in the sense of 'fundamental turnings' in the course of humankind. "*Geschichte*" is the history of be-ing itself, moved and made by be-ing, which reveals itself as event of appropriation.

to be-ing itself. And the same applies to the expression abandonment of being, which indicates the abandonment of be-ing by beings, but also the abandonment that belongs to be-ing itself. Dasein asks the question of the meaning of being from a situation in which the distress of lack of distress not only takes place, but *uncovers itself as distress*. The forgottenness of being becomes a concern when the abandonment of being is experienced as a fundamental event in the history of Western thought, that is, as an event that can change, and which has changed this same history.

Now, how do we enact this being-historical thinking? How does Heidegger enact this thinking? As already mentioned, Heidegger's enactment is articulated in the *Contributions*, which represents this attempt. But Heidegger's effort does not constitute *the* way towards a different way of thinking be-ing. As Kovacs suggests, Heidegger's attempt is to be considered an "invitation" to carry on one's own attempt to think be-ing in a non-metaphysical way, that is, to think its 'essence' from "out of the truth, i.e., the withdrawing unconcealment, of being (*Seyn*) itself."¹⁷ Heidegger's invitation is an invitation to be a "thinker," to be one of the "few" that, with the courage to venture oneself into the journey towards the truth of be-ing as enowning, frees man from himself and enowns him back to his being the "t/here" for the disclosing of be-ing as enowning.

In *Being and Time*, and later in the *Contributions*, Heidegger deals with what he calls the "grounding question," that is, the question which no longer asks about the being of beings, but about the meaning of being, about the truth of be-ing. The grounding question addressed in *Being and Time* remains the fundamental question of Heidegger's whole thought. But the experience of the "historicality" [*Geschichtlichkeit*] of being, the fact that be-ing as Enowning reveals itself throughout history, moves Heidegger to a different perspective from which he considers the question anew. This different standpoint makes him

¹⁷ Kovacs, "An Invitation to Think Through and With Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*," pp. 20-21.

change the language through which he attempts to express the turning which is operative in enowning, and we directly experience this change by reading through the *Contributions* as an attempt to speak from out of *Ereignis*.

While in *Being and Time* Heidegger considers the question of the meaning of being from the perspective of the "transcendence" of Dasein, the language he uses is still too much involved with metaphysics. But his way of thinking transforms into be-ing-historical thinking in the sense that, as Neu explains, being itself is thought from out of being, and Heidegger, in the *Contributions*, attempts to say the being of be-ing as Enowning with a language that "speaks directly from out of the enowning."¹⁸ The being-historical thinking enacted in the *Contributions* is an attempt to let be-ing, as enowning, speak. It is not Dasein which, from the openness of its "Da," takes action in order to understand and disclose the meaning of being. In being-historical thinking the meaning of be-ing is disclosed from out of be-ing itself. The turning of be-ing towards Dasein, in Da-sein, also clarifies the change in the way in which Heidegger expresses his thought. The turning can be imagined as a sudden but slow turn, from a standpoint that nevertheless remains within the fundamental-ontological perspective, but which at the same time wins a different approach. F.-W. von Herrmann names this transformation an "immanent transformation,"¹⁹ as the viewpoint remains within the perspective opened up in *Being and Time*, and from this same perspective a transformed dimension arises. This is also the reason why dealing with the *Contributions to Philosophy* entails dealing with the first elaboration of what is enacted in it, that is, with *Being and Time*.

As v. Herrmann suggests, the relation between the two paths of thinking – the fundamental ontological way developed in *Being and Time* and the "being-historical way" enacted in the *Contributions* – is highlighted by Heidegger

¹⁸ Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie"* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994), p. 6 (translation mine). Quotes from this work will be indicated in brackets as WiE, followed by the page number.

himself in Section 132 of the *Contributions*.²⁰ Here, Heidegger speaks of the “ontological difference” – the difference between “being” and “a being” – as initially necessary for the “crossing” as something to be clarified, to be questioned, because it is by clarifying its meaning that man acquires a first hint towards a way of thinking which is beyond and before metaphysics, a metaphysics out of which the question of the difference between being and a being originates as a necessity, a concern. But this distinction, once stressed and investigated, nevertheless also needs to be “leapt-over,”

for as necessary as this distinction is (to think in traditional terms), in order to provide at all preliminary perspective for the question of be-ing, just as disastrous does this question continue to be. For this distinction indeed *does* arise from a questioning as beings as such (of beingness). But in this way one never arrives directly at the question of be-ing. In other words, this distinction *itself* becomes the real barrier which misplaces the inquiry into the question of be-ing, insofar as, by presupposing this distinction, one attempts to go further than this distinction and to inquire into its onefold. (CP 177 [250])

In order to get closer to the meaning of being, the ontological difference becomes an obstacle; for through it we can never arrive “directly at the question of be-ing.” According to Heidegger, what is to be done is not to “surpass” “that which is” [das Seiende], to encounter being as transcendence. Instead, what is to be done is to “leap-over” [überspringen] the distinction between being [Sein] and beings [Seiende], and to therefore leap-over the idea of transcendence and “inquire inceptually into be-ing and truth” (CP177 [250-251]). But what does it mean to carry on an inceptual inquiry? It means that we first need to think the distinction between being and beings, to think the ontological difference – and this already means to think in the crossing. From this standpoint we need to “sustain” the “ambiguity” that this thinking brings about; it is the ambiguity of

²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

having to think this difference and at the same time to leap over it. But the leap over this difference happens within "the leap" into be-ing and its truth.

Now, before directly contending with the concept of "the leap," let me spend a few lines to introduce in its peculiarity Heidegger's *Contributions*, within which the leap of thought into be-ing is brought forward.

Contributions: Fugue and Joinings

Between 1936 and 1937, Heidegger begins to write the *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, his second major work that will be completed in 1938, and which will be published posthumously for the first time in 1989. This work consists of a "Preview," six "joinings" called "Echo," "Playing-Fort," "Leap," "Grounding," "The Ones To Come" and "the Last God." The content of the six joinings is organized into 252 paragraphs. In 1938 Heidegger added to these six joinings another section entitled "Be-ing" [Das Seyn] that comprehends paragraphs 253 through to 281. This section was originally intended to be after the "Preview" (or introductory part), and the *Beiträge* was supposed to conclude with the "The Last God." But in a note manuscripted by Heidegger in 1939 at the end of the table of contents, he specifies that the section on be-ing was not correctly placed after the "Preview," as "it tries to comprehend (put together) 'once more' the 'entire' issue at hand, the 'matter' of thinking worked out in the entire book, being itself,"²¹ It was thus an "editorial decision" that placed it as the end of book, taking into account Heidegger's own suggestion.

²¹ Kovacs, "An Invitation to Think Through and With Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*," p. 30.

In the *Contributions*, being-historical thinking, as the "essential thinking" of be-ing,²² is enacted and outlined for the first time. At the beginning of his work, Heidegger introduces the title that is divided into "public title" (Contributions to philosophy) and "Essential Heading" (From Enowning). Concerning the "public title," he stresses that it sounds "ordinary" and "bland," and that it seems to indicate that the aim of the work is a "scholarly contribution" for the advancement of philosophy. In spite of this impression, that is not Heidegger's aim. Still, he admits that he had to choose this general title because there was no more title available that could hint at something fundamental in the language. The language, the meaning of words, had been "used up," impoverished, deprived of meaning. The original and authentic relation with words "has been destroyed," has been made unavailable. Given this impoverished situation, there was no expectation of a title that could say something 'different'. But, on the other hand, even if the public title cannot indicate the actual aim of the work, it nonetheless indicates what this work is about, that is, it is an "attempt" to say something never said before about the truth of be-ing as such. As Heidegger states, since we have been living in a time in which metaphysics is moving into being-historical thinking, we can only make an attempt to say the truth of be-ing from a more original stance. The "proper title" of this work, the title that actually names the attempt suggested by the public title, is the heading "From Enowning," which "indicates a thinking-saying which is en-owned by enowning and belongs to be-ing and to be-ing's word" (CP 3 [3]).

In the *Contributions* Heidegger thinks the "essential unfolding of being (*Seyn*) as event."²³ In this experience, our way of thinking will not remain in the categories of the metaphysical tradition, in which being, reduced to beingness, remains veiled and forgotten in its truth. The "future thinking" thinks the truth of

²² George Kovacs (1992), "The Leap (*Der Sprung*) for Being in Heidegger's *Beiträge Zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*," *Man and World*, 25, 39-59, p. 50.

²³ Kovacs, "An Invitation to Think Through and With Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*," *Heidegger Studies*, 12, 17-36, p. 19.

being as event; it recognizes the hints of the history of be-ing as event. The "essential heading" does not therefore suggest that this work will give any treatise about "enowning." Rather, what is said in this work is "en-owned by enowning" and belongs to it. What is said "does not stand over against what is said. Rather, the saying itself is the 'to be said', as the essential swaying of be-ing [Wesung des Seyn]" (CP 4 [4]). As Kovacs states, the *Contributions* "remakes, reestablishes the question of Being as a truly historical question; the *Contributions* speak of the experience of Being as a transformative event, as the event of appropriation, as the mutual belonging of the coming into its own of Being and the human being."²⁴

How does Heidegger introduce us to this transformed dimension of be-ing-historical thinking? How does Heidegger organize this being-historical glance-way? The idea that moves Heidegger when writing the *Contributions* is that of a musical composition: the "fugue." As v. Herrmann asserts, the *Contributions* is the first drawing of the "fugue of the truth of be-ing in its essential swaying as turning enowning" (WiE 19). Fugue refers to the internal 'structure' of the *Contributions*. The six joinings that make up the work play together similar to a musical fugue, which, in our case, enacts the fugue of be-ing. The musical "fugue" is defined as

a composition or compositional technique, in which a theme (or themes) is extended and developed mainly by imitative counterpoint.²⁵ In the opening section, the 'exposition', the main theme or 'subject' is announced in the tonic, after which the second 'voice' enters with the answer, i.e. the same theme at the dominant (or subdominant) pitch while the first may proceed to a

²⁴ Kovacs, "The Leap (*Der Sprung*) for Being in Heidegger's *Beiträge Zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*," p. 43.

²⁵ Counterpoint is "the art of combining two simultaneous musical lines. The term derives from the Latin *contrapunctum*, 'against note' [...] When one part is added to an existing one, the new part is said to be 'in counterpoint with' it." Cf. Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. Internet: http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g_counterpoint.html).

countersubject. This procedure is repeated at different octaves until all the voices have entered and the exposition is complete.²⁶

I have reported this description because, in my view, it gives a clear idea of how the *Contributions* is thought. In fact, what in this work seems to be a series of thoughts that apparently have nothing to do with each other, is indeed a complex composition of joinings that present the same topic in different ways, and which build a "fugue" of joinings that is the enacting of the "fugue" of be-ing itself.

It is said of Bach's *Art of Fugue* that "he explored the potentialities of a single main theme in a cycle of 14 fugues."²⁷ In the same way, Heidegger enacts the potentialities of the fugue of be-ing in the *Contributions*, which we could rename as a hermeneutical cycle of fugues. Moreover, the structure of the musical fugue is enhanced by the music itself as it is played. The six joinings that compose the fugue of be-ing are moments, are the 'octaves', through which being-historical thinking is enacted. The music itself produced through the structure reaches out to a dimension which the interplay of the notes expresses, whereas the structure itself would not be able to render that dimension accessible – even though, without such a structure, the notes could not lead us to higher grounds. I would claim that Heidegger's composition attempts to use the structure of the fugue and the words played in it in the same way. Heidegger's words describe clearly the structure:

Each of the six joinings of the jointure stands for itself, but only in order to make the essential onefold more pressing. In each of the six joinings the attempt is made always to say the same of the same, but in each case from within another essential domain of that which enowning names. Seen externally and fragmentarily, one easily finds "repetitions" everywhere. But what is most difficult is purely to enact in accord with the jointure, a persevering with the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Cf. Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. Internet: http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/g_fugue.html).

same, this witness of the genuine inabiding of inceptual thinking. On the other hand, it is easy to progress continuously in the sequence of "materials" that offer themselves in constantly differing ways because the progression comes "naturally". Every joining stands for itself, and yet there is a hidden inter-resonating and an enopening grounding of the site of decision for the essential crossing into the still possible transformation of Western history. (CP 57 [81])

The *Contributions* cannot be considered a completed work in itself, in the sense that it is not a work that completes the elaboration of be-ing-historical thinking. The essential sway of be-ing as enowning is not completed in this work, because this work remains still preparatory to a thinking-saying that could express and pronounce be-ing in its truth. The type of thinking at stake here is the one that has first experienced "being as the truth of be-ing as such in its essential swaying [*Wesung*] as turning enowning" (WiE 19). In so doing, this thinking "has thought the other beginning in the history of the essential swaying of be-ing" (WiE 20). But the other beginning is not yet grounding the history of be-ing. This thinking, "inceptual thinking," prepares the crossing and at the same time is the crossing; it is the other beginning of thinking. Inceptual thinking is called inceptual because it thinks what is "*originary*," it thinks the beginning and it thinks from out of the beginning. The beginning, Heidegger states,

can never be comprehended as the *same*, because it reaches ahead and thus each time reaches beyond what is begun through it and determines accordingly its own retrieval. What is inceptual is never that which is new, because this is merely the fleeting item of yesterday. Beginning is also never the "eternal," precisely because it is never removed or taken out of history. (CP 39 [55])

The beginning which inceptual thinking thinks and attempts to unfold is be-ing itself as enowning. But "*this beginning*," Heidegger affirms, can be acted out as the "*other beginning*" only when the "*first beginning*," that is, the history of metaphysics, is disclosed and "put into proper perspective," which means that it is recognized for what it is: the first beginning of thinking, out of which the history

of metaphysics as the history of the forgottenness of being has developed. "Grasped inceptually," Heidegger states, "the beginning is be-ing itself. And in accordance with it *thinking* is also more originary than re-presenting and judging" (CP 41 [58]).

The language used by Heidegger in the *Contributions* is very hermetic and cryptic. As v. Herrmann attests, Heidegger did not think about publication while writing it, and therefore did not think about the difficulties of the language for a reader that approaches this work.²⁸ In this work, the language is pushed by Heidegger to its limit. It seems as though Heidegger has used the meaning of every single part of words, such as suffixes, prefixes and endings, in both their current and ancient meaning, and that in order to express all that the language can express. He composes these meanings in all possible ways to try to express, through language, what language apparently cannot express. It appears as though he is almost emptying language of its ordinary, familiar and 'covering' meaning in order to create a void of 'idle meaning', so that the truth of be-ing can show itself through its own language.

Regarding this point, allow me at this stage to introduce an interesting remark made by Carlo Angelino in relation to Meister Eckhart. Angelino writes that the "crisis" of the conceptual language of metaphysics is also identifiable in Eckhart's writings. On Angelino's account, Eckhart could not find in the philosophical and theological conceptual system of Scholasticism the means to express his experience of the Absolute. In particular, Angelino talks about the

inadequacy of that philosophical and theological system to entirely grab at the Absolute and more generally speaking the inadequacy of man's word itself, to tell what man senses as not belonging to his mortal world.²⁹

²⁸ Cf.: Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie."*

²⁹ Carlo Angelino, "Il Religioso nel Pensiero di Martin Heidegger," in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, tr. Fabris Adriano (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983), pp. 11-24, p. 17. Translation mine.

Here we can perhaps *glimpse* Eckhart's thinking as standing beyond and before (in Heideggerian sense) that metaphysical context which Heidegger attempts to overcome in the crossing to the other beginning.

The "transitional nature of thinking" enacted in the *Contributions* attempts to reach, as Kovacs states, "another inception of questioning in order to open up the 'time-play-space' [Zeit-Spiel-Raum] of the truth of Being."³⁰ By investigating the meaning of the leap, we ourselves shall attempt to be tuned up on a different level of questioning, meaning that our questioning should not look for definitions about what the leap is, but that we shall consider the inquiry into the leap a preparation for being open to what Heidegger's saying lets us perceive.

Prelude To The Leap

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger's investigation does not proceed in a systematic fashion. His thoughts seem to be aphorisms, statements that do not clearly express their connection with one other. Most of the time, Heidegger's statements remain obscure to the comprehension of the reader. The nature of this work as a circle of fugues makes it particularly thorny and complex to provide a linear exposition of what Heidegger wants to communicate. Given the nature of this work, therefore, my attempt to investigate the leap does not result in an exposition that offers a definition of the leap. My approach to Heidegger's concept of leap takes into consideration some aspects, referred to by Heidegger as related to the leap, which I shall try to present as turnings that belongs to the leap, that are the leap itself. First, I shall reflect on the leap as "inceptual thinking." I shall then consider the leap in its preparing character as "crossing." Finally, I shall introduce the experience of the leap as leaping into the "cleavage" of be-ing,

³⁰ Kovacs, "The Leap (*Der Sprung*) for Being in Heidegger's *Beiträge Zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*," p. 54.

which is the "intimacy" of be-ing itself. Rather than exhibiting the structure of the leap – if we can ever speak of such a structure – the purpose of the following investigation is to attempt to pave the way for an intuition of the leap.

To the leap Heidegger dedicates the third joining of the *Contributions*. By contending with the *Contributions* we are moving in the crossing between the transcendental-horizontal perspective enacted in *Being and Time* and the be-ing-historical thinking enacted in the *Contributions*. It is in the crossing that the leap of thought takes place. The very moment of the leap is the one within which we shall attempt to rest. In this chapter, I will try to make of the leap the expanse in which my discourse takes place. To understand Heidegger's concept of the leap means to prepare that time-space in which everything happens and reveals itself, wherein the relation between past and present occurs, wherein the hint of the moment expands and allows the encounter with the truth of be-ing be.

Let us recall what is meant by Heidegger when he refers to the "history of being" [Seinsgeschichte], for it is in its domain that the leap precedes. When Heidegger speaks of the "history of being," he refers to the distinction between the "first beginning" of thinking, which shows itself as the development of metaphysics in the Western tradition, and the "other beginning," which reveals itself in the "turning" and opens up to the history of be-ing, in which all that has been familiar is "abandoned and thrown aside" by thinking.

We could venture to say that the history [Geschichte] of be-ing is the 'development' of the history of being which is thought anew by a thinking that is no more "calculative" thinking, but is a thinking which attempts to grasp the 'new' dimension in which be-ing [Seyn] reveals itself. The leap is a leap into this "domain of be-ing history," but this does not mean that before the leap we are outside that domain; for the leap occurs also before leaping into the domain of be-ing. The difference is given by the fact of realizing it. The leap follows the hints from the other beginning, and then leaps from the first beginning of thinking into the other beginning, into the "history of be-ing." What does distinguish the "first beginning" from the "other beginning"?

The history of the first beginning and its end, which is the history of philosophy from Anaximander to Nietzsche, is led by what Heidegger calls the "guiding-question" (CP 53 [76]) which questions "what is being?", but it does not ask about the "meaning of being," what being is as such. The reason why we need to understand the history of be-ing is because it is in its domain that the leap leaps.

According to Heidegger, the whole history of metaphysics is grounded on a lack of grounding, as it does not search for being itself. This philosophy failed to ask the fundamental question about the meaning of being. Being has been presupposed as something already clear in itself, and therefore with no need to be questioned as to its own essence. Now, the "history of be-ing" has its first step in the "existential analytic" carried out in *Being and Time*. *Being and Time* is also identified in the *Contributions* as the work in which the "crossing" from the end of the first beginning to the other beginning occurs, a "crossing" that crosses from the "guiding-question" to the "grounding-question." The thinking that thinks in the crossing and makes the leap is called "inceptual thinking."

Inceptual Thinking: The Leap Towards The Origin

"Inceptual thinking" is the thinking of the "great conversion that leaps towards the origin,"³¹ towards the essential swaying of be-ing. The leap of inceptual thinking is a leap into the tradition that has to be overcome. But it is not a leap over this tradition, a leap into something different. It is the leap into history; an attempt to deepen and find the hidden and forgotten meaning of the history of metaphysics, which is its "essential historical meaning" [seynsgeschichtlich], the truth of be-ing as enowning.

³¹ Aldo Magris (1992), "I Concetti Fondamentali dei 'Beiträge' di Heidegger," *Annuario Filosofico*, 8, 229-268, pp. 235-236. Translation mine.

The thinking that makes the leaps, inceptual thinking, is called "inceptual" because it thinks the origin, and not because it comes first or before in the temporal sense. "Inceptual thinking" is the thinking that thinks the truth of be-ing in its essential swaying as enowning; it is the thinking that "leaps towards the origin" and prepares the "other beginning," as it is involved in thinking and questioning the "first beginning," that is, the history of metaphysics. But why do we have to go back to the beginning? Why, Heidegger asks, should we think a beginning at all?

Because only the greatest occurrence, the innermost enowning, can still save us from being lost in the bustle of mere events and machinations. What must take place is enopening being for us and putting us back into this [being] and thus bringing us to ourselves and before the work and the sacrifice. But now the greatest enowning is always the beginning...For the beginning is what is *sheltered*, the origin that has not yet been misused and managed, the origin that is always withdrawing as it grasps far ahead and thus preserves within itself the highest reign. (CP 40 [57])

In the beginning we can find be-ing as enowning; the beginning is be-ing itself as enowning. And going back to the beginning is going back to the origin in which be-ing holds sway, wherein be-ing is sheltered and is not yet lost, by calculative thinking, in everydayness.

"Inceptual thinking" leaps to that moment where and when the relation with the truth of be-ing is made possible. In our ordinary existence, the "nearest," "the ordinary," the "continual" that we experience, that we think, is where be-ing is most of all lost to view; and it cannot be found because it is not sought after, because be-ing itself strategically withdraws and conceals itself from the awareness of beings. The remembering of it disappeared. Inceptual thinking leaps into the awareness of this disappearance and begins to pose questions about what this disappearance is a sign of.

The thinking of the crossing as presented in the third joining, "The Leap," tries for the first time to inceptually unfold the "entire fugue of the enowning

[Ereignis].”³² According to Neu, “Echo” and “Playing-Fort” prepare the third joining, in the sense that in them is captured the first opening to the essential sway of be-ing. In “Echo” and “Playing-Fort,” thinking unfolds the “distress of the lack of distress” that is characteristic of the modern age, and which is due to the withdrawal of be-ing from the history and thus from man’s everydayness. In the leap, on the other hand, we find “the enactment of projecting-open [Entwurf] the truth of be-ing” (CP169 [239]). Projecting-open [Entwurf] is a “crucial thing” that philosophy, in the crossing from the first to the other beginning, “has to have achieved.” This achievement, which projecting-open is, is “the grounding enopening of the free-play of the time-space of the truth of be-ing” (CP 4 [5]), that is, the unveiling of the truth of being as “*historical* mindfulness.” This makes of history not a discipline, but “that which first awakens and effects thinking-questioning as the site of thinking-questioning’s decisions” (CP 4 [5]).

Projecting-open is thinking from a more originary stance “the truth of be-ing,” that is to say, thinking the “essential sway of be-ing.” “Essential sway” [Wesen] is the word used by Heidegger to grasp the meaning that the metaphysical category of “essence” as the essence of the being of beings, could not grasp. Heidegger’s concern, is with the ‘essence’ of be-ing as such, that is, with the truth of be-ing. Now, this ‘essence’ is what Heidegger calls “*Wesen*”, the “essential sway” of be-ing. In the context of the other beginning, in the moment of the crossing to the other beginning, be-ing “is” not, but “holds sway” [*west*]. If we say that be-ing “is”, we remain within a way of thinking that belongs to the first beginning – which means that by saying that be-ing is, we do not grasp its fundamental way of be-ing as enowning, which is suggested instead by saying that be-ing “holds sway.” If we say that be-ing is, we understand be-ing as

beingness, as what is somehow ‘general’ and thus a condition for beings inserted behind beings, i.e., condition for their representedness and objectness, and finally for their being ‘in-

³² Neu, *Die Notwendigkeit der Gründung im Zeitalter der Dekonstruktion*, p. 158.

themselves', be-ing itself is lowered to the truth of beings, to the correctness of re-presentation. (CP 64-65 [93])

By saying that be-ing holds sway, however, Heidegger intends to indicate the way of being of be-ing as *Ereignis*. When we say that be-ing holds sway, we are speaking from the standpoint of the other beginning of thinking, and we are mindful of the history of be-ing as a crossing between the first and the other beginning. By saying that be-ing holds sway, we name be-ing in its truth, and the truth of be-ing "is in no way something different from be-ing, but rather its own essential way" (CP 64 [93]).

The leap is unfolded as the carrying out of the projecting-open of the truth of be-ing, and in the leap, as this acting out, the thinker recognizes himself as "en-owned" by be-ing. Da-ein, "the thrower of the projecting-open experiences itself as thrown – i.e., as en-owned by be-ing" (CP169-BP 239).

Enacting the "projecting-open" of the truth of be-ing is not something that occurs in a situation which is familiar to us. Indeed, the leap of thinking

abandons and throws aside everything familiar, expecting nothing from beings immediately. Rather, above all else it releases belongingness to be-ing in its full essential swaying as enowning. (CP 161 [227])

It appears as the "most reckless" thinking, in the sense that it seems to show no consideration about the danger, the risk, which Heidegger says is implied in this leap. Why is there a risk in the leap? The leap that, by leaping, puts aside everything familiar, at the same time puts aside every security. It above all puts aside the traditional and secure metaphysical idea of beings and beingness in their transcendental relationship, and leaps into the truth of be-ing as enowning. As Neu suggests, herein consists the danger: inceptual thinking leaps into the truth of be-ing which is not to be understood as a metaphysical ground. The truth of be-ing as enowning, is a more "inscrutable ground." It has its ground in the "counter-

resonance of the appropriating-call [ereignendem Zuruf] of be-ing by means of its refusal, and the appropriated projection [ergründendem Entwurf] of Dasein."³³

After the leap, the truth of be-ing continues to be a risk because it reveals itself as "stranger," as "abyss," and therefore seemingly far removed from beings. This translates as the risk to man of going back to his condition of being lost in the forgottenness of be-ing, and therefore of being far removed from his own truth of belonging, in Da-sein, to the history of be-ing and its truth. The fact that this risk will be taken is not a matter of arbitrariness, but arises from the experience of the distress generated by be-ing's self-refusal, a distress that in the leap emerges in its meaningfulness and thus becomes more urgent, forcing, as Heidegger quoted in Neu says, "the thinking saying of be-ing to come to word."³⁴

We can now glimpse why Heidegger says that the "guiding-attunement," the guiding mood that is proper to the leap, is a "deep awe," a deep sense of respect and fear at the same time for something that is only sensed, but not yet recognized. As Heidegger says in the "Preview": "*The grounding-attunement of thinking in the other beginning* resonates in the attunings that can only be named in a distant way as *startled dismay, reservedness [...], deep awe*"³⁵ (CP 11 [14]). And again: the "deep awe is the way of getting nearer and remaining near to what is most remote as such (cf. "The last God"), that in its hinting – when held in deep awe – still becomes the nearest and gathers in itself all relations of be-ing" (CP 12 [16]). This "deep awe" opens the possibility of being near the hint of "what is the most remote," which we will see is "the last god." The "deep awe" belongs to "the few and the rare" who are always resting in the openness wherein the truth of be-ing as enowning occurs. But this will be investigated in the next chapter.

³³ Ibid., p. 159. Translation mine.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Emphasis original.

The Crossing and the Preparing Character of the Leap

From *Being and Time* we know the situation in which man finds himself. He is trapped in the "machination," while not being aware of it, as he has lost the ability to recognize hints of something not familiar to his way of thinking, but that, nonetheless, still belongs to it. We could say that what man has to do is to free himself from himself and prepare for the occurring of be-ing as enowning. Man, in Da-sein, has to become the "v/here", the time-space for the occurring of the event of appropriation.

In order to accomplish this, man needs to "go-under." This "going-under" is the possibility of entering the being-history of be-ing. Heidegger writes:

Will uniqueness of going-under be granted to humans, instead of the desolation of a continuing progress? Going-under is the gathering of everything in the moment of preparedness for the truth of the uniqueness and one-time-ness of be-ing. Going-under is the innermost nearness to refusal, in which enowning gifts itself to man. (CP161 [228])

Going-under is the alternative to the continuous progress that keeps man in the desolation of machination owing to the self-withdrawal of be-ing. "Going-under" means getting closer to the refusal of be-ing, which means being in a position of recognizing this refusal, and thus being able to realize and prepare for the truth of be-ing. And in this "going-under" the enowning will "gift itself to men." Man begins this "going-under," this preparedness for the truth of be-ing, which unfolds in the history of be-ing critically thought, by means of inceptual thinking.

Entering the history of being is "unpredictable." It does not depend upon progress or upon the fact that culture has declined, and it will therefore enter a new era. Heidegger tells us that this entering is not predictable and is not a sharp beginning. Despite our resolution in wanting to experience the fullness of our existence, it will take a long time before we free ourselves from "the end of the

first beginning". And even if we are (therefore we think) in the other beginning, the first beginning will also continue to be "upon the crossing" [Übergang]: "the end of the first beginning will for a long time still encroach upon the crossing, nay even upon the other beginning" (CP161 [227]). In the long period of time of the history of be-ing, just few moments are recognized as "exceptional enownings" [Ereignisse], moments in history within which the crossing, the encounter and the unveiling of be-ing's historical occurring is more recognizable. These moments occur while the world is destroying itself in the mistaken belief that the constructed world is a world of conquest and progress, and yet all that the world is "triumphing" into is the void, a void of be-ing.

To enter the history of be-ing means to be able to "cross" from the end of the "first beginning" to the "other beginning." The crossing, this time-space that introduces us to the dimension of the history of be-ing, remains confused amongst events and circumstances, thoughts and feelings. But this "crossing" happens through questioning, a questioning that is also already a "take off for the leap, by which alone a beginning and specifically the other beginning – as constantly overtaken by the first – can begin" (CP162 [228-229]). Only a leap of thinking can lead to the other beginning, while at the same time the first beginning keeps invading and interfering with the possibility of this leap.

In the crossing is prepared the "most originary and therefore the most historical decision," the decision between remaining within machinations or making the leap to the other beginning, in which only the truth of be-ing can be encountered as the enowning that enowns man back to his origin in Da-sein. This "either-or" decision is free of any "hiding" or "evading places." *Either* one decides to remain in metaphysics, and in the end of the first beginning wherein nothing fundamental occurs, and where everything is just a "renewed variation" of metaphysics; *or* one decides for the other beginning, which means deciding to take the chance and the responsibility for the long preparation that the "other beginning" requires.

In the other beginning there is no possibility to "evade" the truth of be-ing. There is no "hiding" in machinations, behind "idle talk" or behind the "impersonality" of the "the they." The decision that leads to the leap is a matter of deciding for the history of be-ing or for the loss of it, for belongingness to be-ing or for being lost in the absence of it. But this decision is not in man's hand. It is brought about by be-ing. It is the withdrawal of be-ing, its refusal, that forces those who are ready to receive the gift of the moment for the decision to decide. The withdrawal of be-ing from man's everydayness belongs to be-ing's strategy.

The ground, the origin of this fundamental decision enacted in the projecting-open [Entwurf] that carries out the attempt to understand be-ing, is to be found in the essential swaying of be-ing. This decision is not a choice that can be taken or not. It is the consequence of the ontological condition of being Dasein. This decision is made by man as Dasein, in being "t^here", but each projection [Entwurf] carried on by Dasein is indeed "thrown" [geworfen] by be-ing itself. Every project of interpreting and understanding be-ing in its be-ing enowning is indeed an answer to the call of be-ing, which reveals itself and permits itself to be enowned by the human project.

Since the other beginning can begin only through a leap, even this preparation – the crossing itself – belongs to the leap and, being a preparation, simultaneously has to deal with the first beginning and its history. What will be encountered as "entirely other" in the other beginning can be clarified and shown in a saying that seems to be a 'turning around' of what has already been said, whereas in the context of the other beginning everything is transformed. We need to access this transformed dimension, we need to leap; but to leap we need to prepare ourselves through the crossing from the end of the first beginning to the other beginning. And this preparation is possible through a critical dialogue with the first beginning and its history, the aim of which is to reveal the hidden history of be-ing that occurs as enowning –enowning that, while happening, reveals the truth of be-ing, and in so doing enowns man back to himself, whereby he is therefore transformed while encountered by be-ing.

I would like to point out that the leap, by its own nature, cannot be circumscribed into a clear definition, one we are accustomed to when we want to clarify something by saying that "A is equal to B." The leap is not something in itself, but becomes and reveals itself in its relation to what it is related to. As Annalisa Caputo suggests, the leap is not an action to be taken, and is not even an intuition we think. The leap is a fundamental way of being, a way of thinking, from which it only becomes possible to think and open a new way of experiencing the 'world'. The leap, if authentic, is something to be accepted as a gift from being, and not a simple human undertaking. At the same time, however, it is something that needs to be allowed to happen, in the sense of letting it be free to happen by putting oneself in the condition of being open towards this happening, so that it becomes possible for us to recognize those hints that be-ing is sending us. The leap is something that is to be protected from the continuous temptation of remaining closed in metaphysical thinking, which, by keeping us occupied with ourselves, with progress, and therefore in a state of lack of distress for the question of be-ing, can prevent us from even searching for a leap, thereby rendering the leap impossible.³⁶

Heidegger states:

[The leap] is projecting-open the essential sway of be-ing to the utmost, such that we place ourselves into what is thus opened up, become inhabiting, and through enownment first become ourselves. (CP 163 [230])

The leap opens up to a space in which we can become ourselves. This space opened is the domain of be-ing in which, through the enowning, we become ourselves. And to become ourselves we must first know about our own "grounding." We cannot understand ourselves, our being, via explanation and

³⁶ Cf. Caputo Annalisa, *Heidegger dopo I Beiträge zur Philosophie*, (Fasano: Schema Edizioni, 1998), p. 390.

deduction, because in so doing we will never reach our own grounding. We need to be prepared to understand our own grounding which, according to Heidegger, is in the "truth of be-ing," the truth of be-ing revealed to us as enowning. Now, we need to leap into the "turning of enowning" in order to recognize our "grounding" in the truth of be-ing. But again we need to be prepared. How do we prepare ourselves for this? As already said, this preparation is not a process of explaining or deducing our being by means of other beings. We prepare ourselves by asking about the "grounding-question," the question that asks about the meaning of being, the question that began to be addressed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. But how do we move from the "guiding-question" that led the history of metaphysics to the "grounding-question" that prepares and leads to the other beginning?

The way to do this is "through a complete unfolding of the guiding-question" (CP165 [233]). The transition can never be direct. It is always a matter of dialogue with the history of philosophy, the purpose of which is to reveal the history of be-ing that has remained hidden, to reveal questions that have not been asked. During the history of the first beginning we made decisions that are not decisions, in the sense that they are not historical decisions but just calculation aimed at specific purposes. This is so, as in the first beginning there is no space for historical decisions. By failing to ask the question of the meaning of being, we have put ourselves in the condition of not even being aware of the abandonment of being that is proper to our condition. What we need to be awoken, in order to be in the condition of preparing for the leap, is "to become mindful of the grounding of the space for decision" (CP166 [234]). And to do that, we have to experience the "distress of lack of distress," the "abandonment of being." This is the first step towards the possibility of the leap, the first step that Heidegger reveals in *Being and Time*.

In Chapter Two we tried to read through some key concepts of *Being and Time* in an attempt to understand them as moments of turning, moment of the "crossing." In the *Contributions*, which thinks out of the other beginning and thus

out of the crossing, Heidegger recognizes the leap as a questioning about "what is ownmost to truth itself" (CP166 [234]). The leap that already happens in *Being and Time* does not announce new philosophical truths or new doctrines. The leap is "displacing man out of the lack of distress into the distress of lack of distress, as the utmost distress" (CP166 [234]). "Displacing" man seems, therefore, a condition that will allow the leap into the other beginning, as it will open that time-space in which the 'event' of the truth of be-ing can occur. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger continues, we do not find the leap as entering the space for the decision, as letting man be involved with the "onset and staying away of the arrival and flight of gods," since this can be chosen only by a thinking that is "inceptual."

In *Being and Time* the decision is between the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity; it is a decision whether to hear the call of conscience, which reminds man of his guilt with respect to his task of being capable of authenticity. It is a decision that moves from a fundamental condition of anxiety proper to Dasein's ownmost being. In the leap, the grounding-attunement that is proper to Dasein becomes "deep awe" before something "strange." The deep awe, as the grounding-attunement proper to the leap, shows us that, in the leap, we are dealing with the "gods" in the sense that the leap opens the space for the decision about the gods. The gods are those truths, those certainties, that man created and believed in for his own need and security throughout history; and now, facing the disclosure of the truth of be-ing in its historical happening, Dasein needs to face its truth and choose accordingly. Indeed, Heidegger states that the leap to the other beginning situates man in the time-space for the decision about the "arrival and flight of gods," an inceptual decision about something which is beyond and before the decision about the gods that can exist or not. Deciding about the "arrival and flight" does not mean deciding for one thing or the other, but means rather being resolute towards be-ing's holding sway. The decision to be resolute about the "arrival and flight of the gods", becomes the turning in *Ereignis*, the strategy of be-ing that appears in its dynamic of concealing and unconcealing.

As with every other word, Heidegger says, the word leap is also easily "misunderstandable." The leap is to be related to the enowning, which is the event of the appearing and disappearing of the "arrival and flight" of gods. The awareness of this happening is the enowning which enowns man to himself. But this 'event' cannot be enacted by man. Man can only remain open in order to be ready for the occurring of this event. And it is through thinking that man can remain open for the moment in which the enowning occurs. As Heidegger states,

The leap gives rise to preparedness for belongingness to enowning. Onset and staying away of the arrival and flight of gods, enowning, cannot be forced by thinking with thinking as measure [denkmässig], whereas, on the other hand, the open can be held ready by means of thinking [denkerisch] -the open that as time-space (the site for the moment) makes the cleavage of be-ing accessible and lasting in Da-sein (CP166-167 [234]).

Thinking is what "holds ready" the open in which the truth of be-ing becomes accessible. The openness opened by thinking "makes the cleavage of be-ing accessible and lasting in Da-sein" (CP 167 [235]). Be-ing shows itself seldomly and its "onset" is revealed in its "staying away." Be-ing is the "essential swaying" of the enowning, and is not an infinity of something that can be determined. The leap, therefore, being a leap into the truth of be-ing, is not a leap from somewhere into "an ocean of determinables." The leap "lets the t/here [Da] - belonging to and enowned by the call - first emerge as the site for the moment for a 'somewhere' and a 'when'" (CP 167 [236]). The leap reveals the t/here as the possibility for the occurring of the leap of thought into the essential sway of be-ing. The t/here is that openness in which it first becomes possible to glimpse the 'event'. The t/here, says Heidegger, "belongs to the call" and is "enowned by the call." But what is this call by which we are called? It is the call of be-ing, to awake us to our own history, to our own being grounded in the truth of be-ing. But why should we leap? Why should we even think about it? The leap is the possibility of man to enown himself back to himself by recognizing his ground in

the truth of be-ing, by being part of the history of be-ing and its truth, by being the "Da", the opening for the occurring of the truth of be-ing.

The Cleavage of Be-ing

Be-ing's way of being, which consistently exceeds the being of being as beingness, remains precluded to a thinking that is not enowned by be-ing itself, that does not think the truth of be-ing as *Ereignis*. On the other hand, the holding sway of be-ing, the truth of be-ing in its "manifoldness," is accessible to being-historical thinking which, in the leap, opens up to an understanding of be-ing in its truth.

Heidegger states that "the most actual and broadest leap is that of thinking" (CP167 [237]), and this is not because thinking determines the essential sway of be-ing, but because thinking makes us conscious of the enowning. In this way, the essential sway of be-ing can be glimpsed, and "the 'cleavage' of being can be climbed through the furthest and the possibility of sheltering of truth in beings can be measured the furthest" (CP167 [237]). What does Heidegger mean by "cleavage" [*Zerklüftung*]? Cleavage or cleft is a geological term that indicates a fissure, a crack, a cleft in a mountain. It is a crack that cannot be closed, and that splits a mountain into two sides, which at the same time constitute the sides of the fissure. As Vallega-Neu affirms, "in the leap, the clearing of the truth of be-ing opens as being-t/here in the turning of enowning. Heidegger formulates this clearing with respect to its most concealed, as well as inceptive, character, as *cleft* (*Zerklüftung*)."³⁷

The cleavage opened in the leap is "the unfolding unto itself of the intimacy of be-ing itself, insofar as we 'experience' it as refusal and turning-in-

³⁷Vallega-Neu, Daniela, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 75.

refusal" (CP 172 [244]). The cleavage is the deepest abyss in which the essential swaying of be-ing discloses itself as "refusal." "Be-ing is experienced as refusal when it remains in itself, i.e., when it does not sway as enowning in what Heidegger conceives as the present era of abandonment of being."³⁸ Refusal names how be-ing holds sway when thinking experiences the abandonment and the forgottenness of being, which are characteristics of the history of metaphysics. That be-ing holds sway as refusal means that be-ing withdraws; "it refuses its essence and beings remain abandoned by being."³⁹ This abandonment is 'secured' in the forgottenness of being, but when this forgottenness is remembered "*as* forgottenness" (CP 75 [107]), "the echo of be-ing as refusal" begins to resonate and the refusal begins to disclose as the opening of the cleavage of be-ing.

The leap into the cleavage needs the "longest preparation," a preparation that requires the "complete disengagement from being as beingness" and from being as "the most general determination" (CP 196 [278]). The thinker that dares to leap and face the "intimacy of be-ing itself" needs to detach himself from thinking being in terms of beingness. He must forget, let go of the way in which he used to question being, in order to be free to access a different domain in which the abyss, the depth, the complexity of the essential sway of be-ing becomes accessible. That Dasein must forget does not mean that it loses something that was once 'possessed' in its memory and is now lost. The idea of forgetting is that of a "transformation into a more originary stance of questioning" (CP 196 [278]). This more originary stance of questioning questions the "inexhaustibility of the simple," the simple as the essential sway of be-ing in its cleavage, in its abyss. This simple, be-ing itself, does not withdraw before this transformed questioning; for in it the essential sway of be-ing is questioned.

The simple is that "in which all essential swaying has gathered" and in it "every being must be found." But, Heidegger continues,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

we attain the simple only by preserving each thing, each being – in the free play of its mystery and do not believe that we can size being by analyzing our already firm knowledge of a thing's property. (CP196 [278])

We need to keep each thing in the "free play of its mystery," we have to let go of every need to define the essence of beings from the properties we think it possesses and which we think we know. We need to remain open and let each thing, each being, be in its mystery, in those shadows in which we do not feel comfortable because we do not have certainty and security for shelter. We need to suspend and halt our necessity, our habit, of wanting clarity and certainty about everything, as we fear the instability of our ultimate condition of being mortals, and therefore fear not being in control of our existence. When we try to define everything, to control and have power over everything with which we deal, "the simple" withdraws, be-ing in its holding sway disappears, and what remains is only a void in which we get lost. And fearing the mystery of the unknown, we build for ourselves that frame in which the grounding fear of the abyss is confused with the extreme and unreal clarity of our organized existence. The consequence is the loss of our innermost possibility of being enowned by be-ing, in enowning.

If we want to comprehend the essential sway of be-ing, we cannot rely on those "modalities" which we know from the metaphysical tradition as those categories (possibility, reality and necessity) according to which the beingness of being is determined. The "modalities" according to which we determine being remain in the domain of the guiding-question, and they cannot say anything about the cleavage of be-ing. It is the grounding-question that questions from a more originary stance, makes the leap into be-ing, and makes it possible to have a glimpse of the intimacy of be-ing, of the way it holds sway [west]. In the framework of the guiding-question we find the "arranging, canceling and mixing of 'categories'" (CP 197 [280]), but this procedure cannot achieve an insight into,

cannot even get close to, be-ing and its truth, for the "categories speak *from* a being *unto* a being and never name or know be-ing itself" (CP 197 [280]).

To understand the essential sway of be-ing, we need to question the cleavage, as it names the whole essential swaying of be-ing.⁴⁰ Inceptual thinking must have the courage to face the cleavage of be-ing, the abyss in which the essential swaying of be-ing is gathered, because "what is proper to Da-sein is its capacity of withstanding the abyss despite lacking defense and hold."⁴¹ In the precise moment (that keeps coming, but at the same time remains unique) in which man, in Da-sein, faces the abyss, man can perceive "the silent and alarming passing by of the last god."⁴² The leap into the cleavage of be-ing puts man in the condition of being capable of perceiving the hints of the last god. Why is the leap into be-ing that which opens up to us the hints of the last god? Who/what is the last god? Is the last god hinting at us? We leave these questions open-ended for the moment, as we shall address them in the next chapter.

In the leap, thinking as future thinking begins to recognize and glimpse the hidden truth, be-ing as *Ereignis*, that had been there for long time, but which has remained unrecognized, unseen and 'almost' completely forgotten. It is almost forgotten, but not completely, because there are a "few" that have remained open and could hear the echoes of the history of be-ing underway. These are the "few that come to the leap," and they come to the leap "on various paths" (CP167 [236]). As we shall see in Chapter Four, these "few" are called by Heidegger "the ones to come," those capable of recognizing the hints of this 'other' history. They allow other humans to know about this history so that they too can have the chance to be "surprised" by a spark that could lead them to question something strange, something they somehow sense, but ignore. In relation to enowning, "those who are to come" are those who "take over and preserve belongingness to

⁴⁰ Magris, "I Concetti Fondamentali dei 'Beiträge' di Heidegger," p. 261.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

⁴² *Ibid.*

enowning and its turning, a belongingness that has been awakened by the call. They come thus to stand before the hints of the *last god*" (CP 57 [82]).

Heidegger's thinking is very complex, and the interlacing of the concepts in play sometimes makes it necessary to introduce perspectives that apparently have nothing or little to do with the reason for which the discourse is taking place. Nevertheless, this circularity is also peculiar to Heidegger's symphony, which requires these turnings that slowly work on our thinking and stretch it, preparing it for something unsaid, and which will later be gathered in unity. From the perspective of this unity, the unsaid will be spoken as the word of be-ing.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, let me sum up what has been said thus far. The leap discloses our thinking to a different dimension of thinking from the one we are familiar with, enabling us to be in the condition of beginning to know what Heidegger names "the essential sway of be-ing," that is, its truth as enowning. Understanding it is a process that questions throughout the history of metaphysics and, remaining in relation with it, it reveals the hidden truth of be-ing in its being-history. To understand be-ing as enowning we need to prepare ourselves by asking 'worthwhile' questions, that is, questions that disclose to us the strategy of be-ing, that allow us to perceive it in its history of concealing and unconcealing. Thinking otherwise, re-thinking the history of philosophy, means preparing for the leap into be-ing; but this preparation is itself already the leap into be-ing. The leap becomes "the leap" as it leaps, and by leaping it prepares and enacts the turning of our thinking, the turning that discloses the essential sway of be-ing, its truth, as enowning.

Let us now proceed to the next chapter in which we shall contend with "the last god", which being "the last"

not only needs the longest fore-runnership but also itself *is*: not the ceasing, but the deepest beginning, which reaches out the furthest and catches up with itself with the greatest of difficulty. (CP 285 [405])

CHAPTER FOUR

The Last God Of The Ones To Come

Thinking the Last God

One problem that has always occupied Heidegger's thinking, together with the question of being, is the question of god. Heidegger's concern was the possibility of thinking god in its divinity, that is, a god fundamentally "other" from the one we are accustomed to think of in terms of supreme being. Heidegger is looking for a concept of god that is prior to and beyond metaphysics. He is looking for a god different from the one reduced to a being and which, during the history of metaphysics, became a hidden god, so hidden as to disappear in an *ens*, in an entity. In Heidegger, the search for a god different from the one of onto-theology is inextricably linked to the search for an authentic thought and the project of overcoming metaphysics, in that the god Heidegger is looking for is an original god, is the ownmost divinity of god.

In the context of the present study, the reason why we are interested in the figure of the last god is because, in our path towards *Gelassenheit*, thinking the last god is a radically different thinking of the essence of what is divine, and becomes an experience of thinking as dwelling in the openness, in the expanse that be-ing, revealing itself in the dynamic of the *Ereignis*, opens up and out of which "the hint" of the last god surfaces. The last god as event of thinking becomes accessible out of the dimension that we are trying to disclose, that is, "future thinking," a thinking that "is to come," and which "must learn to experience" be-ing and its truth. Only the thinking that has experienced be-ing, and is able to dwell in its truth, can think the last god as the essence of what is divine. In fact, the holy, divinity in what is ownmost to it, "comes to radiate only

when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth" (LH 258).

Since the thought of the last god belongs to this transformed way of thinking, the possibility of grasping at least part of the meaning that Heidegger attributes to the last god depends on how we succeed in detaching ourselves from the conceptual world of metaphysics, according to which we are accustomed to think of god as the supreme being, the fullness of being, the *summum ens*. In fact, as Heidegger states,

coming from a posture toward beings that is determined by 'metaphysics', we will only slowly and with difficulty be able to know the other, namely that god no longer appears either in the 'personal' or in the 'lived-experience' of the masses but solely in the 'space' of be-ing itself... (CP 293 [416])

From what follows we should not expect a definition or set of propositions that provides us with a picture of the last god. In this chapter, the attempt is to move towards an understanding of the last god as "the utmost god" [der äußerste Gott], the most distant from what we are accustomed to thinking of. A god that is not a being, but "needs be-ing" [bedarf des Seyns] (CP 287 [408]). But we will be able to grasp only with great difficulty what the last god in itself is, in that the last god never gives itself as something present, but only as a hint, a hint that emerges out of "the space of be-ing itself."

To search for the last god means to contend with the whole jointure of the *Contributions*, for the last god pervades the whole jointure. However, the joining in which Heidegger directly deals with the last god, and in which he 'plays' together the turnings enacted in the whole work, is Chapter Seven of the *Contributions*. This joining is very short, but extremely dense and obscure. It consists of four sections: The Last (253); Refusal (254); Turning in Enowning (255) and The Last God (256). It is the last of the six joinings that compose the

Contributions, and it concludes the moment of the crossing that the whole work attempts to enact.

Given the difficulty of the task before us, this chapter does not pretend to be exhaustive in its interpretation. My attempt is to shed some light on the figure of the last god, in order to bring us closer, on the path that we have been unfolding, to the dimension of that which is divine, which since the beginning of man's history has always constituted a fundamental aspect of the identity of human beings. How I intend to deal with the task in the present chapter is, first, to try to understand the role of the last god in man's history. I shall then attempt to understand the meaning of the last god within the context of *Ereignis*. After that I shall investigate some of the features of the last god, as presented by Heidegger in the dedicated joining. Finally, I shall introduce "the ones to come," as those "few and rare" prepared for the "passing" of the last god.

The Last God Within Man's History

Our age is the age of technology. The age of technology is above all characterized by a thought that distinguishes between subject and object, that sees nature as a pool of materials over which man, the subject, exercises his power. It is a conception of nature in terms of science and technology; and under this conception human beings too become material to be exploited. Everything is thought in terms of *ens*, and the concern is how to benefit from the use of entities we deal with. Man thinks and pretends to be able to solve all problems. Every situation is approached with the conviction that man, in his doing and making, can find answers and solutions to any problem. This age is the age of "machination", in which everything is calculated and produced to serve the illusion of 'unlimited' power. The danger and emergency of this situation is that of man loosing himself, of man not being able to return to his innermost being, insofar as he is lost in the production of achievements and results.

In the age of technology, "everything is functioning," but precisely this functioning and 'unproblematic' situation created by technology becomes something uncanny, becomes a distress that demands to be dealt with, as, in Heidegger's words, it "uproots" man "from earth."¹ The age of the uprooting of man is the age of the "distress of the lack of distress" (CP 75 [107]). It is the age in which the abandonment of be-ing and the "forgottenness" of be-ing reverberate. It is the "epoch of total lack of questioning" (CP 75 [107]). It is the epoch wherein "everything 'is made' and 'can be made' if one musters the 'will' for it" (CP 76 [108]). It is the epoch in which "machination" rules, a term by means of which Heidegger indicates a way of being – proper to our epoch – whereby the occurrence of be-ing is reduced, as Neu suggests, to the "makeability of things; beings, things, are reduced to mere exchangeable products of calculative thinking," and the possibility of experiencing the "more originary occurrence... of be-ing" remains precluded, until machination is perceived as something effected by the abandonment of being and until the distress of this abandonment is recognized as such.² In this historical moment the withdrawal of be-ing, its oblivion, is at its apex.

The phenomenon that bespeaks of the problematic nature of man's condition is the continuous need and will to produce and develop, and also consume, 'things'. Man's problematic condition hides behind the phenomenon of the production of novelties, particularly in the realm of technology and scientific knowledge, and that is why this condition becomes so difficult to detect. It has the appearance of a self-sufficient and 'perfect' situation, whereas in the realm of machination man is giving himself up. From this condition man cannot free himself by himself. There is no philosophy and there is no simple human effort

¹ Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us": *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger, tr. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, in: Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 91-116, 105.

² Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 38.

that can help us in overcoming the situation. "Only a god can save us," Heidegger states. What man can do is

to prepare a sort of readiness, through thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering [Untergang]; for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder.³

The god of metaphysics is thought of as a "supersensible being," as the "highest being," as the "first cause." This god is dead, but we need to prepare for a god that can save us from our uprooting. But what kind of god should we prepare for? If the god of metaphysics is dead, does that mean that the sense of the divine does not pertain to the experience of modernity anymore? With the death of god, has the sense of that which is divine also disappeared? Has the original essence of the divine disappeared? The metaphysical god is dead. The 'divinity' of god, as the essence of what is divine, what is ownmost and most originary in that which is divine, is not dead. The god for which we should prepare, though we cannot understand it since it is that which remains beyond thinking, represents the possibility of overcoming man's uprooting. The last god represents this possibility, as it is that which, out of the space of be-ing, hints and its hinting is a passing that reverberates as a "trembling."

The last god, being "the last," completes the first beginning of history and opens the possibility of the other beginning. How does the last god enact this possibility? By "standing outside" all forms of calculation that belong to machination. In so doing, the last god brings to an end all theisms that have been prevalent until now, and it opens up the possibility for authentic history.

³ Heidegger, *"Only A God Can Save Us,"* pp. 91-116, p. 107.

As Heidegger states:

The last god has its most unique uniqueness and stands outside those calculating determinations meant by titles such as 'monotheism', 'pan-theism', and 'a-theism'. 'Monotheism' and all types of 'theism' exist only since Judaeo-Christian 'apologetics', which has metaphysics as its intellectual presupposition. With the death of this god, all theisms collapse... (CP 289 [411])

The last god is called the last not only in the sense that it "is" and "needs the longest fore-runnership" (CP 285 [405]), but is the last in the sense of the most originary beginning. The last is not that which no longer acts and therefore ceases, but on the contrary is the primary beginning, the furthest and deepest beginning, the primary 'event' of human events. It is the beginning of history as it opens the space of decision for another beginning. In Heidegger's perspective, the last is 'ontologically' first, and because of this it is the last to be perceived.

The last god is not the end but the other beginning of immeasurable possibilities for our history. For its sake history up to now should not terminate but rather must be brought to its end. We must bring about the transfiguration of its essential and basic positions in crossing and in preparedness. (CP 289 [411])

"The last god is not the end, but the other beginning of immeasurable possibilities for our history [Geschichte]" (CP 289 [411]). The last god is not an end, a termination. The last god is the possibility of opening up to the other beginning. The last god is "the other beginning," in the sense that it is the possibility for the beginning of another history. History can be brought to its end, which is not a termination. Its end is the beginning of the "transfiguration of its essential and basic positions in crossing and in preparedness" (CP 289 [411]). To bring history to its end means to transfigure it, to make visible the basic positions of history from the perspective of the other beginning. It means to free the possibilities of history as the history of be-ing, and not just as a history produced

by man, a 'narrative' of progress which, instead of opening up the originary possibilities of history, is a reduction, a limitation, a closing down of possibilities. As Figal asserts, the risk and the danger for man and the world is that of "remaining caught in its own formation in the essential possibilities provided by control and makeability," whereas man is not fulfilled in his being by forming such a world because, "simultaneously with a determinate world-formation, something disappears that remains unavailable for the formed world."⁴ This has been the case with be-ing throughout metaphysics, and is the case with the essence of what is divine.

In the situation of "distress of lack of distress," the experience of be-ing becomes the experience of an "absence." This absence testifies that 'something' is not there, is not revealing itself, is hiding. Absence is not 'nothing'. Absence is the presence of a fullness that used to be as such, but now is experienced in its withdrawal. The experience of this absence calls for 'something' to be sought. The situation of "distress of lack of distress," due to the abandonment of be-ing, becomes available in a dimension that recognizes that the gods of metaphysics are gone, and that man is thereby free for the divinity of god.

It is from the situation of the "distress of lack of distress" that we are actually open to the possibility of beginning to think again, to ask worthwhile questions that open up for us the possibility of a 'historical understanding', not only of be-ing, but also of that which originally belongs to that which is divine. As Heidegger points out, "whoever does not know of *this* distress has no inkling at all of the decisions that are ahead of us" (CP 67 [97]). The situation of "distress of lack of distress" is the echo of an absence, which is be-ing in its "self-refusal." But this echo needs to be detected as a sign of the self-refusal of be-ing, in order for man to be awakened to the possibility of making historical decisions. When

⁴ Günter Figal, *Forgetfulness of God: Concerning the Center of Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, in: C. Scott, S. Schoenbohm, D. Vallega-Neu, A. Vallega (eds.), *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 198-212, 204.

the "lack of distress" begins to be noticed as "distress," we are then in the moment of the crossing; we are approaching the leap into the truth of be-ing, as the disclosure of be-ing in its strategy. When we begin to look at the "distress of lack of distress" with concern, we then begin to move towards be-ing in its truth and towards the divinity of god.

This awareness becomes available through the passing of the last god, through its hinting. As Neu states,

the hinting of the last god befalls humans only if they experience the utmost distress out of be-ing's utmost self-refusal. Bearing this distress by abiding in the clearing of be-ing's self-refusal, humans find themselves answering a call through which the hinting of the last god occurs.⁵

The last god, in its hinting, opens up for us the moment for the "decision," the "utmost and briefest decision about what is highest" (CP 286 [407]). It is the decision about "history and the loss of history" (CP 66 [96]), that is, the decision about "belongingness to be-ing or abandonment in non-beings" (CP 69 [100]). This decision, however, does not have to be intended as a choice, in the sense of a resolve that prefers one thing instead of another. This decision is not the expression of a preference. Rather, decision here is meant in the sense of "utmost decision," as the one that can "bring about clarity," for it is a decision "from within and about be-ing." This decision is an originary decision about history and the loss of history, a decision between remaining in a narrative or entering the history of be-ing. This decision, Heidegger states, "must create *that time-space*, the site for the essential moments, where the most serious mindfulness, along with the most joyful mission, grows into a will to found and build" (CP 68 [98]). If we do not decide in this originary sense, "what remains is the continual dawning of renovations and disguises, or even a total collapse." The decision we need to engage with is the utmost decision as "grounding and creating" (CP 68 [99]). It is

⁵ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: A Introduction*, p. 103.

a decision through which we find ourselves in the crossing to the other beginning, where we find ourselves leaping into the truth of be-ing as enowning.

Originary Turning

To deal with the last god means to deal with the *Ereignis*, insofar as the last god emerges out of the "space of be-ing." Be-ing as *Ereignis* is an authentic letting be of 'essential intimacy'. It occurs as the interplay of what is ownmost to that which exists. Through the letting be of what is ownmost, the ownmost is owned back to man, and be-ing, by owning back man to himself, reveals itself in history. Be-ing gifts itself to man and, in so doing, holds sway [west]. Man, for his part, is given back to his innermost being, which belongs to be-ing, in the sense that man, in *Da-sein*, is in relation with be-ing. In *Da-sein* the relation between be-ing and *Dasein* occurs. The metaphysical concept of being as beingness dissolves in the *Ereignis*, and what was previously thought as being now needs to be thought as *Ereignis*. Be-ing holds sway as enowning. Enowning is the turning, which is also a counter-turning, of be-ing to *Dasein*, and of *Dasein* to be-ing, in *Da-sein*.

At the beginning of section 255 of the *Contributions*, entitled "Turning in Enowning," Heidegger states:

Enowning has its innermost occurrence and its widest reach in the turning [die Kehre]. The turning that holds sway in enowning is the sheltered ground of the entire series of turnings, circles, and spheres, which are of unclear origin, remain unquestioned, and are easily taken in themselves as 'last'. (CP 286 [407])

The turning Heidegger is referring to here is that which he will shortly thereafter call the "originary turning." Contending with *Ereignis* as originary turning means to deal with the intimate relation between man in his being *Da-sein*

and the truth of be-ing as enowning. As Heidegger tells us, be-ing holds sway as enowning, and enowning is identified here as the "originary turning." It is called *originary* turning because it constitutes the grounding turning, the inceptual turning. It is the "sheltered ground of the entire series of turnings." Without the originary turning, all the other turnings (decisions) would not be possible. The enowning as originary turning is the turning that enowns man to his innermost being in being-t/here, and in so doing opens up the possibility for the truth of being to hold sway. As Heidegger states,

Only the onset of be-ing as enownment of the t/here [Da] leads Da-sein to itself and thus to the enactment (sheltering) of the inabiding [der inständig] and grounded truth into a being which finds its site in the lit-up sheltering-concealing of the t/here. (CP 286 [407])

In its holding sway, the originary turning determines man in his being-t/here. But at the same time, as Heidegger states, "be-ing needs [braucht] man in order to hold sway; man belongs to be-ing so that he can accomplish his utmost destiny as Da-sein" (CP 177 [251]). Man's utmost destiny as Da-sein is that of abiding "in the opening of the truth of be-ing by remaining attuned to this opening, i.e., to be-ing's enowning withdrawal, and by sheltering it in a being (for instance, words, works of art, gestures)."⁶ But Heidegger asks: if be-ing needs man in order to be be-ing, in order to be itself, does this not mean that be-ing depends upon man? Moreover, "how can man... bring be-ing under his domination, if indeed he must surrender his lostness to beings, in order to become the en-owned and to belong to be-ing?" (CP 177 [251]). How do things stand with be-ing and Dasein? Does be-ing's essential sway depend upon Dasein? How do we understand be-ing's need of Dasein, and Dasein's belonging to be-ing?

To understand this we need to recall the meaning of the verb "*brauchen*" (to need) in the context of the relation between be-ing and Dasein. As pinpointed

⁶ Ibid., p 42.

by A. Fabris, the German verb "*brauchen*" (to need) – as well as the substantive "*Brauch*" (the need) – indicates, as used by Heidegger, the "hermeneutical relation between man and be-ing."⁷ The meaning assigned by Heidegger to "*brauchen*" is not the common meaning that translates as "to need," and which bears the instrumental connotation of use. Indeed, in the ordinary use, when we say that we need something, we intend that we must have something, for it is a necessity upon which our existence depends, such as in the case of food and water. We say that we need something when we think we can benefit from it, by using it for certain purposes. But this is not the meaning that Heidegger intends. As Heidegger often does, he recalls the "root meaning" of the word which, in the case of "*brauchen*," goes back to the German "'bruchen' [to brook], in Latin 'frui', in German *fruchten*, *Frucht* [to bear fruit, fruit]," and that indicates:

to let something that is present come to presence as such. *Frui*, *bruchen* [to brook], to use, usage, means: to hand something over to its own essence and, as so present, to keep it in the protecting hand.⁸

Keeping the link with its roots, the verb "*brauchen*" represents the word that best expresses the "gifting of be-ing" in its relation to man. It best indicates the way in which be-ing holds sway in its relation to man, but also – as we shall see – it refers to the way in which be-ing relates to the last god, in that be-ing is the expanse out of which the last god emerges as hinting.

When we think the relation of "needing and belonging" between be-ing and man, we should not think of it as two different relations. It is not a matter of one depending on the other, and the other belonging to the one. Here what is mentioned, and has to be stressed, is the "originary turning," as the *interplay* of "*needing and belonging*" (CP 177 [251]), the interaction of the "enowning call

⁷ Cf. Adriano Fabris, note 18, p. 85, in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*. Traduzione di Fabris Adriano. (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983).

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Anaximander's Saying*, in: Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, tr. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 277.

[ereignendem Zuruf] and the enowned projecting-open [ereignetem Entwurf],”⁹ which Heidegger recognizes as the “counter-resonance” [Gegenschwung] that constitutes be-ing as enowning.

F. W. von Herrmann gives a clear interpretation of this cryptic relation between be-ing and Da-sein. He states:

Da-sein is enowned as one who, projecting-open, stands in its turn in [inabides] the t/here [Da] as the enowned truth of be-ing. But the essential swaying of being happens, not only as that en-owning of Da-sein, but also and at the same time in the enactment of the enowned projecting-open that Da-sein enacts. Because be-ing ‘needs’ man as Da-sein for its [be-ing’s] essential swaying, it [be-ing] en-owns Da-sein, i.e., it opens [up] Da-sein to itself as projecting-open inabiding in its [be-ing’s] clearing. Da-sein for its part, then belongs, with its enowned projecting-open, in the essential swaying of be-ing.¹⁰

“Through enowning,” affirms Heidegger, “Da-sein... is thrown unto *itself* [sich zugeworfen] and becomes a self” (CP 286 [407]); and when this happens Da-sein reveals itself as belonging to enowning, as the “sheltered possibility of grounding the essential swaying of be-ing” (CP 287 [407]). The interplay between be-ing and Da-sein is enacted through enowning, but the enowning is this same interplay. “Within the turning,” explains Heidegger, enowning, that is, be-ing as event of appropriation, “must need Dasein,” and by needing it, be-ing places it “into the call and so brings it before the passing of the last god” (CP 287 [407]). By needing Dasein, be-ing opens Dasein to the “enowning call” that owns man back to himself. This call of be-ing places Dasein in “Da-sein,” and this allows Dasein to be “before the passing of the last god.” This means that Dasein, in Da-sein, becomes the “seeker,” “preserver” and “guardian” of the truth of be-ing. In

⁹ Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers “Beiträge zur Philosophie”* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994), p. 19. Translation in accordance with the translation used in the *Contributions*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18-19. As translated in: Scott, Schoenbohm, Vallega-Neu, Vallega (eds.), *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 158.

Da-sein, man is open to the passing of the last god; he can be aware of the stillness of the passing of the last god. In the turning, the last god finds the expanse, the time-space, for its appearing.

As man needs be-ing in order to be brought back to himself, to be enowned in Da-sein, man also needs the "gods," needs the divinity of god, which has withdrawn from history, and is therefore experienced in its not-being. On the other hand, the "gods" need the enownment of man in Da-sein; they need man to be, in Da-sein, the seeker, preserver, and guardian of the truth of be-ing, insofar as out of this truth the "gods" become manifest. As Neu attests,

Being-t/here, in turn, discloses only if humans respond to the need of the gods....this does not mean that the need of the gods exists prior to the enownment of being-t/here. Their need is experienced only as thinking is set out into the more originary realm of the truth of be-ing as withdrawal and abides in this abysmal opening. The need of the gods and the response of humans occur at once in enowning.¹¹

Man, in Da-sein, is enowned to himself, and not only in relation to be-ing. The turning reveals itself not only as a turning between be-ing and Dasein in Da-sein, but it is at the same time a turning between gods and humans. Man is enowned also in relation to gods; in Da-sein, man can respond to its need of god, by responding to the gods' need of man's enownment, in that only if man is enowned in Da-sein can the gods become manifest.

The Last God and the Gods

In the context of the enowning, Heidegger affirms that be-ing does not belong to "gods," but that "be-ing is needed by gods. It is their need" (CP 309

¹¹ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 76.

[438]). Why does Heidegger speak of the "gods"? Why is he using the plural form? What is the difference between the gods and the last god?

Seen from one angle, if we think from the perspective of the history of metaphysics, when we say gods, we probably recall not only the gods of various religions, but the word gods could also hint at those "determinations" based on "calculation," produced by machination. I would venture to say that the gods as determinations, rise from a necessity of security that man needs to possess. Seen from another angle, but still from the stand point of the first beginning, I would also dare to think the gods in terms of sparks of the truth of be-ing within the history of metaphysics, as signposts for a history of salvation, signposts which, before turning into "calculations," could have led a man, prepared to listen, back to his ownmost being. If this could be an average understanding of the word gods from within the first beginning, Heidegger's idea, thought from within the context of being-historical thinking, is quite different.

If we think the plural "gods" from within the context of being-historical thinking, when Heidegger uses the plural "gods", he does not refer to the gods of various religions; he does not intend to assert the existence of a plurality of gods, instead of one god. The meaning of the plural indicates "the undecidability of the being of gods, whether of one single god or of many gods" (CP 308 [437]). Heidegger does not want to take sides concerning the existence of one or more gods. The plural 'gods' refers to what is 'question-worthy' regarding what is divine, that is, whether we can at all attribute a being to gods, "without destroying everything divine." Heidegger writes:

The undecidability concerning which god and whether a god can, in utmost distress, once again arise, from which way of being of man and in what way- this is what is named 'gods'. (CP 308 [437])

Now, with respect to gods within the context of *Ereignis*, the last god names the origin of that which is "divine," and that which the plural "gods" wants

to name. We could venture to say that the last god names the moment of the decision of the "undecidability" that the plural "gods" names.

Heidegger states that be-ing does not belong to the "gods," and here uses the plural to indicate the essence of what is divine. The gods "need [brauchen] be-ing in order through be-ing... to belong to themselves" (CP 309 [438]). In saying that, the gods do not have be-ing, but they need be-ing. Heidegger attests that there is no identification between be-ing and god (an identification which we find in metaphysics, for which god is the supreme being). Be-ing and god are not of the same nature. As Regina suggests, thinking god, not as the supreme being, but as the "originary need" of be-ing, means being able to open oneself up to what is problematic, instead of remaining caught up in a situation of denial and avoidance, such as the machination in which man finds himself. Thinking of god as needing be-ing allows man to enter the history of be-ing, in which alone man can be owned back to himself.¹² The fact that the gods need be-ing, and yet are not be-ing, names the "essential swaying of be-ing itself," that is, what the gods need in order to belong to themselves, and that is what the gods reveal as the urgency in which man finds himself; an urgency towards which man, lost in machination, is called upon to turn to. The fact of thinking the gods as needing be-ing, as well as be-ing as the need of gods, is what makes us begin to think differently; we begin to think historically, that is, from the perspective of be-ing-historical thinking. The "needfulness" of be-ing indicates the essential swaying of be-ing itself, that is, with respects to the gods, "what is needed by 'gods' but is never causable and conditionable" (CP 309 [438]). By thinking the gods as "those who need be-ing," and not representing god as 'the most-being' or the supreme being, we "accomplish the first steps in the history of be-ing" (CP 309 [438]).

The different relation between be-ing and the last god, the "gods," assigns a different role to man. The understanding of this relation between be-ing, the last

¹² Umberto Regina (1991), "Il Problema Antropologico Nei *Beiträge zur Philosophie* di Martin Heidegger," *Fenomenologia e Società*, ANNO XIV, no. 2, 29-73, p. 46.

god and man is one of the most difficult passages in the *Contributions*. Conscious of this, we shall nevertheless try to grasp it, if not in its whole complexity, at least in some of its elements. We said before that man needs the last god in order to be aware of the situation of urgency in which he lives. As Regina suggests,¹³ if man, from one side, needs the last god in order to be freed "from his tendency of remaining closed within himself," on the other side "god needs man as the 'clearing' into which develop its salvific strategy; the history of be-ing needs the human space."¹⁴ That "clearing" is Da-sein, which we could try to understand as what man aims at in his task of being, according to his ownmost being. In the other beginning, Heidegger says that

beings are such that they also carry the clearing into which they are placed, which clearing holds sway as clearing for self-sheltering and concealing, i.e., for be-ing as enowning. In the other beginning all beings are sacrificed to be-ing, from which beings as such receive their truth. (CP 162-163 [230])

For man, to be Da-sein means to be "transformed" into the "seeker," "preserver" and "guardian" of the truth of be-ing. Man in Da-sein is the clearing for the "self-sheltering and concealing" of be-ing; he belongs to this history and is needed by this history, in which be-ing itself "lights up as the trace of the way of the last god" (CP 163 [230]).

The Last God

The last god, states Heidegger, is the "totally other over against gods who have been, especially over against the Christian God" (CP 283 [403]). Here the Christian god is meant as the god of the completion of metaphysics. The last god

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

is the "totally other over against" the metaphysical god, and therefore the Christian God as a product of metaphysical thinking. The last god is not to be represented as

the most-being, as the first ground and cause of beings, as the unconditioned, in-finite, absolute. None of these determinations arises from the divine-character of god, but rather from what is ownmost to a being as such. (CP 308 [438])

The last god is not a personal being. It is not a being. We cannot, therefore, ask 'who is the last god?' because that would direct our quest in the wrong direction from the outset. And we know that a search already begins within the question that moves it. Thus we do not ask 'who is the last god?' because the concept we are looking for does not belong to subjective metaphysics. The last god is a new concept that emerges from the thinking of enowning, from be-ing-historical thinking. It is a concept thought out of *Ereignis*, and it is to be thought in its interplay with be-ing and Dasein.

According to Coriando,

The 'last god' is *neither* the 'ancient' *nor* a 'new' figure of the godly, and still less a 'philosophically' conceived or postulated god; the 'last god' is rather the time-space which is dimensionally grounding and in which for the first time the godly [das Gotthafte] as historically present, has to be *thought* again, i.e. 'totally otherwise'.¹⁵

Since we cannot answer the question as to who the last god is, we shall not expect an idea of what/who the god is, as though the last god was a being or an entity. The last god 'is' not, the same as be-ing 'is' not, meaning that they both belong to be-ing-historical thinking, and hence need to be thought within the context of enowning, and not according to metaphysical categories. How can we,

¹⁵ Coriando Paola-Ludovica, as quoted in: David Pascal David (2001), "From Fundamental Ontology to Being-historical Thinking," *Heidegger Studies* 17, 157-168, p. 161.

then, understand this figure? In the *Contributions* Heidegger speaks of the last god as "the strangest among all beings" (CP 185 [263]), and if we want to understand it, we must not think in a "calculative way," from a perspective which is not that of enowning. If, for instance, we think the last god in a calculative way, then we consider the fact that it is the last as a "ceasing," an end. But in so doing, we will never be in a position to understand its meaning, in that, as already pointed out, the last god becomes manifest only out of the space of enowning. The last god is the last as the "utmost and briefest decision about what is highest" (CP 286 [407]). It withdraws from any attempt to reach out to it. The last god, affirms Heidegger, is that which must be able to bear the most evident and most common misinterpretation, which almost always happens. And this is so because the last god is that which remains beyond anything one could think.

At the beginning of section 256, Heidegger states: "The last god has its *essential swaying* [Wesung] within the hint" (CP 288 [409]). That the last god has its essential swaying in the hint means that the last god occurs in hinting. As Neu affirms,

the god sways in a hinting, and this hinting occurs out of a need in which the god first becomes manifest for thinking. This means that there is not a god that hints but the god/s become/s manifest *in* the hinting.¹⁶

According to Figal,¹⁷ the "hinting" of the last god can be interpreted as "to give to understand," not in the sense of alluding, but in the sense of an "introduction into the leeway of understanding," an introduction "into a sense" that becomes sensical when inserted within a "specific connection." The last god, in hinting, gives to understand a "horizon of meaning," an "open time" in which what has remained hidden, be-ing and the essence of that which is divine,

¹⁶ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, p. 102.

¹⁷ Figal, *Forgetfulness of God: Concerning the Center of Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, pp. 198-212.

becomes available to thought. The last god in itself, however, cannot be understood because the last god

stands all the more beyond understanding; it cannot be understood itself, and, on the other hand, it only gives to understand that which withdraws itself from understanding. What gives to understand is self-withdrawing, and it can be interpreted as the 'godly' [das Göttliche].¹⁸

In the domain of the hint, what remains metaphysical in the being of man finds the possibility of an immanent 'transformation'. Transformation here is taken in the sense of a turning back to what is revealed as ownmost to man that, in Da-sein, becomes the "grounding of the guardianship" of the "stillness" (CP 285 [405]), a stillness which is the passing of the last god that reveals itself as silent hint, and echoes out of the experience of the truth of be-ing as refusal.

When we think of the refusal, "we move into the time-space of decision of the flight and arrival of gods" (CP 285 [405]). The refusal is not the "flight and arrival of gods," as "flight and arrival of gods" is a signpost within metaphysics, for the truth of be-ing underway. It indicates the passing of the god which, in metaphysics, was barely sensed; and if it was sensed at all, it was not in its passing, but only in its being past, that is, in the form of remembering something that seemed to have happened, but about which man remains uncertain.

The refusal is the strategy enacted by be-ing, to save the truth of be-ing as enowning, from the continuous temptation of reducing it to a calculation, to a human construction. The refusal is the way in which be-ing gifts itself: through withdrawing, be-ing gifts itself. Be-ing withdraws from the thinking that does not think. In so doing, be-ing reserves and gifts itself to those who are prepared to receive the unveiling of the truth of be-ing. The refusal is something "originary." It is the strategy of be-ing that used to show itself through the "flight and arrival of gods," but which now, in refusal, gifts itself in its origin, in itself. In refusal we

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 198-212, 206.

experience "neither flight nor arrival, and also not flight *and* arrival, but rather something originary, the fullness of granting be-ing in refusal" (CP 285 [405]). The refusal is the "highest nobility of gifting." It is the fundamental character of the "self-sheltering-concealing," and is the inceptual way in which be-ing "holds sway" [west]. The *disclosing* of the way in which be-ing strategically holds sway constitutes the "originary essential sway of the truth of be-ing" (CP 285 [406]).

Be-ing, as refusal, opens the time-space in which the "stillness of the passing of the last god" occurs. Be-ing as refusal, "estranging itself," becomes "the stillness of the passing of the last god" (CP 285 [406]). As Crownfield affirms, "when refusal is understood as the heart of be-ing, we find ourselves exposed to the silence of the passing of the last god."¹⁹ Man, in his Da-sein, becomes the time-space (the "Da") for the sheltering of the truth of be-ing, and becomes the preserver of the stillness of the silent passing of the last god.

The appearing of the last god, states Heidegger, needs to be prepared for, and this preparation "is the utmost venture [das äußerste Wagnis] of the truth of be-ing" (CP 289 [411]). It is the "utmost venture" because man, in this preparation, needs to let go of all his certainties, in order to remain open for the truth of be-ing. But owing to the nature of this preparation, owing to its being so ultimate and radical, it becomes the utmost risk of the truth of being, because man can refuse this preparation and, in so doing, he would prevent the truth of be-ing from revealing itself in its essential swaying as refusal.

The moment when the last god is closest to man is in the refusal, a refusal that is not a mere lack. The refusal is a "not-granting" of the truth of be-ing. It is an awareness that become accessible when man is fundamentally attuned to the essential sway [Wesen] of be-ing; when man in his being "Da" thinks within the perspective of the other beginning of thinking, that is, within the perspective of the enowning. Within this context, and out of this thinking dimension, the

¹⁹ David Crownfield, *The Last God*, in: Scott, Schoenbohm, Vallega-Neu, Vallega (eds.), *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 220.

experience of the refusal, as an experience of an absence, brings the last god the closest to us.

But the last god's "greatest nearness" (CP 289 [411]) in the refusal is, at the same time, the "utmost remoteness" (CP 290 [412]). This nearness and remoteness in "not-granting" is the event that brings about Dasein as the one which is "overcome," that is to say that Dasein as "existenz" is now "overcome". Be-ing as refusal calls Dasein, through the hint of the last god, to be Da-sein. For man, to be Da-sein means to be "transformed" into the "seeker," "preserver" and "guardian" of the truth of be-ing. Man, in Da-sein, is the clearing for the "self-sheltering and concealing" of be-ing, and is part of the history of be-ing, belongs to this history, is needed by this history, and be-ing itself in this history "lights up as the trace of the way of the last god" (CP 163 [230]).

Be-ing as refusal constitutes the 'expanse' within which the nearness and remoteness of the last god appears. The last god is not enowning itself, states Heidegger, but needs the enowning. Be-ing as not-granting constitutes the "domain of the enowning" of that distress which makes Dasein the "site for the *first* passing of god, as a god that does not-grant itself" (CP 290 [412]). Dasein becomes Da-sein, dwelling in the expanse that has been opened, which is revealed, by the passing by of the last god. In being "t/here," Dasein becomes aware of the possibility of being the "site," the ambit, the clearing for the "*first* passing" of the last god: "not-granting distresses Da-sein to itself as grounding the site for the *first* passing of god, as a god that does not-grant itself" (CP 290 [412]). Heidegger's emphasis on "the *first* passing" does not imply the first of a series of moments in which the last god passes. Rather, it is "the *first* passing" because, in this moment [Augenblick], the 'transfiguration' of Dasein into Da-sein occurs, the relation between man (Da-sein) and the truth of be-ing as enowning holds sway. The "*first*" passing is the moment of the utmost decision, the decision for the truth of be-ing, the decision for a being "to become more-being."

In the history of metaphysics the 'event' of be-ing has remained hidden, and thus undetected. It was constantly disappearing because its was immediately

absorbed by that rapidity that does not want to see, that does not want to take charge of the intensity and radicality of man's being, but prefers to make of any event (potentially enowning) a possibility to be used for a purpose. But be-ing as "refusal" nevertheless echoes in the forgottenness of being. Between the silent not-granting of be-ing and the din of machination are "the ones to come," those who sense, listen, feel, hear the echoes of 'something' hidden that is happening. They are capable of this because they are attuned to that reservedness which allows them to foresee and be aware of the passing by of the last god. It is not man who awaits the last god. Thinking this, states Heidegger, is perhaps "the most acute godlessness." Indeed, it is the last god that awaits man and his leap into the truth of be-ing; and the "ones to come" seem to be those who, in solitude and reservedness, are mindful of the fact that the last god waits for man.

"The ones to come" are "those strangers of like mind who are equally decided for the gifting and refusing that has been allotted to them" (CP 277 [395]). Not everybody can be prepared for the passing of the last god, and not everybody can bear the decision for the crossing and the leap into the truth of be-ing. It is not certain who can bear to abide within the turning and counter-turning that the truth of be-ing as enowning brings about. Those who can, however, will remain in solitude, like "summits of the most separate mountains":

...whether man can master both, sustaining the echo of enowning as not-granting *and* enacting the crossing to grounding the freedom of a being as such...who is inclined to decide and to know? And so those who are consumed by such a history and its grounding always remain separated from one another -summits of the most separate mountains. (CP 290 [412])

The Ones to Come

Man needs to be displaced from his situation of "distress of lack of distress," in which he finds himself and from which he cannot rescue himself by

himself, as he is not even aware of being ensnared in it. "The ones to come" [die Zu-künftigen] are those "few" who "from time to time again *ask the question*, i.e. who put up anew the essential sway of truth for decision"; they are the "rare" ones who "bring along the utmost courage for solitude, in order to think the nobility of be-ing and to speak of its uniqueness" (CP 8 [11]). Through their questioning, the truth of be-ing, which had remained unthought and hidden behind the appearance of a human condition that lacks any distress, is brought forth as "distress." Indeed, this distress is "*experienced*" by the few and rare, as they "*suffer*" this distress, and by suffering it, they witness it and they can thus "awaken" those who are not aware of it:

the awakening to this distress is the first displacing of man into that *between* [Zwischen] where chaos drives forth at the same time as god remains in flight. This 'between' is...that open to which man belongs as founder and preserver wherein as Da-sein he is en-owned by be-ing itself - be-ing that holds sway as nothing other than enowning. (CP 19 [26])

The ones to come are thus those who bear the task of opening the possibility for man to be enowned by be-ing itself, that is, to become the "founder and preserver" of the truth of be-ing, and of abiding in that "between" in which the passing of the last god is disclosed.

The ones to come are the "lingering and long-hearing founders" of the "essential swaying of truth." They are those who "withstand the thrust of be-ing," and towards whom the hint of the last god "advances." They are those who belong to the "call of enowning as the essential swaying of the truth of be-ing in the shape of the last god" (CP 66 [96]). In enowning, man "has his abode in the truth of be-ing," and within this truth, which is be-ing itself, man can decide "for or against god." Enowning, claims Heidegger,

owns god over to man in that enowning owns man to god. This 'owning-to' that 'owns-over' is enowning, wherein the *truth* of be-

ing is grounded... and wherein history takes its other beginning from be-ing. (CP 19 [26])

The ones to come are those "few individuals" through whom the decision for history is made. They, through poetry, thinking, action, prepare and open up the possibility of the historicity of Da-sein, as they open the possibility of the sheltering of truth "in which Da-sein become historical" (CP 67 [96]). In them is preserved the truth of be-ing. They are the " stillest witness to the stillest stillness" (CP 277 [395]), wherein the truth of be-ing, removed from the confusion proper to "calculated correctness," shows itself in its most originary be-ing. They are the " stillest witness to the stillest stillness" because they recognize the hinting, the passing of the last god in its "distancing and nearing." The ones to come are the time-space, the "t/here [Da]" in which the truth of be-ing holds sway. In them the already "most sheltered," be-ing and the passing of the last god, can be sheltered. They are those who 'hear' from far away the call of be-ing through the passing of the last god; they stand in front of this call, and choose to hear this call and to be witnesses to the truth of be-ing that opens up to them.

The ones to come witness, in stillness, the passing of the last god, a passing which, on the other hand, as Neu suggests,²⁰ can occur through the witnessing itself of this stillness. In this context, continues Neu, the stillness is not to be taken as "motionlessness," but rather as

a most intense motion... which culminates in an intense vibrating, in a trembling (*Erzitterung*) which marks the moment of the decision of the gods and the inceptive swaying of be-ing... The ones to come are thought in relation to the decision of the other beginning of Western History, which occurs in the passing of the last god.²¹

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 98.

Why are the ones to come open to the time-space, wherein the truth of being as enowning holds sway and the passing of the last god occurs? How are the ones to come distinguished from other humans who are not the ones to come? Why are they named "the ones to come"? They are called the ones to come not because they are people who might come in the future, but who now, in the present time, do not yet exist. Indeed, Heidegger deems the poet Hölderlin, who lived between 1770 and 1843, "the most futural of the ones to come." But the fact of being "futural" as not-yet present is not what is meant here. Hölderlin is "the most futural" because "he comes from the farthest away; and coming from so far away, he *traverses* and transforms what is the greatest" (CP 281 [401]). The "farthest away" from which Hölderlin comes, the "far away" in which the ones to come dwell and of which they are aware, is the " stillest stillness" in which the passing of the last god hints. It is the time-space for the decision about the other beginning of history.

The ones to come are those towards whom the hinting of the last god moves. They stand "in sacrificing reservedness," accepting their destiny as bearers of the truth of being. This destiny is a "sacrifice" to them, for they know the difficulty of their stance. They will be the ones who have the difficult task of saying the truth of being in a reality that muddles what is ownmost with what is an escaping from it. The ones to come have to be prepared for this task, and the "inceptual thinking" that thinks the other beginning, from out of the other beginning, serves this purpose as the "silent reticence of enowning" (CP 277 [395]).

To be part of the history of being, man needs to be attuned to this history. The phenomenon that testifies to man's involvement in this history, in the crossing from the first to the other beginning, is testified by a "grounding-attunement" that Heidegger calls "reservedness" [Verhaltenheit]. Reservedness is a fundamental disposition proper to those who are in the crossing, and it is the only disposition that allows this crossing. "Reservedness," together with "startled dismay" and "deep awe," are those attunements that constitute the "*grounding-*

attunement of thinking in the other beginning"²² (CP 11 [14]), grounding-attunement proper to the ones to come.

"Startled dismay," states Heidegger, means "returning from the ease of comportment in what is familiar to the openness of the rush of the self-sheltering" (CP 11 [15]). Startled dismay is that attunement that emerges when we inquire into "what is familiar," and this inquiry reveals that what we were accustomed to, as something familiar, is not familiar anymore, but is something "estranging and confining." What is familiar here is intended as the "abandonment of being," as that situation in which man is accustomed to live in, even if in the mode of unawareness. Startled dismay "lets man return to face that beings *are* and that this – be-ing – has abandoned all 'beings'... and has withdrawn from them" (CP 11 [15]). Startled dismay reveals itself before be-ing's self-sheltering, and thus before the abandonment of being.

The attunement of startled dismay, according to a not attentive way of thinking, could suggest the idea of a withdrawal and an "evading" of the will that refuses to deal with the situation which caused this attunement. To a more attentive thinking, to a thinking which is in the crossing to the other beginning, this attunement shows another possibility. It reveals the self-sheltering of be-ing itself. Indeed, be-ing itself "opens up in startled dismay." Since beings, once aware of the self-sheltering of be-ing, wants to maintain a relation with be-ing, the reaction to this awareness is not that of giving up the relation with be-ing as refusal and withdrawing before the frightening situation. The "ownmost 'will' of startled dismay," the innermost disposition that is proper to startled dismay, does not want to flee from itself, but wants to "ally itself *to* startled dismay from within – and that is what we call here *reservedness*" (CP 11 [15]).

Reservedness, as the 'allaying' of startled dismay with its ownmost 'will', is "the fore-attuning of preparedness for refusal as gifting" (CP12 [15]). Reservedness is that grounding-attunement that makes it possible for a being to

²² Emphasis original.

remain in that condition of startled dismay, and allows it to abide in it; and in so doing reservedness prepares those who bear to abide in it, for the gifting of be-ing that gives itself as refusal. In reservedness the human being turns and stays before be-ing as refusal, and this turning that occurs in reservedness "reigns as the essential swaying of be-ing" (CP12 [15]). In reservedness, therefore, is also be-ing that turns towards the human being; the turning occurring in reservedness reveals itself as the essential swaying of be-ing itself.

Now, if startled dismay occurs before the abandonment of being, deep awe is the attunement that reveals itself before the passing of the last god. "Deep awe" is "the way of getting nearer and remaining near to what is most remote as such" (CP 12 [15]), that is, the last god. The hinting of the last god, in the attunement of deep awe, from being the "most remote" becomes "the nearest and gathers in itself all relations of be-ing" (CP 12 [16]). Deep awe is the attunement that guides the leap into the truth of be-ing. In deep awe, a fear imbued with respect, "the will of reservedness exceeds itself into inabiding and sustaining the most distant nearness to the hesitating refusal" (CP 161 [227]). Deep awe constitutes that grounding-attunement that brings about "the necessity of reticence." Reticence, as we commonly understand it, is an unwillingness to talk about what one knows or feel. It is reticence as modesty or introversion. But this meaning does not express the meaning given to it by Heidegger. Here reticence is

the letting-hold-sway of be-ing as enowning [Wesenlassen des Seyns als Ereignis] that through and through attunes every bearing in the midst of beings and every comportment to beings. (CP 12 [16])

How does reservedness relate to startled dismay and deep awe? Reservedness is the "*midpoint* for startled dismay and deep awe" (CP 12 [15]). It is that grounding-attunement which opens towards both those other attunements, and thus toward both the abandonment of being and the passing of the last god. Reservedness is that grounding-attunement which is revealed in conjunction with

the passing of the last god, a passing as the "disclosing of a strategy that indicates the truth of be-ing as that towards which man, and thus humanity, should move and be concerned about."²³ In reservedness, man in Da-sein feels that he is part of the history of be-ing. Man realizes that he belongs to this history, and recognizes that his task is that of being the "seeker" of the truth of be-ing, the "preserver" of this truth as that which is to be sought, and the "guardian of the stillness of the passing of the last god" (CP 208 [294]). Man as Dasein is the guardian by being that which overcomes himself into Da-sein, to be the clearing for the appearing of the last god and of be-ing.

Reservedness is that which "determines the style of inceptual thinking in the other beginning" (CP 12 [15]), and the ones to come are those who are attuned in reservedness. The "style" of the ones to come is reservedness. Reservedness is the "grounding-attunement" that is "effected within inceptual thinking," and in which the ones to come abide. In refusal "is grounded the origin of the future style, i.e., of reservedness in the truth of be-ing" (CP 285 [405]). Reservedness is the grounding-attunement of the ones to come, who are attuned to the gifting of be-ing as refusal.

"The ones to come" are those who "reside in masterful knowing, as what is truthful knowing" (CP 278 [396]), and those who achieve this "knowing-awareness," do not allow themselves to "be computed and coerced". They know their 'essence' as seekers and preservers of the truth of be-ing. They achieve the "truthful knowing" which is not a knowing that can be useful, according to the usual concept of usefulness and utility. In this respect, "truthful knowing" has "no value." Instead, the value of this knowing resides in the possibility it opens, the possibility of the awareness of the hint and indication of the history of be-ing. This "knowing-awareness" of those who "really" know, begins with "actual historical knowledge," which is never a knowledge that describes situations or

²³ Regina, "Il Problema Antropologico Nei *Beiträge zur Philosophie* di Martin Heidegger," p. 52. Translation mine.

states given circumstances; it is not a summarizing of reached goals during history. This "*actual historical knowledge*" knows "the hours of the occurrence that history actually builds. *Our hour is the epoch of going-under*" (CP 278 [397]). "Going-under" is the movement that leads to the silent preparation of "the ones to come." It is the moving towards the moment and place where the decision about the "coming and staying-away" of the gods happens. This "going-under" is what comes first of the "first beginning": it is the time-space for the decision, the decision for "knowing-awareness" or for "calculated correctness."

"The ones to come" are those who "are going-under," which means that they are already imbued and fecund with what is coming. They are those who continuously "expose themselves to questioning," and who sacrifice themselves for being those who ground what is "futural." Only those that are part of it can recognize the epoch of "going-under"; to the others, who do not belong to it, "the epoch of going-under" – with the ceaselessly questioning proper to it – can appear only as "weakness and a termination." But the insecurity which the feeling of worry or anxiety over continuous questioning can apparently suggest is not insecurity at all. Instead, it is the "enopening and fostering of that stillness which, as gathering unto the most question-worthy (enowning), awaits the simple intimacy of the call and withstands the utmost fury of the abandonment of being" (CP 278 [397]).

Asking how and where the truth of be-ing hides and is grounded is a kind of question that belongs to the "reservedness" [Verhaltenheit des Suchens] of one who looks for the truth of be-ing. Seeking here is intended not as a mere "not-yet-having." It is not looking for something of which we are deprived. Considered in this way, it would mean that we consider the seeking only in view of the result. Here "seeking" means "proceeding into the domain in which truth is enopened or refused" (CP 279 [398]). Seeking is a "coming-into-the-nearness of being," which means that, through seeking, man is first brought to his selfhood in being-t/here.

The last god belongs to the enowning; it belongs to the 'project' of giving to "historical man" the goal of becoming the "*founder and preserver of the truth*"

of *be-ing*, to *be* the *t/here* [*Da*] as the ground that is used by *be-ing*'s essential sway" (CP 12 [16]). The last god is "last" not because it no longer acts, but because it is the most originary and primary event of human events. It is the beginning of the history of the other beginning, for it opens the time-space for the decision about the other beginning of history. To decide for the other beginning of history means, at the same time, to decide for the 'authenticity' of man, for his ownmost selfhood in *Da-sein*. Man, in *Da-sein*, becomes the "seeker," the "preserver" and "guardian" of the truth of *be-ing*, and thus of the stillness of the passing of the last god. The last god becomes available to thought, through its passing, because there are those few and rare persons who witness its passing and make it available to others. The fact that "historical man" witnesses the passing of the last god allows the passing itself, and thus the last god, to hold sway. The last god in its passing gives itself as "trembling"; it is never a steady presence that can be grasped. The last god 'holds sway' in its passing.

We saw that *be-ing* in its truth needs man in its being-*t/here*, in order to hold sway as enowning. Man, for his part, belongs to *be-ing*, for through *be-ing* he can be brought back to his innermost and authentic being-*t/here*. At the same time, the last god needs man in his 'fullness', in his being the "*t/here*" for the truth of *be-ing*, because, through man, in *Da-sein*, the last god can hold sway in its passing. Man, for his part, needs the last god in order to be awakened to the truth of *be-ing* as self-refusal. Those humans that belong to and witness this 'event' of appropriation are the "the ones to come," those who are attuned in reservedness, who witness the passing of the last god and can withstand the "thrust" of *be-ing*. The ones to come are those who can hear the call of *be-ing* and are mindful of the passing of the last god. They can therefore be those who, throughout history, hint at the truth of *be-ing* as enowning. Can we at this point suggest that the ones to come are those who rest within *Gelassenheit*? Let us now proceed to explore what Heidegger means by *Gelassenheit*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Heidegger's *Gelassenheit**

Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking

One of the major problems we face when approaching Heidegger's thought is that we are forced to dwell in uncertainty. When Heidegger speaks, he does not give any assurance regarding his saying. He willingly puzzles us; he always tries to undermine and rouse us from our comfortable thinking zone. And in so doing, Heidegger wants his reader to be open to something unusual that could occur. This is particularly evident in Heidegger's *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking*, a work that deals with the essence of thinking investigated as *Gelassenheit*. That will be the central focus of the present chapter.

The *Conversation*, written between 1944 and 1945, was published for the first time in 1959, together with a "Memorial Address" that Heidegger delivered in 1955 on the occasion of the 175th birthday of composer Conradin Kreutzer. The title of the book containing these two works is *Discourse on Thinking*.¹ In the "Memorial Address," Heidegger talks about *Gelassenheit* in relation to technical devices [technische Dinge]. But, as von Herrmann suggests,² if we want to understand how Heidegger thinks *Gelassenheit* in its essential features, we must consider the *Conversation*, a dialogue on the 'nature' of thinking conceived as *Gelassenheit*.

* An earlier version of this chapter was published as journal article in *Minerva: an Internet Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10, 2006, under the title "Heidegger on *Gelassenheit*."

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, tr. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). German edition: Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Stuttgart: Neske, 2000). Hereafter referred to as *Discourse*. References from this work will be indicated as follows: D, and the page number of the English edition, followed by the page number of the German edition, into square brackets.

² Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie"*. (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994).

Heidegger's *Conversation* is a dialogue between a scientist, a scholar and a teacher. The scientist represents one who conducts scientific research, and who is therefore accustomed to thinking according to a deductive and representational model of thinking. The scholar represents an academic "learned in the history of philosophical thought,"³ who thinks from within a metaphysical perspective. The teacher, through whom Heidegger speaks, we can consider to represent the Heideggerian idea of 'thinker'. In this dialogue these three speakers conduct an inquiry into the nature of thinking, a type of thinking that does not involve willing. They search for a "will-less thinking"⁴ that will be found to occur as 'Gelassenheit'.

At the beginning of the dialogue the scientist and the scholar appear to deal with the search in accordance with their scientific way of thinking, which is to say thinking with the mindset proper to their scientific role and speaking, from well determined and clear positions. But gradually, under the guidance of the teacher, the interlocutors begin to give up their own standpoints and, with that, their accustomed form of thinking. They let the dialogue itself take charge, so to speak. As they abandon the will to dictate and lead the search, a different approach and way of thinking discloses itself through the dialogue. The interlocutors, as the dialogue proceeds, no longer impose their view, but let the elements of their search emerge from their dialogue with one another. In the *Conversation* the standpoint of each speaker is gradually abandoned, in the sense that the focus is on what is disclosed during the dialogue by and through the interaction of the three speakers. We could venture to say that, at a certain point, it does not matter anymore who said what, because what reveals itself in the dialogue is beyond the distinction of 'whatness'. What the *Conversation* shows is the transformed nature of thinking, in its transforming process. During the *Conversation* we witness in the interaction between the three speakers the

³ William Lovitt and Harriet Brundage Lovitt, *Modern Technology in the Heideggerian Perspective*, Vol. II (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), p. 599.

⁴ Ibid.

transformation of our own way of thinking, which is forced to change in its core in order to be part of the scene settled by Heidegger.

Heidegger's *Conversation* does not present a linear structure. We do not find a form of deductive reasoning that brings the dialogue forth. Rather, we witness and experience a continuous circular movement. In the dialogue we do not find a series of stages that takes us closer to the goal we are aiming at. In the dialogue it is possible, instead, to recognize hermeneutical circles that are nourished by the dialogue itself. The dialogue, that is, the *interplay* between the interlocutors, shows the movement and 'counter-movement' that constitutes the 'structure' of the dialogue as the expanse in which it occurs, as the experience of *Gelassenheit*. That is why we can say that, at every moment of the dialogue, what we are looking for is already showing itself, and the investigation itself is already an experience of it.

Now, the aim of the present chapter is to investigate what Heidegger means by *Gelassenheit* through a careful study of the *Conversation*. To reach this goal, I will first present the difference between our common way of thinking and meditative thinking. I shall then explore the first step needed to move towards *Gelassenheit*, that is, what Heidegger indicates as "keeping awake" for *Gelassenheit*. I will look, then, at *Gelassenheit* as "higher acting" and "waiting". After that I will contend with the dialogue form chosen by Heidegger for this search. Finally, I shall introduce Heidegger's concept of "*Gegnet*" and its relation to *Gelassenheit*.

This investigation, however, remains an interpretation that, as such, does not pretend to be exhaustive, though I hope it will give a valuable contribution to the understanding of Heidegger's thought on *Gelassenheit*.

Meditative Thinking

When we use the word 'thinking', our thought immediately goes back to a well known set of definitions that we have learnt in our life or in our studies. To us thinking is a mental activity that helps us to solve problems, to deal with situations, to understand circumstances and, according to this understanding, to take action in order to move forward. Thinking for us also means to have an opinion, to have an impression that something is in a certain way. Thinking means reasoning, the process of reaching certain conclusions through a series of statements. Thinking is "a means of mastery."⁵

We already mentioned that this is a chapter about the essence of thinking, sought as *Gelassenheit*. But the kind of thinking whose essence we are about to investigate is not the common way of thinking. The kind of thinking that we need to think of is "the thinking of the thinker." This is not a general philosophical concept of thinking, but we need to consider what, in the *Discourse*, Heidegger calls "meditative thinking" [das besinnliche Denken], which in the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* is identified more technically as "future thinking" [das künftigen Denken].

The kind of thinking we are probably accustomed to is what Heidegger names "calculative thinking" [das rechnende Denken] (D46 [13]), and it is the thinking proper to the sciences and economics, which we, belonging to the technological age, mainly – if not solely – employ. Calculative thinking, says Heidegger, "calculates," "plans and investigates" (D46, [13]); it sets goal and wants to obtain them. It "serves specific purposes" (D46, [13]); it considers and works out many new and always different possibilities to develop. Despite this productivity of a thinking that "races from one aspect to the next"; despite the richness in thinking activities proper to our age, and testified by the many results obtained; despite our age's extreme reach in research activities and inquiries in

⁵ Ibid., p. 586.

many areas; despite all this, nevertheless, Heidegger states that a "growing thoughtlessness" (D45 [12]) is in place and needs to be addressed. This thoughtlessness depends on the fact that man is "*in flight from thinking*" (D45 [12]). "Thoughtlessness" [Gedankenlosigkeit], Heidegger states,

is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today's world. For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly. Thus one gathering follows on the heels of another. Commemorative celebrations grow poorer and poorer in thought. Commemoration and thoughtlessness are found side by side. (D45 [11])

Calculative thinking, despite being of great importance in our technological world, is a thinking "of a special kind." It deals, in fact, with circumstances that are already given, and which we take into consideration, to carry out projects or to reach goals that we want to achieve. Calculative thinking does not pause to consider the meaning inherent in "everything that is" (D46 [13]). It is always on the move, is restless and it "never collects itself" (D46 [13]). This fact hides and shows that man is actually "*in flight from thinking*." Now, if it is not a question of calculative thinking, then what kind of thinking does Heidegger refer to when he speaks of "meditative thinking"? And why, if at all, is there a need for it? Because if we have no problem in understanding the importance of calculative thinking, we probably are not so clear about the need, for our existence, of a different kind of thinking.

In the "Memorial Address," Heidegger speaks of two kinds of thinking: the above mentioned "calculative thinking" and "meditative thinking" (D46, [13]). Meditative thinking is a kind of thinking man is capable of, it is part of his nature; but nevertheless it is a way of thinking that needs to be awoken. When Heidegger states that man is "*in flight from thinking*" (D45, [12]), he means flight from meditative thinking. What distinguishes meditative thinking from calculative thinking? What does meditative thinking mean? It means to notice, to observe, to

ponder, to awaken an awareness of what is actually taking place around us and in us.

Meditative thinking does not mean being detached from reality or, as Heidegger says, "floating unaware above reality" (D46, [13]). It is also inappropriate to consider it as a useless kind of thinking, by stating that it is of no use in practical affairs or in business. These considerations, Heidegger states, are just "excuses" that, if on one hand appears to legitimize avoiding any engagement with this kind of thinking, on the other hand attests that meditative thinking "does not just happen by itself any more than does calculative thinking" (D46-47 [13]). Meditative thinking requires effort, commitment, determination, care, practice, but at the same time, it must "be able to bide its time, to await as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen" (D47 [13]).

Meditative thinking does not estrange us from reality. On the contrary, it keeps us extremely focused on our reality, on the *hic et nunc* of our being, 'existence'. To enact meditative thinking, Heidegger says that we need to

dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history. (D47 [14])

By remaining focused on the moment, we 'notice' aspects of our reality and we keep them in mind. We then 'remember' elements, events, circumstances related to them. This invite us to 'think further', and by doing so we clarify, discern, elements that pertain to our situation. Through this process we 'grow thoughtful', and this generates questions that further deepen our thinking and awareness of the roots of what moved us to think; and that was just something barely noticed before. An attempt to enact meditative thinking is carried out by Heidegger himself when, during the "Memorial Address," he tries to conduct the audience from a situation of consuming the address to a situation in which it actually meditate and thinks about what is going on, beyond the simple event of

commemoration. What follows is a long quotation which I think can give us a picture of what the process of meditative thinking is about:

What does this celebration suggest to us, in case we are ready to meditate? Then we notice that a work of art has flowered in the ground of our homeland. As we hold this simple fact in mind, we cannot help remembering at once that during the last two centuries great poets and thinkers have been brought forth from the Swabian land. Thinking about it further makes clear at once that Central Germany is likewise such a land, and so are East Prussia, Silesia, and Bohemia.

We grow thoughtful and ask: does not the flourishing of any genuine work depend upon its roots in a native soil? Johann Peter Hebel once wrote: "We are plants which – whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not – must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether"...

The poet means to say: For a truly joyous and salutary human work to flourish, man must be able to mount from the depth of his home ground up into ether. Ether here means the free air of the high heavens, the open realm of the spirit.

We grow more thoughtful and ask: does this claim of Johann Peter Hebel hold today? Does man still dwell calmly between heaven and earth? Does a meditative spirit still reign over the land? Is there still a life-giving homeland in whose ground man may stand rooted...? (D47-48 [14-15])

Even though "man is a *thinking*, that is, a *meditating* being" [der Mensch das *denkende*, d.h. *sinnende* Wesen ist] (D47, [14]), we need to train ourselves in the ability to think meditatively, to confront reality, and thus ourselves, in a meditative way. The cost of not doing so would be, Heidegger states, to remain a "defenseless and perplexed victim at the mercy of the irresistible superior power of technology" (D52-53 [21]). We would be – and today, more so than sixty years ago, when Heidegger gave this speech – victims of "radio and television," "picture magazines" and "movies"; we would be, and perhaps already are, "chained" to the imaginary world proposed by these media, and thus homeless in our own home:

all that with which modern techniques of communication stimulate, assail, and drive man - all that is already much closer to man today than his fields around his farmstead, closer than the sky over the earth, closer than the change from night to day... (D48 [15])

The risk for man is to be uprooted not only from his reality, from his world, but also from himself. If we think meditatively, however, we allow ourselves to be aware of the risk implied in the technological age and its usefulness, and we can hence act upon it.

When we think meditatively we do not project an idea, planning a goal towards which we move, we do not "run down a one-track course of ideas" (D53 [22]). When we think meditatively, we need to "engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all" (D53 [22]). In order to understand what this means, Heidegger suggests that we look at the comportment we have towards technological devices. We recognize that, in today's world technological machineries are indispensable. We need just to think of computers and their usage in daily life activities to be convinced, above any doubt, that "we depend on technical devices" (D53 [22]). By thinking calculatively, we use these machineries at our own convenience; we also let ourselves be challenged by them, so as to develop new devices that would be more suitable for a certain project or more accurate in the carrying out of certain research.

If calculative thinking does not think beyond the usefulness of what it engages with, meditative thinking would notice and become aware of the fact that these devices are not just extremely useful to us. It would also notice that they, by being so extremely useful, at the same time are "shackling" us: "suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them" (D53-54 [22]). If man, not being aware of this, is in a situation of being chained to these machineries, then by becoming conscious of this he finds himself in a different relation to them. He becomes free of them. With this awareness man can utilize these instruments just as instruments, being at the same time free to "let go of them at any time" (D54 [22]). And this is so

because once we acknowledge that their usefulness implies the possibility for us to be chained to them, we deal with them differently; we “deny them the right to dominate us, and so to wrap, confuse, and lay waste our nature” (D54 [23]). It is a matter of a different comportment towards them; it is a different disposition to which Heidegger gives the name “*releasement toward things*” [*die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*]⁶ (D54 [23]).

Releasement toward things is an expression of a change in thinking. Thinking is not just calculation, but ponders the meaning involved and hidden behind what we are related to and engaged with. This hidden meaning, even if it remains obscure as such, is nevertheless detected – by a meditating thinking – in its presence, a presence that “hides itself.” But, as Heidegger states,

if we explicitly and continuously heed the fact that such hidden meaning touches us everywhere in the world of technology, we stand at once within the realm of that which hides itself from us, and hides itself just in approaching us. That which shows itself and at the same time withdraws is the essential trait of what we call the mystery. I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, *openness to the mystery*. (D55 [24])

“Releasement towards things” and “openness to the mystery” are two aspects of the same disposition, a disposition that allows us to inhabit the world “in a totally different way.” But as we already mentioned, this disposition does not just happen to us. It develops through a “persistent courageous thinking” (D56 [25]), which in this work is meditative thinking, and which in the language of the *Contributions* is determined as “future thinking” [*das künftige Denken*] (CP3 [3]),

a thinking that is *underway* [*Gedanken-gang*], through which the domain of be-ing’s essential swaying – completely hidden up to now – is gone through, is thus first lit up, and is attained in its ownmost enowning-character. (CP3 [3])

⁶ Emphasis original.

Future thinking, which initially becomes accessible as meditative thinking, is the kind of thinking that thinks the truth of be-ing and, at the same time, is a mode of access, the way through which the essential swaying of be-ing, which has remained hidden in metaphysical thinking, is revealed in its own character, that is, in its being "enowning" [Ereignis].

We have spoken here of meditative thinking as that mode of thinking that allows "releasement toward things" and "the openness to the mystery" hidden in the technological world. Let us now move on, armed with meditative thinking, to further investigate *Gelassenheit* – which we just glimpsed in relation to technological devices – in its essential traits, considering it as "the manner of taking place of a thinking that is wholly free, wholly open to Being's governance."⁷

Keeping Awake for *Gelassenheit*

The dialogue on *Gelassenheit* opens by addressing the question of the essence of man. Since the European philosophical tradition has always seen in thinking the sign of the essence of man, questioning the essence of thinking means questioning the essence of man. What is investigated as the essence of man in the *Conversation* is not a general meaning of this essence; rather, what is investigated is "the *historical self-transforming, essential sway* [künftigen Wesen] of man" (WiE 373).⁸ What is distinctive about this search is the fact that it can be carried on and experienced only by turning one's sight away from man. This seems to be paradoxical, but as von Herrmann states, this ceases to be a paradox when we consider that the "future" essence of man (which is what we are looking for) determines itself from its relation to that which is not man. This means that the

⁷ Ibid., p. 544.

⁸ Translation mine.

"self-transforming *essential sway* of man is comprehensible only in that relation from out of which man receives its *essential sway*" (WiE 373),⁹ and that, we shall see, is the relation of *Gelassenheit* to "*Gegner*", that is, "that-which-regions," which is another name for be-ing itself.

As Heidegger states, the traditional concept of thinking intends thinking as a representing, and therefore as belonging to the context of will. It is still involved with a subjectivism that *Gelassenheit* wants to overcome. Subjectivism, as Caputo attests, is "setting up the thinking 'subject' as the highest principle of Being, and subordinating everything to the dictates and demands of the subject."¹⁰ *Gelassenheit*, as the essence of future thinking, does not belong to the realm of willing. What characterizes the search carried out in Heidegger's *Conversation* is the fact that the context of the search requires distance and detachment from the traditional context in which thinking is related to willing. The question of the essence of thinking, posed in terms of *Gelassenheit*, is in fact a question about the essence of thinking as a "non-willing" [Nicht-Wollen]:

Scholar: But thinking, understood in the traditional way, as representing is a kind of willing; Kant, too, understands thinking this way when he characterizes it as spontaneity. To think is to will, and to will is to think

Scientist: Then the statement that the nature of thinking is something other than thinking means that thinking is something other than willing.

Teacher: And that is why, in answer to your question as to what I really wanted from our meditation on the nature of thinking, I replied: I want non-willing. (C58-59 [29-30])

"I want non-willing" is the first step towards *Gelassenheit*. But in this statement we immediately notice an ambiguity: on the one hand, when one says "I want non-willing" (C 59 [30]), it is still a matter of will, wanting the non-willing

⁹ Translation mine.

¹⁰ John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 175.

is an act of will, as it expresses the will to say no to will. On the other hand, Heidegger states that, by saying that I want “non-willing,” I mean that I “willingly... renounce willing” (C 59 [30]). But by renouncing this, I search for what overall stays beyond any kind of willing, and that cannot be ‘reached’ by any act of will. By “renouncing willing,” Heidegger states, “we may release, or at least prepare to release, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not willing” (C 59-60 [31]). By means of willing not to will, we put ourselves in the condition of being able to reach that thinking that is not a matter of will. As Caputo explains, we need to go through this stage, as it is a “preparation for the final stage of releasement where we have left the sphere of willing behind altogether, where man, as with Eckhart, has no will at all.”¹¹

By willing not to will, we move one step closer to *Gelassenheit*. Letting go of our willing is the first step that allows *Gelassenheit* to “wake up” [Erwachen] in ourselves. It is not, though, that we act to wake it up. Actually this is not at all a waking up. As Heidegger points out, it is an “awakening of releasement,” in the sense of “keeping awake for releasement” [Wachbleiben für die Gelassenheit] (C61, [32]). Keeping awake for *Gelassenheit* means to let-go of willing, in order to contribute to the “awakening” of *Gelassenheit*. But not only that. By letting-go of willing, we let ourselves be in the position of being let-in into *Gelassenheit*. What we face here is a twofold mode of releasement: from one side we need to let-go of thinking as a representing that tends to explain everything in terms of reasons. This letting-go means that we keep ourselves awake for releasement which, on the other side, means that we open ourselves to something, a ‘mystery’ that – as we shall see later in this chapter – is actually be-ing itself, and is that which lets us in into *Gelassenheit*.

Heidegger opts to say “keeping awake” [Wachbleiben] for *Gelassenheit* instead of “to wake up” [Erwachen] *Gelassenheit*, because the latter implies an action undertaken by man, and thus implies that a will is still in place, and that we

¹¹ Ibid., p. 177.

still abide in the realm of willing. But in order to know what *Gelassenheit* means, it itself has to be allowed to be. It is not we that wake it up. It is something else; from somewhere else is *Gelassenheit* called to be, is let-in in ourselves. What we can do is to keep awake for *Gelassenheit*. Once we free ourselves from willing, we prepare ourselves for the "awakening of releasement"; the more we detach ourselves and we "wean ourselves from willing," the more we contribute to the "awakening of releasement."

Posed in these terms, it seems that dealing with *Gelassenheit* means to deal with something specific, something that we would be able to discover and point at, once we possess the right elements. But, as Heidegger often affirms, we need to start from what we know and are familiar with, in order to step forward, or to simply move on.¹² Let us, therefore, accept for now this impression regarding *Gelassenheit*, but try at the same time to keep in mind that *Gelassenheit* is not something that, as such, we will be in a position to determine clearly, and hence define as a whole. It will continue to be hermeneutically the same and something different, and that will perhaps let us abide in a kind of secure vagueness, in which our thinking will be at rest and dwell. Having said that, we need to nevertheless focus on specific meanings that we know, which during the dialogue will be enriched, and perhaps changed, with that which is unspoken and 'unseen', which will give them new flavor, new sounds, new color.

At this stage, however, we still cannot say what *Gelassenheit* is. Grasping the meaning will be a gradual process of disclosure that arises during the dialogue. Nevertheless, here we come across the structural moment of *Gelassenheit*, which shows *Gelassenheit* as the letting go of willing, a letting go that prepares us to "let-oneself-in" [*Sich einzulassen*] into *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* awakens when we let go of willing, and by letting go of it, we let ourselves in, in the sense that we are let-in into *Gelassenheit*. By letting-go of willing, we actually give

¹² In the context of Heidegger's philosophy, we need to think this step forward as indeed a step back towards the origin of the other beginning of thinking.

ourselves the possibility of being open to *Gelassenheit* and, in *Gelassenheit*, remain open for be-ing itself. This is also a step that moves us from thinking as a matter of willing to meditative thinking: it is a "transition from willing into releasement" (C61 [33]).

Now, what does *Gelassenheit* mean? What do we keep awake for? What do we contribute to awaken, by letting-go of our thinking as a matter of will? How are we to think *Gelassenheit*?

Higher Acting and Waiting

Reading the *Conversation*, we never find a clear statement that gives a definition of *Gelassenheit*. From our perspective, *Gelassenheit* is in fact a process, a conquest, a movement that changes our attitude, our way of thinking. While reading the conversation we come across elements that belong to *Gelassenheit*, but they are not exhaustive. They lead to a better comprehension of its meaning, but they do not define a picture of it, one which we could say: that is *Gelassenheit*. Nevertheless, these elements point towards and constitute its meaning.

At a certain point of the dialogue we come across one of these elements. It is identified in the fact that, in *Gelassenheit*, is "concealed" an acting which is "higher" than the acting we find in "actions within the world":

Scholar: Perhaps a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world and in the machinations of all mankind...

Teacher... which higher acting is yet no activity.

Scientist: Then releasement lies – if we may use the word lie – beyond the distinction between activity and passivity...

Scholar... because releasement does *not* belong to the domain of the will. (C61 [33]).

Before continuing, let me stress one point that could appear strange. Heidegger refers to *Gelassenheit* as “higher acting” and this, at first sight, could appear a contradiction if we consider the word *Gelassenheit*. The word *Gelassenheit* has its root on the verb ‘lassen’ which means to let, to give something up. This could suggest that an idea of passiveness belongs to *Gelassenheit*, but this is certainly not the case. Actually, the whole dialogue, which is an attempt to lead the reader to experience *Gelassenheit*, implies, paradoxically, an ‘active’ reading. It is an active reading because what this conversation is about is the letting go of an accustomed way of thinking and wanting, an experience of something which lies beyond it. This apparent passivity, which should be ‘enacted’ in the reading and constitutes the experience of *Gelassenheit*, is no passivity at all. Indeed, it is a “higher acting” that, as we shall see, has the form of “waiting.” The enactment of our thinking, in the attempt to think *Gelassenheit*, is in itself “higher acting,” for in its being ‘on the way’ our thinking is a “waiting upon” what we do not know yet. Our attempt to think *Gelassenheit* is, therefore, already an enactment of the higher acting that is proper to *Gelassenheit*. But now, how are we to understand this “higher acting”?

Probably when we hear the word “acting” we immediately relate it to a familiar concept of action, such as the one that thinks of action as that which produces some kind of result, which means that we understand action in terms of cause and effect. To understand what Heidegger means by “higher acting,” we need to refer to the essential meaning that, according to Heidegger, pertains to ‘action’. In the *Letter on Humanism*,¹³ Heidegger defines the essence of action as ‘accomplishment’ (LH239), and he unfolds the meaning of accomplishment as “to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness – *producere*” (LH239). “Higher acting” is not, therefore, an undertaking towards a

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Letter on “Humanism,”* tr. Frank A. Capuzzi, in: Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), pp. 239-276. German Edition: *Über den Humanismus*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 2000). Hereafter referred to as LH followed by the page number.

practical doing, but is a 'higher' acting as accomplishment, in the sense of leading forth something into the fullness of its essence. Releasement itself is what makes this available to man.

Gelassenheit as "higher acting" is further determined in the dialogue as "waiting" [warten]. As Heidegger affirms, what can be done to glimpse *Gelassenheit* is to actually do nothing but "wait," "we are to do nothing but wait" [Wir sollen nichts tun sondern warten] (C62, [35]). "Waiting" is the key experience, for in waiting we are in the position of crossing from thinking as representing to thinking as meditative thinking. In waiting we move from that thinking which, as Heidegger states, has lost its "element" (be-ing) and dried up, to the thinking that is "appropriated" by its "element" (be-ing itself) and which, therefore, has turned towards be-ing itself.¹⁴

But let us consider more closely the idea implied in 'waiting'. When Heidegger says that we have to do nothing but wait, we probably ask ourselves: what do we have to wait for? Asking this question puts us back into the realm of representing, and therefore removes us from that disposition from out of which we can experience *Gelassenheit*. If we ask what we are waiting for, we are expecting something, we already have an object of expectation, whereas we need to remain open towards something we do not know. If I expect, I have an object of my expectation, whereas 'waiting' has no object. In waiting, we rest in the act of waiting, or as A. Fabris states, "waiting does not objectify, does not reify possibilities, but instead it maintains them open as possibilities."¹⁵ As soon as we represent, says Heidegger, we think about what we are waiting for, and as soon we think about this, we are not waiting anymore: "in waiting we leave-open what we are waiting for" (C 68, [42]) because waiting allows itself to be brought into the openness. Waiting is a moment of crossing; in waiting the swinging

¹⁴ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁵ Adriano Fabris, note 5, pp. 81-82, in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1983)

movement between the different kinds of thinking is present. In waiting something opens. What we need to do is 'just' wait, wait without expecting.

It seems as though waiting is a moment of disorientation, which somehow shakes us because it wants us to suspend any kind of thinking as representing, and therefore any kind of wanting in the sense of expecting. Waiting is similar to being suspended, lifted up in a moment where nothing more passes, but just the moment occurs. But if we are to wait and suspend our expectations, are we still thinking? How do we get to know the essence of that thinking we are trying to grasp? Everything seems vague.

If we are disoriented about what Heidegger says, we are in the right disposition to be open towards what is going to come towards us. What Heidegger names here is 'something' that allows itself to be thought only by a thinking that is not representing, not a putting forward of concepts that one knows, in a structured thinking that already means something to me. To do this would prevent us from sensing the echo of 'something' different that is turning toward us. How can we identify this 'disposition'? We cannot describe it, as to describe it would mean to have already clear in front of me what I am describing. If we are in the condition of feeling the urge to ask these questions to ourselves, says Heidegger, we are getting closer to that disposition from out of which we are let-in into the essence of thinking. In waiting we let-go of an accustomed way of thinking, and we let-in what we are 'waiting upon', be-ing in its truth. We could venture to say that *Gelassenheit* names the relation between Dasein and be-ing. In *Gelassenheit*, man, letting go of willing, opens himself, in waiting, to be-ing. In waiting we are open to be-ing itself and in being open to it, be-ing itself is let be and we are let-in into *Gelassenheit*.

In this dialogue, Heidegger never gives the kind of answer we would expect, the kind of answer that would in fact help us in *not* thinking anymore. This kind of answer would seem to give us clearness, the absence of doubt that would allow us be quiet and give us the certainty of possessing knowledge regarding that particular matter. But this is exactly what Heidegger wants to

avoid. He wants us to keep thinking, to be restless, in order to remain open to what occurs, and in fact he chooses the dialogue form to conduct us towards this openness. Before dealing with the importance of the dialogue form, let me briefly recall what we have been saying.

Until now we have characterized *Gelassenheit* as our disposition in terms of "keeping awake" for *Gelassenheit*. This disposition is open when we let go of thinking as willing. *Gelassenheit* "awakens when our nature is let-in so as to have dealings with that which is not willing" (C61 [32-33]). To let-go of willing awakens *Gelassenheit*, which in turns reveals itself as a letting-oneself-in into releasement, a releasement in which one would be "freed of that task of weaning" (C60 [32]). *Gelassenheit*, as the nature of future thinking, is further characterized as "higher acting," which is not to be conceived as an action undertaken for a practical making or doing, but is to be taken in the sense of 'waiting'. We have determined this waiting not as a waiting for something, but as a waiting that does not expect, because it does not know what to expect. It waits upon something which is 'beyond' man's will. It is a waiting upon be-ing itself, which gifts itself to man's thinking, and toward which (be-ing) Dasein in releasement remains open.

Our efforts have been an attempt to free ourselves from thinking in terms of representing, to leap into meditative thinking. In so doing, we have approached (we have been getting closer to) that disposition that we are investigating. *Gelassenheit* is not primarily something to be described, but is above all something to be experienced, that is to be discovered and learned. *Gelassenheit* is not an event that happens to us, and we just acknowledge it. *Gelassenheit* occurs as something that needs to be allowed to happen. To do this we need to undergo a process of change in the way in which we understand ourselves, and thus in our being as a thinking being. The question we should pose now is not, therefore, what *Gelassenheit* is, but how can we dwell in that disposition in which *Gelassenheit* occurs and holds sway. How do we let this experience occur? "Through the way of the conversation" [Durch den Gang des Gesprches] (C69,

[44]), Heidegger says. The dialogue is, in fact, conducting us to that 'waiting' in which *Gelassenheit* holds sway.

The Dialogue Form

The possibility of reaching *Gelassenheit* is offered by the fact that what is sought for is not known, is hidden and therefore not representable as something that we already know. Throughout the conversation, Heidegger tries to allow something to emerge that the dialogue, in its evolving, has been building up and disclosing. Indeed, it is the dialogue itself which leads us on that path: "the conversation brings us to that path which seems nothing else than releasement itself" (C70 [44]).

Is this the reason why Heidegger uses the dialogue form to conduct this search? What happens in a dialogue, in a conversation between people, that does not occur when I think by myself? Is an open space let open amongst people when they engage in dialogue? Is it in the expanse, in this 'meanwhile' that originates and unfolds when people 'talk', that the openness itself unfolds? Is it in the dialogue (a 'swaying' of people's thinking) that something existing, but otherwise not unfolding, is first revealed? In the dialogue our receptiveness opens up and we become more prepared to wait. The tendency of affirmation weakens and the truth of what occurs finds its way to us. During a conversation 'something else' is allowed to be; it regains its time and space in our existence. It is created through the dialogue, like a symphony. The dialogue is a dynamic game of references, of signs, that allows new paths of thought, paths that are continuously questioned concerning their certainty. This means undermining the authority of what is well known, to let be the multidimensionality of what exists and surrounds us as an expanse, a vastness of silent notes.

Here is a long quote from the *Conversation*, which I believe could be useful for understanding this dynamic of the dialogue, that we could say enacts the meditative thinking process:

(*Scientist*): In many respects it is clear to me what the word releasement should not signify for us. But at the same time, I know less and less what we are talking about. We are trying to determine the nature of thinking. What has releasement to do with thinking?

(*Teacher*): Nothing if we conceive thinking in the traditional way as re-presenting. Yet perhaps the nature of thinking we are seeking is fixed in releasement.

(*Scientist*): With the best of will, I can not re-present to myself this nature of thinking.

(*Teacher*): Precisely because this will of yours and your mode of thinking as re-presenting prevent it.

(*Scientist*): But then, what in the world am I to do?

(*Scholar*): I am asking myself that too.

(*Teacher*): We are to do nothing but wait

(*Scholar*): That is poor consolation.

(*Teacher*): Poor or not, we should not await consolation - something we would still be doing if we became disconsolate.

(*Scientist*): Then what are we to wait for? And where are we to wait? I hardly know anymore who and where I am.

(*Teacher*): None of us knows that, as soon as we stop fooling ourselves

(*Scholar*): And yet we still have our path?

(*Teacher*): To be sure. But by forgetting it too quickly we give up thinking. (C62 [34-35])

A conversation confuses. You do not have 'control' of what you mean, because the interlocutor may be far removed from the meaning you have in mind. The interlocutor's approach to your thought forces you to question your statements, your beliefs, far beyond your own interpretations. It forces you to be open to different perspectives. In a conversation that wants to deal with essential matters, such as the one we are engaging with, we do not look for clarifications, definitions or agreements on how to define *Gelassenheit*. We could say that this dialogue wants to be free from content: it looks for an 'open space' where what we are looking for does not need to be defined against some other concept. In this

openness the truth of that which is appears, and does not need to be justified, but just let-in in its essential clarity of being.

The fact that the meaning sought is not accessible as something determined and determinable in one definition, makes the dialogue form extremely important. The three speakers, occupying different 'thinking spaces', create and at the same time reach openness otherwise not accessible. This brings with it hints and sights that create different sparks of awareness, and therefore leads to a new openness and vision. This new openness and vision prepares us to come closer to an otherwise inaccessible awareness through a continuous resting movement, which is a swinging from one interlocutor to the other, in a creative relation. Having said that, we now know that, in the course of this dialogue, something has been happening, in what is said, as well as beyond and before it. To be aware of this swinging movement is our first experience of thinking as *Gelassenheit*.

Until now we have seen that the path leading to *Gelassenheit* implies a letting-go of our own will, and this opens up to us the possibility of letting-oneself-in into *Gelassenheit*. We have spoken of *Gelassenheit* as a "higher acting" and we have explained its meaning by saying that this higher acting is in fact a "waiting upon." We then further expanded our context disclosing the 'expanse' into which this experience occurs. This 'expanse' is opened through the conversation. Through it, this openness is allowed to be, is disclosed, and from out of it what we have been saying takes form and something from the backdrop begins to show. Do we begin to glimpse a new "horizon"?

Horizon and Region

When we hear the word horizon, we probably imagine the line that we see far away when we look out at the ocean. It defines the space within which we see things. The horizon is the space within which we represent the objects around us.

According to Heidegger, the horizon is not just this. This perception, he states, is only the side facing us of the openness that the horizon is.

The horizon is experienced through the objects that are within it, and actually it can be determined only in relation to objects and through the fact of representing it to us. The reason for pointing this out, Heidegger says, is to stress the fact that man has no experience of what the horizon actually is. We experience objects that we see in a horizon; but we have no experience of the horizon itself. Not only do we not recognize it, but "what lets the horizon be what it is has not yet been encountered at all" (C64, [37]). It seems as though here we face three different elements: objects, the horizon and that which lets the horizon be.

Assuming that we know what we mean by objects, let us focus on the latter two elements: the horizon that is an openness, and the being-open of the horizon, its openness, that does not appear or that appears, but is not identified. Given this, says Heidegger, according to our thinking as representing, the 'being horizon' of the horizon [Horizonhafte] is just that side of the openness that faces us, an openness that is all around us, and that is filled up with the "appearances of what to our re-presenting are objects" (C64 [37]). Being the horizon, the openness that surrounds us, is revealed as something else besides the field of vision that we perceive. But, says Heidegger, "this something else is the other side of itself, and so the same as itself" (C63, [38]). In speaking about the horizon we have performed a 'step back' in thinking. From a thinking dimension closer to *Gelassenheit* we are now back, considering how we represent to ourselves the concept of horizon. From here, we begin another hermeneutical journey towards a transformed meaning of horizon, as it is thought from the perspective of future thinking.

The horizon is "the openness that surrounds us" (C64, [37]). But how are we to think this horizon as openness? We can think of it, says Heidegger, as a '*Gegend*', a 'region'. As von Herrmann affirms, what Heidegger names here

Gegend is also called "the unconcealed, the truth... of be-ing."¹⁶ In the *Conversation*, the region is defined by Heidegger as "an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests" [durch deren Zauber alles, was ihr gehört, zu dem zurückkehrt, worin es ruht] (C65 [38]).¹⁷

The region Heidegger mentions is not one amongst others, but is "the region," "the region of all regions" (C65 [38]). We have seen Heidegger leading us to the region from the concept of horizon and what we call horizon is "the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us" (C64 [37]). But what this openness is in itself has not yet been said. This openness in itself, "the region of all regions," is "that which comes to meet us" (C65 [39]); as soon as we begin to think of it as "the region," it reveals itself as "that which comes to meet us." It reveals itself as a movement that "comes to meet us" and enacts the possibility of the relation with man. The word assigned by Heidegger to the region of all regions, to the openness in itself, is an ancient German form for the word *Gegend*, that is, *Gegnet*. *Gegnet* refers to the acting of *Gegnet* towards the being of Dasein. We could say that *Gegnet* is the essential movement that relates and determines a relation to the being of Dasein.

As Fabris points out, the words *Gegend* and *Gegnet*, as well as the verbal forms "*gegenen*" and "*vergegenen*", belong to the same root "*gegen*", which originally indicates "a dynamic opposition, temporally or spatially occurring."¹⁸ In the English edition, *Gegnet* is translated as the phrase "that-which-regions," since, as the translators point out, in English there is no "analogous variant"¹⁹ which could translate the German word, retaining the idea of movement implied by it. The concept of movement implied in this word enhances a fundamental element proper to *Gegnet*. How does Heidegger characterize *Gegnet*?

¹⁶ WiE, p. 381. Translation mine.

¹⁷ In this statement, as von Hermann suggests, the "charm" [*der Zauber*] that enchants names the way in which the region acts. Cf. WiE p. 381.

¹⁸ Fabris, note 7, p. 82, in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, op. cit.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 66, note 1.

Gegnet is said to be "an abiding expanse which, gathering all, opens itself, so that in it openness is halted and held, letting everything merge in its own resting" (C66, [40]). With this statement we are further pushed to let go of our common way of referring to something as something. Here the meaning of that-which-regions enriches with a 'structure' which is fundamentally a relation that lets "everything merge in its own resting." *Gegnet* is the "abiding expanse," "*die verweilende Weite*." In this statement, it is worthwhile stressing the meaning implied in the German words that merge a temporal and spatial connotation. *Gegnet*, says Heidegger, is a "*Weite*". As Fabris observes, the twofold meaning of this word, as "immeasurable, undetermined space" and as "distance," is combined in Heidegger's use of the word. In this dialogue, Fabris continues, the term "*Weite*" refers to what comes inceptually from an undetermined distance, it refers to what 'gives itself from far away'.²⁰

Gegnet is not only a "*Weite*": it is a "*verweilende Weite*," which adds a temporal aspect to it. "*Verweilen*" means to abide, to linger, to remain, to dwell. *Gegnet* is not only an original movement. It comes from an undetermined distance and keeps gifting itself to us, as it remains, dwells, abides temporally as original openness, as "an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests"²¹ (C65, [38]). It is "an expanse and an abiding. It abides into the expanse of resting. It expands into the abiding of what has freely turned towards itself" (C66, [40]). In these lines Heidegger plays the 'symphony' of the essential swaying of *Gegnet*. The essential swaying of *Gegnet* is expressed by the musicality, by the movement, expressed by the words, by their interplay with one another. This interplay expresses here the sound of the essential swaying of be-ing that the dialogue, as an interplay of thinking engaged with the truth of be-ing, lets emerge.

²⁰ Fabris, p. 83, note 8, in: Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, op.cit..

²¹ In German: "durch deren Zauber alles, was ihr gehört, zu dem zurückkehrt, worin es ruht."

In its essential swaying, the *Gegnet* – another name for the truth of be-ing – moves towards and “comes to meet us” (C66, [40]); but, as Heidegger points out, it seems that this coming forth of *Gegnet* is rather a “drawing back” from us (C66, [40]). We recognize it as something that draws back from us. In coming forth it creates a distance. It creates, or perhaps reveals, a space/time, an expanse in which things themselves also do not have the character of objects anymore. They lose their nature of means and return to their nature of being as tree, stone, flower. They return to that moment that seems to be the absence of time – in the sense of sequence of moments – and emerges as time-space within which they simply are and rest.

The openness itself, is also identified as “*die Weite des Fernen*,” “the expanse of distance” (C 68 [42]). *Gegnet* is the vastness into which thinking as waiting finds that ‘while’ in which it rests, “the abiding in which it remains” (C68 [42]). Remaining in the proximity of the expanse means turning back towards the openness itself. This turning back is a “returning” [Zurückkehren] (C68 [42]) towards the openness, an openness that is “that for which we could do nothing but wait” (C68 [42]). The openness itself is *Gegnet*, and when we think, that is, when we wait upon *Gegnet*, we are “let-in” by *Gegnet* into *Gegnet*. Thinking is no longer representing. Thinking becomes “coming-into-the-nearness-of distance” [das In-die-Nähe-kommen zum Fernen] (C68 [43]). Echo of the Enowning? In the language of be-ing-historical thinking, we could say that we have been getting closer, and yet we are already there, in that moment in which the enowning occurs and reveals itself. It seems like the openness lets us in and allows us to rest in it, where resting means to turn back to that to which we belong, and in so doing we are allowed to be our innermost being, to be Da-sein.

In the *Conversation* we are on our way towards the other beginning of thinking. We are again preparing and carrying out the crossing from the first beginning of thinking to the other beginning. We move from the relation between man and being as beingness, to the relation in which the openness itself moves towards us. It is not a matter of transcending to a different level of being, but of

man receiving his essence, in the sense of returning to his nature of thinking being, by means of his relation to *Gegnet*. In this relation, and just in this relation, the human being can fully be himself.

At this point, let me recall for a moment what we have been saying. We have seen that waiting means to be free from thinking as representing. It means to be let-in into the openness itself; waiting "moves into openness without representing anything" (C69 [44]); and in waiting, in being freed from representing, we "let ourselves in" [*Sich-ein-lassen*] (C69 [44]) into *Gelassenheit*, in the sense of being open to *Gelassenheit*, in and through waiting. The fact that we are let-in into *Gelassenheit* is in fact a being let-in into *Gegnet*, by *Gegnet* itself. The openness that we experience, and to which we are released, is disclosed by means of the dialogue, as well as something else which is "as inconspicuous as the silent course of a conversation that moves us" (C70 [44]). Lovitts writes:

the speaking that has already taken place has manifested a self-authenticating happening of disclosure such that those who in thinking together have carried that speaking forward are united in the hearing of that happening's fresh arrival and can both witness to and reinforce its self-authentication by bringing it to utterance not merely through self-contained individual statements but through the confirmatory medium of anthiphonal speech.²²

The dialogue leads us on a path towards *Gelassenheit*, a path that in its unfolding appears to be *Gelassenheit* itself. *Gelassenheit* is revealed to be the path, and also the way in which we move on this path. As Heidegger asks: Where does this path go? And where does our moving end? Where does it rest? "Where else but in that-which-regions, in relation to which releasement is what it is" (C70 [45]). *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger affirms, is what it is only in relation to '*Gegnet*'. What does Heidegger mean with this statement? We are getting closer to *Gelassenheit* as "releasement to that-which-regions."

²² Lovitt and Lovitt, *Modern Technology in the Heideggerian Perspective*, p. 601.

Release to That-Which-Regions

Gelassenheit means "waiting", and in waiting we are in relation to the openness, and since the openness is *Gegnet*, it is possible to say that "waiting" – and therefore *Gelassenheit* – is a relation to *Gegnet*, a "relation to that-which-regions" [Verhältnis zur Gegnet] (C72 [48]). Indeed, it is not only a relation, but is "the relation to *Gegnet*" (C72 [48]), in that in waiting we release ourselves to *Gegnet* and, in so doing, we let *Gegnet* reveal itself as *Gegnet*. *Gelassenheit*, as the relation to that-which-regions, is a true relation; and, as Heidegger tells us, a relation is true when what is related to, is allowed to be and held in its ownmost way of being, by what it relates to.

Heidegger states: "The relation to that-which-regions is waiting. And waiting means: to release oneself into the openness of that-which-regions" (C72 [48]). But this does not mean that we are brought to a place where we were not (before being brought there). It is not that we are outside a place and then brought back to a place. As Heidegger points out, we are never outside *Gegnet*. Also when we think in terms of representing, we belong to *Gegnet*, in that, as "thinking beings" [als denkende Wesen] (C72 [48]), we remain in that horizon which is but the side of *Gegnet* that is "turned toward our re-presenting. That-which-regions surrounds us and reveals itself to us as the horizon" (C72-73 [48]).

We already noted that *Gegnet* reveals itself in the form of horizon, but we can also say that it hides within the horizon. Thus, at the same time we are within *Gegnet*, as it surrounds us, we are also not in it, insofar as we have not let ourselves be involved with it as *Gegnet*. This involvement only occurs when we wait because, in waiting, says Heidegger, we are set free, we are "released from our transcendental relation to the horizon" (C73 [49]). This "being-released from" [Gelassensein], says Heidegger, is "the first aspect" of what is called *Gelassenheit*. But it is the first not in terms of importance, or as the first of a series. It is the first aspect, in the sense that it is the first that we can directly refer

to, as we are now mindful of some of the elements that constitute the experience of *Gelassenheit*.

The fact that we refer to "being-released from" as the first aspect does not mean that this aspect has any kind of priority, for in *Gelassenheit* there is no ranking. Moreover, we cannot simply identify *Gelassenheit* with this first moment, because it neither comprehends the whole of *Gelassenheit*, nor is it exhaustive of its nature. In fact, Heidegger continues, the "*eigentliche Gelassenheit*," that is, the "authentic releasement" (C73 [49]), can happen even without this first moment. *Gelassenheit* is what it is in its whole, and it is in its whole only when it is in relation to *Gegnet*, that is, when it is "*Gelassenheit zur Gegnet*," "releasement to that-which-regions" (C74, [50]). "Releasement to that-which-regions" is what Heidegger calls "authentic releasement."²³

According to Heidegger, man, in *Da-sein*, "originally belongs" to that-which-regions and this is because man

is *appropriated* initially to that-which-regions and, indeed, through this itself [...] In fact (supposing that it is waiting which is essential, that is, all-decisive), waiting upon something is based on our belonging in that upon which we wait. (C73-74 [49-50])

Even if man is initially appropriated to that-which-regions, man needs to be truly appropriated to it in order to be and rest in his nature of thinking being. But if we already belong to that-which-regions, what is the difference whether we

²³ The peculiar relation between *Gelassenheit* and that-which-regions is named by Heidegger "*Vergegnis*," "regioning". More specifically, *Gelassenheit* names the relation of *Dasein* to the openness, that is, it speaks from the perspective of man as thinking being. The same relation, but from the perspective of *Gegnet* towards the 'essence' of human being as *Gelassenheit*, is called "*Vergegnis*," the "regioning," and it highlights the perspective of *Gegnet* from which the relation is moved, that is, is allowed to be. *Vergegnis* is a word that sums up the essence of what we are trying to experience as *Gelassenheit*. It is a word coined by Heidegger, along with its verbal form "*vergegnen*." It is used by Heidegger to gather together the meaning of *Gelassenheit*. It indicates the movement that, coming from *Gegnet*, moves *Gelassenheit* towards *Gegnet* itself. It is both the movement that opens and the openness that keeps open for *Gelassenheit*, for the waiting upon *Gegnet*, so that *Gelassenheit*, as the nature of thinking, can be appropriated (enown) to itself, resting in its belonging to *Gegnet*. *Vergegnis* is thus another word for "turning in enowning."

are truthfully appropriated to it or not? This question is asked during the conversation, and it directs our attention to the fact that there seems to be a difference between a more originary (authentic) condition of thinking and being, and a more common condition we live in as human beings. It is a condition that bespeaks being (authentic thinking) and not being (representing, calculative thinking) at the same time. It is, as Heidegger puts it, a "restless to and fro between yes and no" (C75 [51]).

This situation highlights the condition and the movement proper to our existence. This is the movement that searches for being, for the truth of being which, in turn, reveals itself as that swinging-movement that reveals being in its swaying of concealment and unconcealment. What we observe here is the same movement that crosses from the first beginning to the other beginning. The same movement that in *Being and Time* attempts to lead to a different comprehension of the meaning of being. It is the difference and the distance between the ontic and the ontological. It is the movement that impregnates the event of the truth of being. These appear to be all different perspectives of the same "originary" movement, the "originary turning" that is *Ereignis*.

Let us pause for a moment to consider a possible misunderstanding. It could appear, from what we have been saying, that *Gelassenheit* "floats in the realm of unreality and so in nothingness, and, lacking all power of action, is a will-less letting in of everything and, basically, the denial of the will to live!" (C80 [58]). But this is not the case, for in the *Gelassenheit* we find something that recalls the "power of action," but which is not a will. It is a "resolve" [Entschlossenheit] (C81 [59]), but not as an act of will that makes a decision and finds a solution to a problem or a situation. This "resolve," as Heidegger himself suggests, must be thought as the one that is spoken of in *Being and Time*, that is, it is a "letting oneself be called forth" (BT 283 [305]) to one's ownmost possibility

of being. "Resoluteness" – as *Entschlossenheit* is translated in *Being and Time* – is "authentic being a self"²⁴ (BT 274 [298]).

It is quite difficult to think a resolve that is not a matter of will that moves to an action; we tend, in fact, to consider resoluteness as a strong determination to attain something. As we read in Heidegger's *Introduction To Metaphysics*,²⁵ the essence of the resolve, as he intends it, is not an intention to act; it is not a 'gathering of energy' to be released into action. Resolve is the beginning, the inceptual beginning of any action moved. Here acting is not be taken as an action undertaken by Dasein in being resolute. Rather, acting refers to the existential and fundamental mode of being of Dasein, which is to be "care," and which is the "primordial" being of Dasein.

Resoluteness, in its essence, is the remaining open of Dasein for be-ing. In the context of the *Conversation*, this resolve should thus be understood as "the opening of man *particularly* undertaken by him *for* openness..." [als das eigens übernommene Sichöffnen des Daseins für das Offene...] (C81 [59]). It is a resolve to remain open to be-ing, and therefore to what is ownmost to man's nature, which is disclosed in relation to be-ing. This resolve is what Heidegger, in the *Conversation*, indicates as "releasement to that-which-regions," the resolve to release oneself to that-which-regions, to remain open towards the openness itself.

Now, there is another element that pertains to *Gelassenheit*: there is, in fact, not only a resolve, but also a "steadfastness" [Ausdauer] (C81 [59]) proper to *Gelassenheit*. Thinking, becoming more and more aware of its nature, and experiencing more clarity about it, remains firm and resolute. Thinking "stands within" and "rests" in this "composed steadfastness" (C81 [59]). The "steadfastness" proper to *Gelassenheit*

would be behavior which did not become a swaggering comportment, but which collected itself into and remained always

²⁴ Emphasis original.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

the composure of releasement [Verhaltenheit der Gelassenheit].
(C81 [59])

Releasement rests in this "composed steadfastness" and, by resting within it, it relates to that-which-regions and is let-in by that-which-regions in the regioning of that-which-regions, in its swaying. The "holding sway" of *Gegnet* allows releasement to be in its ownmost being, as "releasement to that-which-regions." To all of this Heidegger gives the name of "in-dwelling" [Inständigkeit] (C81 [60]). "In-dwelling" refers to what in *Being and Time* is named 'existence', which in its essence is so described by Heidegger in the *Introduction* to "what is metaphysics?":

what is meant by 'existence' in the context of a thinking that is prompted by, and directed toward, the truth of Being, could be most felicitously designated by the word "in-standing" [Inständigkeit]. We must think at the same time, however, of standing in the openness of Being, of sustaining this standing-in (care), and of enduring in what is most extreme (being toward death)...; for together they constitute the full essence of existence...²⁶

Resolve, steadfastness, in-dwelling belong all together to "authentic releasement," that is as such, when it is in relation to that-which-regions. Heidegger summarizes this authentic relation as follows:

(*Scientist*) [...] authentic releasement consists in this: that man in his very nature belongs to that-which-regions, i.e., he is released to it.

(*Scholar*): Not occasionally, but...prior to everything.

(*Scientist*): The prior, of which we really can not think...

(*Teacher*): ...because the nature of thinking begins there.

(*Scientist*): Thus man's nature is released to that-which-regions in what is prior to thought.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to "what is metaphysics?"*, tr. Walter Kaufmann, in: Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, pp. 277-290, 284.

(Scholar): [...]and, indeed, through that-which-regions itself.
(C82-83 [61-62])

During the conversation, the experience of "that-which-regions" occurs, but while the "nature" of that-which-regions "has neared," Heidegger says, "that-which-regions itself seems... to be further away than ever before" (C85 [65]). It is the openness itself that here opens before us; but in its opening, the openness hides itself, and thus seems to be "further away" from us. Perhaps *Gelassenheit*, says the teacher, as the resolve to let oneself be involved with the truth of be-ing, would be – as we have been experiencing during the conversation – a "coming near to and so at the same time remaining distant from that-which-regions..." (C86 [65-66]). But what would be the nearness and distance in which *Gegnet* conceals and unconceals itself?

(Scholar): This nearness and distance can be nothing outside that-which-regions.

(Teacher): Because that-which-regions regions all, gathering everything together and letting everything return to itself, to rest in its own identity.

(Scientist): Then that-which-regions itself would be nearing and distancing.

(Scholar): that-which-regions itself would be the nearness of distance, and the distance of nearness... (C86 [66])

Here Heidegger mentions the 'dialectic' of concealing and unconcealing that is the way in which be-ing in its truth, *Gegnet*, the openness in itself, holds sway. Until now we have considered the nature of thinking as "(that in-dwelling releasement to that-which-regions) which is the essentially human relation to that-which-regions" (C87 [68]). The nature of thinking, so expressed, is "something we presage as the nearness of distance" (C87 [68]). This nearness of a distance that the nature of thinking reveals itself to be, cannot be expressed by a 'single' word. Nevertheless, Heidegger stresses, during the conversation one word echoes from the backdrop, a word that could be closer to indicating what we have been

looking for. The word is a Greek one: “Ἀγχιβασιῇ” (C88 [69]) that can be translated, as Heidegger suggests, as “going towards,” but also – more literally – as “going near.”

Heidegger is reluctant to choose one word to indicate what is being revealed during the conversation. A single word can only with difficulty retain the meaning of something multidimensional. Nevertheless, Heidegger proposes a word which, in itself, seems to remain in the dynamic of the counter-movement of be-ing itself, and which seems to suggest itself throughout the conversation. This word, “Ἀγχιβασιῇ”, both names and does not name the nature of thinking which is sought. Nevertheless, it remains the word that seems best suited to let the nature of this experience emerge. “Ἀγχιβασιῇ” as “going toward” and “going near,” can be taken as “moving-into-nearness” [In-die-Nähe-gehen]... in the sense of letting-oneself-into-nearness” [In-die-Nähe-hinein-sich-einlassen] (C89 [70]). This “letting-oneself-into-nearness,” Heidegger finally states, seems to be “the name for our walk today along this country path” (C89 [70-71]).

The path towards *Gelassenheit* guided us into-nearness, a nearness with which we have been involved by engaging with this path, which has been a path of thinking, a path along which the nearness and distance of that towards which we have been moving has been disclosing itself in our own attempt to understand what we are looking for. Our path, which began as a question about *Gelassenheit*, brought us into the nearness of be-ing and became an experience of a moving-into-nearness of be-ing. With this experience we are posed now before a task that belongs to man's nature, which is that of being a “thinking being,” a being that meditates and thinks the truth of be-ing. The task is that of being mindful and moving closer to that which is the closest to us, and because of this the farthest, that is, be-ing in its truth. Thinking the truth of be-ing is the task of thinking, and thus of man, that as “thinking being,” is called to “in-dwell into releasement to that-which-regions.” The experience of the Enowning, which we have attempted to unfold throughout this work, becomes the experience of the essence of future

thinking, becomes "moving-into-nearness" of the truth of be-ing, becomes the experience of *Gelassenheit*, further disclosed as Ἀγχιβασιή.

Now, it is time, at last, to introduce the relation between Heidegger and Eckhart on *Gelassenheit*. Even though it will be much briefer than originally planned, I think it can still offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of Heidegger's thought of *Gelassenheit*, in that it highlights the origin from out of which Heidegger was moved to think *Gelassenheit*. As we shall see, Eckhart, who, unlike Heidegger thinks *Gelassenheit* within a religious context, identifies *Gelassenheit* as the true relation of man to God, and this relation is true insofar as man lets go of his own will to entrust himself completely to God. This, according to Eckhart, does not mean that man has to give up his wishes or his will. What is to be given up is in fact the 'own-sense' that is implied in man's willing. To give up our own will to entrust God, as Eckhart states, makes man "joyful." As he says, "whoever has all his will and what he wants is joyful. No one has that but he whose will and God's will are one. God grant us this oneness."²⁷ But let us now proceed to the next and last chapter.

²⁷ Meister Eckhart, *The Talks of Instruction*, in: M. Walsche, *Meister Eckhart. Sermons and Treatises*, (Elements Books, 1998), Vol. III, p. 58.

CHAPTER SIX

Heidegger And Eckhart On Gelassenheit

Heidegger and Eckhart: Men and Thinkers

I would like to begin this last chapter by explaining why, at the end of this path towards *Gelassenheit*, I propose to bring together two characters that are not only very distant in time from one another, and therefore belong to very different cultural traditions, but a philosopher and a mystic: Martin Heidegger, one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, and Meister Eckhart, a Dominican monk who lived between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and who is often considered to be the greatest of the German mystics.

When we think about Heidegger's philosophy, probably many different perspectives gather in our minds. Indeed, his thought deals with various themes, but all of them, step by step and during the entire course of his life, have always been oriented towards the core of his thought: the search for the meaning of being. In the development of his thought, we recognize important events that had a strong impact on his life as a thinker. One of those milestones is his decision to leave the Catholic Church, in whose cultural environment he made his first steps as a philosopher, coming across medieval mysticism, and therefore the writings of Eckhart.¹

Admittedly, at first glance it might seem quite odd to link a philosopher, known for having decided to part with the Catholic institution, and a mystic belonging to this same institution, in an attempt to discover the possibility that they could 'walk' the same path towards *Gelassenheit*. Moreover, given the different historical periods in which they lived, one could be skeptical about the

¹ Cf. Chapter one of the present work.

claim that some affinity exists between them and their thought. But perhaps thinking about Heidegger's early years, during which he adhered to the teachings of the Catholic Church, could be of some help in getting us closer to that dimension out of which I claim we can think about these two figures as very close to one another.

I would like to start with a quote from Karl Löwith, which draws the backdrop of Heidegger's thought very well, and against which this relation can be thought:

... the basis that serves as background for everything said by Heidegger, and that permits many to take notice and listen attentively, is something unsaid: the religious motive, which has surely detached itself from Christian faith, but which precisely on account of its dogmatically unattached indeterminacy appeals all the more to those who are no longer faithful Christians but who nonetheless would like to be religious.²

As we know from the letter to Krebs of 1919,³ Heidegger recognizes the worth that Catholicism bears in itself during the Middle Ages, but he also admits that the understanding of this significance is still far away from the awareness of "academic technicians," those who "officially work" in the ambit of Catholic studies. Now, if we turn to consider Meister Eckhart, at first glance he seems to belong to those "academic technicians" mentioned by Heidegger in his letter to Krebs.

Meister Eckhart was born in Tambach, near Gotha in Saxony, ca. 1260 and entered the Dominican order probably at the age of eighteen. As a young friar, he studied philosophy and theology in Cologne. From there he was sent to Paris, where he undertook higher theological studies, eventually becoming a lecturer in theology in 1293. In 1294 he returned to Saxony, and was made prior of the friary

² Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, tr. Gary Steiner, ed. Richard Wolin (New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 133.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Letter to Father Engelbert Krebs (1919)*, tr. John van Buren, in: Martin Heidegger, *Supplements*, ed. John Van Buren (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 69-70. Cf. Chapter One of the present study.

at Erfurt and vicar⁴ of Thuringia. Later on, in 1302, he went back to Paris to take up the Dominican academic chair of theology. He kept the chair for just a year, and in 1303 returned to Germany to become the provincial of Saxony, a new province consisting of forty-seven friaries in north and east of Germany. He remained in this position till 1311, when he was sent back to Paris by the General Chapter, to be appointed *magister*, "a rare privilege, hitherto granted only to Thomas Aquinas."⁵ By 1314 he was in Strasbourg as vicar for the Dominican Master General. There he began his experience as *Lebemeister*, having the opportunity to be totally involved with preaching and with being a spiritual guide, an experience which, during the years in which he was university professor and official of his order, he could never fully dedicate himself to. Eckhart remained in Strasbourg till 1323, when he moved to Cologne, where he stayed just a few years; for in 1327 he left to go to Avignon, the city of the papal court, where he had to face charges of heresy. Indeed, during the last years of Eckhart's life the Church accused him of heresy, though not condemning him as one, but rather condemning twenty-six of his articles, "insofar as they could generate in the minds of the faithful a heretical opinion, or one erroneous and hostile to the faith."⁶

If looking at Eckhart's life, as briefly presented in the above, we get the impression of being before the "academic technician," a thoughtful consideration of what he experienced in the last period of his life will draw for us the figure that will be Heidegger's interlocutor in the present investigation. Looking back at Eckhart's life from the perspective of his being accused of heresy, we see a man, a thinker, who, for the sake of his faith and his love for truth, and in spite of the fact that the institution he chose to live and serve in not only did not understand him, but even doubted the truth of his faith; despite all this, he nevertheless remained

⁴ The vicar was the local representative of the provincial.

⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

faithful to the truth he believed in, the truth that he knew was the same one professed by the Catholic Church, and which he experienced as surviving the limit of the institution, because it was beyond and before the institution. Eckhart did not disown the Church, as his deepest trust and faith was in the truth which was God, and God was to be encountered in unity with the Church, beyond and despite what was happening.

In this chapter, I attempt to conduct my investigation whilst having as a backdrop the idea of Heidegger and Eckhart, not only as philosopher and theologian, but above all as men and thinkers. On one side is Heidegger, the thinker "whose philosophy is conducted at the limits of philosophy,"⁷ whose philosophy is a thinking that tries to free itself from everything that could prevent the opening of a different horizon for thought and its essence. The way we should try to think Heidegger, in his possible relation to Eckhart, is not only as a scholar, the professor of Freiburg, the Rector of the University who pronounced that discourse in 1933; not only the public and official Heidegger. Whilst studying his works I have tried to keep in mind those aspects of him as a man, which do not appear in his works, but are hidden and protected in them. I have tried to recall the man Heidegger with relationships, feelings, worries, pain, hopes for himself, for the world, for humanity, for philosophy and its task.

Heidegger conducted his philosophical attempt from a position that could be said to be in opposition to the philosophical tradition that led the Western history of thought, but he actually does not want to be in opposition to this tradition. His starting point is the history of philosophy, to go back, investigate and question this same history, regarding what remained unquestioned and unknown about being. His goal has always been to reach into that depth, from out of which he was constantly called, and this call never let him be free from his

⁷ John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 1.

destiny of trying to say something that has continued to remain undetected, and thus unspoken.

On the other side, Heidegger's interlocutor is Meister Eckhart, known as a mystic belonging to the Catholic Church, and therefore belonging not only to that philosophical tradition that Heidegger criticizes, but also to that institution from which Heidegger himself parted ways in 1919. The fact that Eckhart belongs to that "system of Catholicism" rejected by Heidegger does not constitute an obstacle to an attempt to associate or link these two personalities. On the contrary, the fact that Eckhart belongs to the Catholic Church, and particularly considering the fact that the limit of this institution had been experienced by Eckhart himself at the end of his life, poses these two figures again in the same 'beyondness', if I may say so. Their thought and souls are constantly beyond what is said and experienced. We should try to remain in this beyondness while attempting to think the possibility that, despite the apparently different perspectives from out of which these two figures speak, they could nevertheless indicate the same space in which the human being can find the deepest meaning of his existence.

What about the fact that Eckhart is a mystic and Heidegger a philosopher? What is the affinity between Eckhart's mysticism and Heidegger's thought? In the history of philosophy, Heidegger propounded a radical transformation of thinking. He bequeathed the idea of philosophy as a matter of searching and giving reasons to every statement. What Heidegger is concerned with is not philosophy in the sense of metaphysics. As already stated, he is concerned with a kind of thought that "holds sway" before philosophy and which can surface at the end of philosophy, but which always remains essentially different from philosophy. As Heidegger affirms in the *Letter on Humanism*, "the thinking that is to come is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics - a name identical to philosophy" (LH 276). Thus the "future thinking" thinks more deeply,

who can therefore speak and be a witness to God's presence. We could venture to say that "the ones to come" that Heidegger thinks in the realm of be-ing recall the mystic in the realm of God.

Indeed, "genuine and great mysticism" is what can be brought closer to that depth of thought out of which Heidegger speaks of "future thinking." "Genuine and great mysticism" is that kind of mysticism which can be associated to thought itself, as Heidegger intends it. Mysticism here is not to be understood as being detached from reality and distant from the sensible world. It is not irrationalism. Great and genuine mysticism is that which lets the matter express itself in its simple presence. It allows the experience of God to come forth in its 'truth', before any representational thinking precludes this immediacy. Eckhart's mystical thought belongs to genuine and great mysticism. It thinks the relationship between the soul and God, and *Gelassenheit* is that disposition which allows the union with God to happen.

Having said that, let us proceed now to the next section, in which I shall introduce Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit* in its essential traits. The aim of the next section is to shed light on that thought which moved Heidegger to think *Gelassenheit*. My intention is not to make a comparison of contents between Heidegger's and Eckhart's concept, for what concerns this investigation is not the themes, the contents, but the path that leads to *Gelassenheit*, a path that, throughout this investigation, we have attempted to make our own. As Schürmann attests:

the call of the selfsame shows a way which has to become ours. The study of Meister Eckhart and Heidegger remains in vain if it does not lead to the appropriation of this path. 'Whoever wants to understand this has to be very detached'... What counts is not the understanding of a doctrine which then is lived up to as honestly as possible. The teaching of releasement is not moral. Rather, the experience of the selfsame is what counts. The selfsame counts on

us, claims our effort. To undergo the trial of hearing is to find ourselves directly exposed to letting-be.¹⁵

In dealing with Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, we need to keep in mind that, as was the case with Heidegger, we are dealing with a change in attitude to thinking. Better still, we are dealing with a thinking that thinks from the other beginning of thinking. Also, in the case of Eckhart we could say that this change in thinking occurs only when it is actually enacted in man's thinking. It "holds sway" when it occurs. Not before, not after. Just in the moment in which it happens. Our disposition should, therefore, be one of being open towards that which, through Eckhart's words, gives itself to us.

Gelassenheit in Eckhart

Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit* unifies two essential concepts: from one side, man has to let go of his own self-will, his own way of making sense of reality, and, on the other side, man, once freed from his will, needs to be open and receptive to the advent of God in the soul. The unity of these two dispositions constitutes Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*.

The works of Eckhart are divided into two groups: the Latin works and the "vernacular" works. The Latin works represent Eckhart's doctrinal base, which present in a more formal and methodological way what is presented in the vernacular works. If the Latin works were primarily conceived for academic purposes, and thus for an audience who had received a theological training, the "vernacular" works represent sermons and treatises intended for young friars and for "the religious orders of women in the thirteenth century,"¹⁶ to whom the

¹⁵ Reiner Schürmann, *Wondering Joy* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), p. 193.

¹⁶ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 101.

Dominicans were assigned as preachers. In the Latin and German works, Eckhart "teaches basically the same thing," states McGinn.¹⁷ But if in the Latin works we find the "doctrinal basis" of his thought, in the German works we find an invitation to take on the journey preached. Furthermore, in the vernacular works, Eckhart, speaking in his own language and without being confined to the "apparatus of late scholasticism,"¹⁸ could express more originally that awareness of God's presence which he was trying to convey in his sermons.

The work of Eckhart that inspired Heidegger most, in relation to the thinking of *Gelassenheit*,¹⁹ and which constitutes the focus of this section, is one of Eckhart's earliest vernacular works: a treatise entitled *The Talks of Instruction*.²⁰ I have chosen to investigate this treatise, not only owing to its influence on Heidegger, but also because, in it, Eckhart introduces "many of the aspects of the detaching process"²¹ that he will continue to preach about.

The Talks of Instruction,²² composed probably between 1294 and 1298, is a "collection of basic spiritual ground-rules."²³ It brings together some talks given by Eckhart, at that time Prior of Erfurt and Vicar of Thuringia, to his novices gathered together in *collationibus*. It is composed of 23 chapters that can be divided into three main groups: chapters 1-8 contend with the importance of releasement and obedience as a way to renounce oneself. Chapters 9-16 contend

¹⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, Introduction, p. xviii.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie"* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994), p. 376.

²⁰ Meister Eckhart, *The Talks of Instruction*, in: Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, tr. and ed. M. O'C. Walshe, Vol. III (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1998), pp. 11-60. Hereafter referred to as TI, followed by the page number. Works from Eckhart other than TI, cited from Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Treatises*, tr. and ed. M. O'C. Walshe, Vols. I, II, III (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1998), will be hereafter indicated as follows: (W. Sermon No., Vol. No., page No.). The German edition I refer to is: Meister Eckhart, *Werke*, Vols. I, II. Texte und Übersetzungen von Josef Quint. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993). Citations from the German edition will be hereafter indicated as follows: (Q, Sermon No, Volume No, page No.).

²¹ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 134.

²² Hereafter indicated as *Talks*.

²³ Wolfgang Wackernagel (2004), "From Detachment to Incarnation: A Study on Spiritual Advice in Eckhart's Early teaching," *Eckhart Review*, No 13, Spring 2004, 51-59, p. 51.

with sin, the way one should deal with it, and repentance. Chapters 17-23 appear to be less homogeneous in their content, and in these Eckhart deals with a variety of topics such as: how a man can be at peace within himself; how a man can deal with good things without being attached to them; in what kind of disposition one should receive the Body of Christ; how we are supposed to follow God; and he speaks of diligence and "inward and outward works." Going through these talks, I have focused on those elements which, in my opinion, best reveal the concept behind the word *Gelassenheit* as used by Eckhart.

It is worthwhile noticing that even if in these *Talks* Eckhart introduces his idea of *Gelassenheit*, the word *Gelassenheit* actually appears only once throughout the entire work. It appears in chapter 21, where Eckhart, answering the question as to whether to "willingly forego all God's sweetness" could also be moved by "laziness or insufficient love for God," he replies:

certainly, if one does not understand the difference. For we can tell whether it comes from laziness or from true detachment and self-abandonment [Denn, komme es nun von Trägheit oder von wahrer Abgeschiedenheit oder Gelassenheit] by observing whether, when we feel in this state, when we feel inwardly completely detached, we are just as much devoted to God as if we felt Him strongly. (TI 49 [413])

In the *Talks*, Eckhart very often uses forms of the verb "*lassen*" (to let go, to give up, to abandon); he speaks of the one who "has given up everything" [hat er alles gelassen] (TI 14 [341]); he uses forms like "resign yourself" [laß dich] (TI 13 [341]) or "we must school ourselves in abandoning till we keep nothing back" [Solange lerne man sich lassen, bis man nichts Eigenes mehr behält] (TI 48 [413]). The word *Gelassenheit*, as Bundschuh points out, is an abstraction of "*gelassen*" (given up), which refers to that man who has given up everything,

himself and the world, and who has entrusted himself completely to God.²⁴ *Gelassenheit* indicates an inner disposition of man. But this disposition is not a static or stable state of being. It unifies the two moments of letting-go and being open to, which belong to one another.

In his talks, Eckhart describes what a released man is like; he provides suggestions on the path that leads to being a released man; he speaks about what this process involves, what it requires from a man who wants to undertake it. Eckhart's instructions shed light on those inner dispositions upon which one needs to work, in order to walk the path of releasement. We could venture to say that Eckhart points at 'inner turnings'; he awakens an awareness on those inner changes that either lead man closer to God, or turn him far away from Him. Now, how does Eckhart identify a "released man"?

A released man is one who has abandoned all affections and worldly matters, but who has above all given up himself completely, to be empty for the advent of God in the soul, an advent which Eckhart calls "the birth of the Son" in the soul. This is the aim of releasement, and is at the same time releasement itself: "all God wants of you is for you to go out of yourself in the way of creatureliness and let God be within you" (W. I, 13, p. 118). To have abandoned everything means also to be detached from any image or idea of God. Indeed, God enters within man's soul, as Eckhart states, just when it is empty of any "creaturely image," for even the "least" image makes it impossible for God to enter. As soon as we have an image of God, God cannot enter into our souls: "as soon as this image comes in, God has to leave with all His Godhead. But when the image goes out, God comes in" (W. I, 13, p. 118). How does one free oneself of these images? How does one detach oneself from everything, and above all from oneself, in order to be empty for God? How can one possess the "right disposition," that is, releasement? How can one let this disposition develop from within?

²⁴ Adeltrud Bundschuh, *Die Bedeutung von gelassen und die Bedeutung der Gelassenheit in den deutschen Werken Meister Eckharts unter Berücksichtigung seiner lateinischen Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 102.

One needs to have a "bare mind" [ledigen Gemüt], for from this is moved "the most powerful prayer... and the noblest work of all." A "bare mind," asserts Eckhart,

is one which is worried by nothing and is tied to nothing, which has not bound its best to any mode, does not seek its own in anything, that is fully immersed in God's dearest will and gone out of its own. (TI 12 [339])

One who has a bare mind "can do all things," and the bare the mind, the more "worthy, useful, praiseworthy and perfect the prayer and the work" (TI 12 [339]). In a bare mind, it is God that works for me, in me. One with a bare mind has all his senses turned towards God; his focus is completely turned to God. The attitude of a bare mind is that of continuously being directed towards God, searching for God in everything, and never ceasing the search "until we find ourself about to be united with God" (TI 12 [339]).

"Unresigned people" [ungelassene Leute] are those who do not possess a bare mind. The attitude of these people is to often complain of not having the right disposition, of being fidgety, about situations they are or are not involved with. They tend to justify the impossibility of being completely turned towards God or immersed in Him because of this and that; or they blame the fact that they are not in the right place, such as a "cell" or a "cloister," for instance, which would allow them to collect themselves and thus be free to turn towards God. But this complaining is rooted in the fact that the person has not yet given himself up completely, but still possesses a desiring will. As Eckhart states, the reason for being held back is not to be found within things, but in oneself: "restlessness never arises in you except from self-will, whether you realize it or not... It is you yourself *in* the things that prevents you, for you have a wrong attitude to things" (TI 13 [339]). This wrong attitude is due to self-will, and self-will is what one should work upon.

How do we change this attitude? One needs to "resign" oneself. Unless we resign ourselves, we will be restless, no matter the situation, the place or the people we are with. If one is to find peace, a person

should resign *himself* to begin with, and then he has abandoned all things. In truth, if a man gave up a kingdom or the whole world and did not give up self, he would have given up nothing. But if a man gives up himself, then whatever he keeps, wealth, honour or whatever it may be, still he has given up everything. (TI 13-14 [341])

We need to begin with ourselves. Giving up myself, my own will, has the effect of me being released from all things. Myself, my will, my way of making sense of reality, is what most of all prevents me from being free for God's advent in the soul, and therefore, is precisely what needs to be given up most of all, in order to be free for God. To be free for God does not necessarily mean to be free from worldly possession, as perhaps one would think. What acts on us and can move us towards an image of god, and thus prevents us from turning to the essence of God, does not lie primarily in things or in others, but in ourselves. That is why that which is important is not what we do, but what moves us, "the ground upon which"²⁵ one acts. And this ground, cannot be man's will, but God's. We need to give up our will, to be able to know, and hence remain in, God's will. The more we own ourselves, the less we have God in ourselves; and the less we possess God, the more we are restless and we lack peace.

According to Eckhart, a released man is a man who possesses God. In such a man is found "detachment and turning away." Detachment is not only detachment from external matters, but is, most importantly, detachment from oneself, from one's own attitude, desire, will, ways of thought, which are rooted in oneself, and not in God. Once we are so detached from ourselves, we are free to possess God. We possess God, says Eckhart,

²⁵ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 120.

by not possessing ourselves or anything that is not God, and the more perfect and free this poverty, the greater the possession... For the more detached, the more truly possessed... He is without possession, who does not desire or wish to have anything of himself or of all that is outside him, or even of God or anything. (TI 54-55 [425])

We need to be completely empty of everything, including the desire for God, for being united with God, as this would still be the fruit of our own will, and would hence prevent God's advent in the soul.

Now, the decision to move towards God, and therefore to give up self-will, is a decision that man must take. As Eckhart states, nothing can be achieved unless man actually gives up his will and, most of all, decides, through an act of will, to give up his own will. As an example of this, Eckhart refers to the Annunciation, pointing out that nothing that the angel Gabriel or Mary said "could have made her the mother of God," but once she "gave up her will, at once she became a true mother of the eternal Word and conceived God straight away: he became her natural son" (TI 26 [367]). The decision to give up self-will is a decision that begins to transform our attitude, our inner disposition, which, once reached in releasement, will lead us to union with God.

To be in this disposition, however, is not a state of being that one either possess or does not. This disposition is a state that one achieves; it requires great effort to know oneself, one's "interior life." This disposition is a process of knowing oneself, knowing what inhabits one's own mind, when dealing with daily matters and when dealing with oneself. It is a process of clearly seeing through, of "breaking through" things, and having a clear perception of what is in one's mind. To learn this disposition, one does not need to be in a desert or be alone, far away from everything and everybody. Instead, as Eckhart attests, one needs to attain an "inner desert," which will remain as such in any circumstance and in anybody's company; an inner desert into which God can come in His whole essence.

To attain this inner desert means to be at peace, a peace that cannot be found in outward matters. If one thinks that one can find peace in "outward things," Eckhart tells us, then he fools himself because, no matter the actions one undertakes, the people one stays with, or the situations one is involved with, in those things one will never find peace, but will be "like a man who has taken a wrong turning: the further he goes, the more he goes astray" (TI 13 [341]). To attain this peace, one should resign oneself, give oneself up or, expressed otherwise, one should become "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3), that is, in *will*" (TI 14 [341]).

The poverty the evangelist talks about, and to which Eckhart refers, is an "internal poverty." It is not a poverty of means or external goods, but is poverty in itself, the "true poverty." A man "poor in spirit" is one who "wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing" (W. 87, II, pp. 269-270). A man who "wants nothing" is not a man who, in his life, does not do his will in anything, and instead struggles to do God's will. This man, Eckhart attests, would still possess a will, that is, a will for doing God's will and of "longing for eternity and God." But a man poor in spirit is one who "wants nothing and desires nothing," a man who is "free of his created will as he was when he was not" (W. 87, II, p. 271). He is a man that "must will and desire as little as he willed and desired when he was not" (W. 87, II, pp. 271-272). This is "true poverty."

To reach true poverty, to be a released man, Eckhart says: "observe yourself, and wherever you find yourself, leave yourself: that is the very best way" (TI 14 [341]). What Eckhart wants from man is, as Caputo puts it, a "perfect 'will-lessness'," to be completely empty of one's own will, so that "God's will simply steps in and takes over for our will";²⁶

In return for my going out of myself for His sake, God will be mine entirely with all that He is and can do, as much mine as His,

²⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

no more and no less... Nothing was ever so much my own as God will be mine with all that He is and can do. (TI 54 [425])

In life, continues Eckhart, there is always something more to be left of oneself. Not many people recognize this, but the one who does, and stays "steadfast in it," consistently attempts to detach himself from oneself, from all things and matters, because as much as one releases oneself from things, "just so much, neither more nor less, does God enter in with all that is His" (TI 14 [343]).

A man who lets go of his own self, and so prepares his soul for God's advent in the soul, is a released man. As such, he is in a "right state." One in a right state, Eckhart affirms, is always in a right state, and his state does not change according to circumstance and situation. It does not modify depending on people one finds oneself with. It does not depend upon either outer or inner situations, for to be in the right state means that one "has God with him." If a man truly has God with him, he "bears God in all his works and everywhere" (TI 16 [347]); everything is made for God's sake, and with God alone in mind. A released man is one whose mind is not just "entirely turned towards God" (TI 15 [345]), but also "holds fast to God" (TI 15 [345]). When this happens, a different awareness becomes available. When one is turned towards God, is tuned into His will and makes the effort to remain within His will, God turns towards this man and stays with him. To be in this disposition, as well as remain in it, turns things around:

If a man holds fast to God, God and all virtues cleave to him. And what before you sought, now seeks you; what before you pursued, now pursues you; and what before you fled, now flees you. And so, if a man cleaves fast to God, all that is divine cleaves to him and all that is alien and remote from God flees him. (TI 15-16 [345])

How can a man have this inner state and truly "possess" God? According to Eckhart, to possess God depends upon the fact that the mind not only needs to be turned towards God, but must also make the effort to move towards God. One needs to school oneself in order "to keep God ever present in his mind, in his aims

and in his love" (TI 17 [347]). This does not mean that one should incessantly keep thinking of God. This would be extremely difficult, given the fact that we live in a world, dealing with situations and people all the time. Moreover, continues Eckhart, this would not be what we should strive for. Indeed, it would imply that there is an image of God which one consistently turns towards. Eckhart wants people to learn to be free of all images and ideas of God, to focus on the essential God, on God's godhead, which is always beyond any image we could have of Him. If we are empty of an "imagined God," we are free for an "essential God," a God who "far transcends the thought of man and all creatures. Such a God never vanishes unless a man willfully turns away from Him" (TI 18 [349]).

What one should do, then, is to make the effort to remain tuned into keeping God present in one's mind: what one should be focused on and attentive to is keeping an "essential awareness of God."²⁷ We can have this awareness if we are in the right state, and hence possess God. A man who essentially possesses God, sees God in everything. To him everything is about God,

all things taste divinely to him, and God's image appears to him from out of all things. God flashes forth in him always, in him there is detachment and turning away, and he bears the imprint of his beloved, present God. (TI 18 [349])

To explain this concept through a familiar experience, Eckhart draws attention to the following example: when we are thirsty, he says, no matter what we do or are involved with, no matter if we are alone or with somebody else, our mind is always turned towards the idea of drinking; and the more one is thirsty, the more the thought of drinking is present and enduring. The same occurs to the man who essentially possesses God; his thought is persistently turned towards God and nothing can distract him from God, and everything is perceived by him as divine and "greater" than it is in itself. This being turned towards God is not a

²⁷ McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, p. 135.

continuous thinking of God which inhibits our living. It is more a letting of the Godhead, the essence of God, to surface in ourselves from within. Through the practice of releasement we learn to allow this awareness to emerge and we find ourselves in God's presence, dwelling in His will.

The process that aims at "keeping God ever present" in one's mind can be compared, as Eckhart states, to the way one learns an art and how to master it. This requires effort and practice, and if at the beginning, when we learn, for example, a new language, we need to make the effort to remember the rules and think about how they apply to that language. Later on, when we have attained the required knowledge, we do not have to stop and think about those elements; we possess them and are free to use them to speak the new language. And even if we might be distracted and occupied with other works, or involved in different matters, we will still be able to speak coherently, because we have gained the ability and skill to speak that language. This same attitude is to be thought in relation to God:

a man should be pervaded with God's presence, transformed with the form of his beloved God, and made essential by Him, so that God's presence shines for him without any effort; rather he will find emptiness in all things and be totally free of things. But first there must be thought and attentive study, just as with a pupil in any art. (TI 19 [353])

A man that acquires the "inner desert" is in the "right state," and in whatever he does, he should have a "perceptive awareness of himself and his inward being, and in all things seizes God in the highest possible way" (TI 20 [353]). This man should be always "on the watch" – as the evangelist Luke says – expecting the Lord. A person on the watch is attentive to any sign or situation that could indicate the presence or advance of the one who one expects. If I am on the watch for someone, I keep looking around, searching for the one I expect. The same attitude belongs to the man in the "right state." But for the man who wants to achieve this state, either "he must seize God in activities, and learn to have

Him, or he must abandon all works" (TI 21 [355]). Now, as Eckhart points out, since in life man is engaged with all sorts of activities, we cannot expect that he will abandon "all works" to be attentive to God's presence. Due to this, continues Eckhart, this man needs to take care to have God in all his actions and thoughts. Therefore, he who is a "beginner" on the way towards being united with God, this man, before engaging with people and in activities,

should first arm himself strongly with God and fix Him firmly in his heart, uniting all his intentions, thoughts, will and strength with Him, so that nothing else can arise in that man's mind. (TI 21 [355])

To release oneself from everything means not only to be detached from that which appears as something that would obviously turn us away from God, as could be the case with an undivided attention to something that is not God. To release oneself from everything also means to let go of the desire of doing good things, of embarking upon important undertakings. That is so, states Eckhart, because to "perform many and great feats" would be of "great joy, support and hope" for those who undertake such activities. Their works would become their "mainstay, support and security," whereas God wants to be "their sole support and security." This is the fundamental reason why, for Eckhart, God allows good people, people with good will, to be prevented from such undertakings.

Moreover, from the perspective of a man who is not yet in a right state, some undertakings could appear to have great value, whereas they could also be a way to hold onto oneself:

It seems a great thing if a man gives up a thousand marks of gold for God's sake and builds many hermitages and monasteries and feeds all the poor: That would be a great deed. But he would be far more blessed who should despise as much for God's sake. That man would possess very heaven who could for God's sake renounce all things, whatever God gave or did not give. (TI 55 [427])

To be in a right state, to be completely released from oneself, means also to be ready to give up what seems to be positive, an undertaking from which people could benefit. For a person in a right state to have the possibility of such an undertaking, or not having it, is the same. Being in the "right state," asserts Eckhart, means that one "would take it all the same way, lacking and having" (TI 57 [431]). "Lamenting," being mournful for something, or being disappointed at something, is indicative of a non-detached person, for one who is in a right state does not grieve over anything, because disappointment and different expectations do not belong to one who is in a right state.

Now, apart from specific suggestions and instructions about what one is supposed to do or not do, about how one should be disposed towards oneself and outer situations, apart from this Eckhart says more. Every time one replies to his instructions with but, or alas, or with any kind of thought that gives reasons and explains why things or feelings or dispositions should not be the way they are, or that things would be better if they were different, Eckhart shows that this kind of response recalls a disposition which still is not free of one's own self-will. It brings forth a will that has not yet let go of itself. The attitude that reacts thus shows that one still possess one's own will. The expectation of a response closer to one's own feelings or inclinations indicates that self-will, a desiring will, is still there. But if one wants to be united with God – and one should want this, for it is according to one's innermost nature to be one with God – the slightest sense of possession needs to be given up.

In Eckhart's instructions we constantly witness an immanent overcoming of what sounds, what is signified, in the words. We could venture to say that this is the ontological difference between the realm out of which one thinks and speaks as a released and detached person, and the realm from out of which a man, full of self-will, finds himself thinking and speaking. Listening to Eckhart's instruction, we realize that, from a released heart, the thoughts of a man who is still full of self-will and far away from God's will almost always still bespeak some sort of reluctance to let go of oneself. This hesitation, which is self-love,

makes it difficult to give up ourselves. To struggle against this hesitation means accepting to walk the path towards releasement, and thus towards union with God. To be united with God is what man needs to strive for in that, as Eckhart states,

as far as you are in God, you are at peace, and as far as you are out of God, you are not in peace. If anything is in God, it has peace: as much in God, so much at peace. That is how you can tell how far you are in God or otherwise, by whether you have peace or unrest... Whoever has his will and what he wants is joyful. No one has that but he whose will and God's will are one. (TI 58 [433])

We have seen the significance Eckhart attaches to being a released man, and we have investigated the practice of releasement as changes that need to take place in one's own mind and heart, if one wants to be united with God. The starting point of this path towards *Gelassenheit* is man's decision to give up self-will for God's sake. To give up self-will means to become empty of myself, and at the same time to become free, empty for the "birth of the Son" in the soul, that is, for the advent of God in the soul. In giving up myself, I open up to God's coming, I become receptive to God. The released man is one whose soul has become so "dispossessed of its own will, that God takes up residency in the soul and becomes the source of its life."²⁸

Having attempted to convey at least a sense of what *Gelassenheit* is in Eckhart's thinking, we can now move on to the last section of this chapter, in which we shall attempt to address the question that moved this investigation: can we say that Heidegger and Eckhart walk the same path towards *Gelassenheit*?

²⁸ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 123.

Heidegger and Eckhart: A Path Towards *Gelassenheit*?

As we mentioned in the Introduction of the present work, the idea that moved this investigation was to unveil the path that led Heidegger and Eckhart towards their respective concepts of *Gelassenheit*, in order to be in a position to determine whether and how these two figures converge. In the present work, we could investigate only Heidegger's path, whereas Eckhart's approach to *Gelassenheit* has been just laid out. This fact does not allow us to give a resolute answer to the question posed. We can nevertheless propose a suggestion regarding a possible answer to our question, a suggestion which, in my view, emerges from this work.

Throughout this study, by means of Heidegger's thought, we have attempted to enact a thinking process, the purpose of which is to lead us to be open to an experience of the meaning of *Gelassenheit* as developed by Heidegger. By presenting Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, we have shed light upon the concept which at first inspired Heidegger's own thinking of *Gelassenheit*.

The aim of this last section is to suggest the possibility of attesting that Heidegger and Eckhart come together on the path towards *Gelassenheit*. I would venture to say that Heidegger's path towards *Gelassenheit* is actually the same path that emerges from Eckhart's meditations on *Gelassenheit*. The path of Heidegger's thought 'expands', shows, reveals, brings forth, breaks through the thinking process and the thinking transformation that needs to be in place, for a man to learn to be a released man, and for those who attempt to understand Eckhart's saying, to actually understand his saying. In this sense, we can say that the paths of Heidegger and Eckhart are the same. But this sameness is not intended in terms of content. I would suggest that, to think this sameness, is to think an immanent thinking transformation which Heidegger's path enacts, and which allows us to abide in the 'thinking space' from out of which we can experience the meaning of Eckhart's understanding of *Gelassenheit*. I would suggest that this immanent transformation, which we called a path, is the expanse

out of which both speak, and constitutes that moment of *Gelassenheit* in which Heidegger and Eckhart come together. On this thinking path, experienced as the opening moment of *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger and Eckhart converge. The thinking path that we developed through Heidegger's thought is a path which, for what concerns *Gelassenheit*, has its original hint in Eckhart's thought, and to Eckhart it hermeneutically returns in a fecund unveiling.

As already mentioned, Heidegger came across this concept of Eckhart's in his early studies. As von Herrmann suggests,²⁹ when Heidegger recognizes in *Gelassenheit* the "transformed" and "future essence" of thinking, he links himself to the way in which Eckhart conceives *Gelassenheit*. Both, in their own particular way, recognize *Gelassenheit* as the core experience that allows man to be himself in his fullness. Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, von Herrmann continues, does not depend upon Eckhart's, in the sense that Heidegger's concept is a development of Eckhart's. What is suggested, rather, is that, being in dialogue with Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, has allowed Heidegger to reach his own fundamental thought about *Gelassenheit*, a thought that is not deducible from Eckhart's own thought, but which at the same time would not be possible without him.

According to von Herrmann, Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, conceived within the structure of the enowning, and Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, belonging to the experience of God (which are to be distinguished), have their link in the fact that "the '*Gelassenheit*' proper to the experience of God takes place within the *Gelassenheit* that belongs to the enowning."³⁰ Now, my own view is akin to this type of approach. Indeed, I believe that Heidegger's thought of *Gelassenheit* and Eckhart's belong together: they "need" (in the originary sense of "*brauchen*") each other; they need to be in dialogue with each other to let the core element of what they say emerge. Just as Heidegger's thought

²⁹ Cf. von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis: zu Heideggers "Beiträge zur Philosophie,"* Chapter IV, Section III.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 386. Translation mine.

of *Gelassenheit* would not be possible without Eckhart, so too I believe that the non-metaphysical ground out of which Eckhart speaks of *Gelassenheit* would not come forth without Heidegger. Heidegger's path towards *Gelassenheit* sheds light on the expanse out of which Eckhart speaks. I think Heidegger contributes to an actual understanding of the mystical thought of Eckhart, but not so much in the sense that his thought helps us understand the content of Eckhart's doctrine. The most valuable contribution of Heidegger's thought to Eckhart's is that, through his path towards *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger reveals that Eckhart's thought of *Gelassenheit* does not belong to the realm of metaphysics.

In the chapter dedicated to Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit*, we spoke about the difference between meditative thinking and calculative thinking, and we enhanced the need for meditative thinking, as the one that we need to enact to understand and experience *Gelassenheit* as the relation between Dasein and being. We further deepened our understanding of meditative thinking by saying that it is a kind of thinking which seeks to detach itself from willing, and that it is actually characterized by the will to say no to will. In meditative thinking, I want not to will. With regard to this point, we mentioned the ambiguity of this saying, that with an act of will one decides not to will; but we also pointed out that, in order to leap to a different kind of thought, we need to go through this first step, which is still an act of will, although as a will to say no to will.

In Eckhart we witness the same ambiguity: *Gelassenheit*, as the practice of saying no to self-will, in order to be empty for God's advent in the soul, needs to be undertaken by an act of will. It is man who has to accept the challenge to give up his own will, in order to begin the releasement process, about which Eckhart instructs those prepared to listen. When we are instructed on something, we hear what the person who instructs us has to say. We then project those instructions into our lives, and represent it to ourselves in our own context. Step by step, thinking, meditating about these instructions, probably being critical of what we have been told and adapting it to our situation, we move on towards the aim for which the instruction has been given. In searching for union with God, this path,

which begins simply as any other path that intends to reach out at something, becomes, at a certain point, a path that, moved by an action of will, transforms itself into an attempt, an effort to abandon a wanting will, for a will that decides to let go of itself for God's sake. This abandonment cannot happen at the beginning of the path because our will has not undergone a change, a transformation which is an overcoming of will itself. The possibility of letting go of one's own will for God's sake appears to be an immanent possibility of will, perhaps the ownmost possibility of will itself, a possibility that becomes available throughout the path which is actually a process towards a free abandonment of oneself for God's sake.

This immanent transformation of willing into non-willing is a thinking transformation. It occurs in a moment of releasement. This transformation, which disposes the released man towards God, is, I claim, the same thinking transformation that Heidegger enacts in the *Conversation*, and which throughout this investigation, by means of Heidegger's thinking turnings, we ourselves have attempted to enact. Namely, although the content of what Heidegger and Eckhart say is different, my claim is that the thinking expanse from out of which they speak is the same. I do not agree with Heidegger when he attests that Eckhart thought *Gelassenheit* within the context of will. In the *Conversation*, we see that Heidegger wants to distance himself from Eckhart's thought of *Gelassenheit*, which he claims is still thought within the realm of will:

Scientist: The transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me.

Teacher: And all the more, since the nature of releasement is still hidden.

Scholar: Especially so because even releasement can still be thought of as within the domain of will, as is the case with old masters of thought as Meister Eckhart.

Teacher: From whom, all the same, much can be learned.

Scholar: Certainly; but what we have called releasement evidently does not mean casting off sinful selfishness and letting self-will go in favor of the divine will. (C 61-62 [33-34])

As Caputo suggests, Heidegger misunderstood Eckhart's view, in the sense that Heidegger's critique seems to interpret Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit* simply as a negation of will, as passivity, "an ethical and moral category."³¹ In my view, Heidegger, when thinking Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*, was himself still caught up in metaphysical thinking, in the sense that, despite recognizing the depth of thought of the "old master," Heidegger could not think of Eckhart as not belonging to the Scholastic tradition. He did not recognize Eckhart as one who thinks from a standpoint that is free of metaphysical determinations, for what he wants to convey is an experience that does not belong to a doctrine, but to the essence of man's being. It is my view that Heidegger could not see Eckhart as a thinker who actually took that "step back" out of metaphysics, a step back that is testified to by the way in which he instructs. Eckhart is not preaching a doctrine. Through his words, he exposes those who listen – as Heidegger himself does – to authentic thinking. By listening to both Eckhart and Heidegger, what is to be enacted is not primarily a rational understanding of concepts. In both cases, I venture to say that one can understand, one can be exposed to, the meaning of their saying, just if one listens by "being-t/here," in that expanse which is a moment in releasement, from out of which both speak.

To bring this reflection to a conclusion, I would suggest, therefore, that the non-metaphysical ground out of which Eckhart speaks is made manifest through the unveiling of Heidegger's paths towards *Gelassenheit*. The non-metaphysical essence of Eckhart's saying is that "naked truth" that shows itself in his words, but which at the same time remains undetected to those who are not prepared to listen. This is clear in Eckhart's words:

if anyone cannot understand this sermon, he need not worry. For so long as a man is not equal to this truth, he *cannot* understand my words, for this is a naked truth which has come direct from the heart of God. (W. 87, II, p. 276)

³¹ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 180.

From this perspective, I would venture to say that Heidegger and Eckhart do not speak about the same thing, and yet they still do; they do not speak the same language, and yet they still do. But again, by saying that I do not mean to attest that the content of their saying is the same. In both Heidegger and Eckhart, it is the path as a mode of thinking that is a mode of being, that allows us to leap into that moment of releasement which, I would venture to say, manifests itself as the opening moment for the coming forth of truth — in Heidegger the truth of being as *Ereignis*; in Eckhart the “naked truth” coming “from the heart of God.”

The purpose of this investigation has not, therefore, been to assert a similarity of content between Heidegger and Eckhart. The question that moved this search was the question: “Can we think the path towards *Gelassenheit* in Heidegger and Eckhart as the same?” My suggestion is that we can. My assumption is that this sameness lies in the fact that the thinking dimension out of which Heidegger and Eckhart speak is that passing, and at the same time enduring moment, that is *Gelassenheit*. The “to” towards which they think releasement to be releasement to, is different; but the actual moment in which they think and “hold sway” in releasement, I claim, is the same, for it is the path of thinking which, in its essential turnings, leads to and holds sway as that opening moment.

CONCLUSION

In the present investigation, we have attempted, by means of thinking turnings, to enact a thinking transformation that would allow us to gain access to Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, which is thought within the context of enowning. After dealing with Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, from the perspective of the dimension opened by the pathway which took us there, we have also approached Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, with the aim of shedding light on the original concept that moved Heidegger to develop his own concept of *Gelassenheit*. The further aim of this was to let a possible "sameness" between Heidegger and Eckhart emerge.

From this preliminary approach to Eckhart's concept of *Gelassenheit*, our suggestion has been that Heidegger, through his path of thought, allows the non-metaphysical element of Eckhart's thought to emerge. We proposed that Heidegger's own thinking casts light on Eckhart's thinking of *Gelassenheit*, as belonging to that dimension of thought out of which Heidegger speaks of the truth of be-in as *Ereignis*. Indeed, we have pointed out that Heidegger's path towards *Gelassenheit*, as the experience of a thinking transformation, represents the expanse out of which the experience of *Gelassenheit* in Eckhart becomes available. Having recognized Heidegger's path as an experience of a thinking transformation which opens up to *Gelassenheit*, and which is actually the enactment of *Gelassenheit*, we have claimed that this same thinking transformation – which, moreover, we have ambitiously attempted to enact in ourselves in the present investigation – is enacted, is already "t/here," as a transformed thinking in Eckhart's saying.

Now, one element which we did not consider in our preliminary introduction, concerning the relation between Heidegger and Eckhart, is the ambit in which Heidegger and Eckhart develop their thinking of *Gelassenheit*.

Eckhart speaks of *Gelassenheit* within a religious context. *Gelassenheit* is the relation between God and the released man, who gives himself up with a view to entrusting himself completely to God. The God to which one entrusts oneself is a loving Father, a God of love who loved mankind so much that He sent His Son for the salvation of all. God is the fullness of being: He is a God of goodness, a God one can trust. He is a God who, once we are united with Him, grants us peace. But the same cannot be said of Heidegger's be-ing. In Heidegger, we saw that "authentic releasement" is "releasement to that-which-regions," a releasement to be-ing; and, as Caputo suggests, if we consider Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, as the relation between Dasein and be-ing, we do not find, as the "fruit" of this relationship, the same peace which belongs to Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*. In Heidegger's releasement, states Caputo, there is no peace:

Heidegger's Being is by no means 'fatherly' or 'loving' or 'benevolent'. Nor is Heidegger's Being a plenum of 'intelligibility'... For inasmuch as it is a process of *a-letheia*, Being is necessarily a process of emerging out of a primal and ineradicable core of concealment (*lethe*).¹

This, according to Caputo, is the main divergence, "the critical point of difference" in the similarity between Heidegger and Eckhart's thought of *Gelassenheit*. In Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, there is no peace, but "anxiety" and "awe" before a be-ing which is not a loving figure at all, nor something wholly intelligible. Instead, it is the "inscrutable play of a child." In Heidegger, continues Caputo, be-ing is "a ground which does not *admit* of explanation,"² and to release oneself to such a be-ing is not comforting at all. There is no assurance that be-ing – as God does for Eckhart – will give back what is beneficial to mankind. Heidegger's be-ing is not thought personalistically. In Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* all man can do is just wait, and yet without awaiting. Dasein is in the hand of a be-

¹ John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 247.

² *Ibid.*

ing, which is figured as a child who plays. There is no hope in Heidegger's waiting. For what man releases himself to is a world-play. This, according to Caputo, is the danger in thinking *Gelassenheit* outside a religious context. In Heidegger *Gelassenheit* assumes an "ominous aspect," and releasement is "no longer releasement to a loving God." We do not find hope or rest in Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, but rather find ourselves in front of an abyss, and "before the possibility of a final disappointment."³

During the development of this investigation, the sense of "despair" that Caputo assigns to Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit* as thought outside a religious context has not been suggested, and deliberately so. I do not, namely, agree with Caputo's view that Heidegger's "way of *Gelassenheit*," detached from its religious "matrix," has become "awesome and austere and comfortless." By saying that, and by speaking of the "danger" in this manner, it appears to me as though Caputo shifts out of *Gelassenheit*. I would venture to say that *Gelassenheit* ceases to be as such when we say that its way is comfortless or awesome. The way to *Gelassenheit* cannot be "comfortless," not because it should be comforting, but rather because it belongs to a different dimension of thought, in which the notion of being comforting or comfortless does not belong. Likewise, *Gelassenheit* in Eckhart, which is thought within a religious context, should not be conceived as a way of being that leads to a situation of comfort or peace. *Gelassenheit*, for Eckhart, is beyond comfort, in that it is deeper than comfort, more original than any expectation, feeling, worry. Indeed, *Gelassenheit* is even beyond God Himself, for in *Gelassenheit* one also needs to be detached from God in order to be an emptiness, a "nothingness," for God's "Godhead," for the divinity of God.

I would venture to say, and I leave this claim open to further investigation, that *Gelassenheit*, in both Heidegger and Eckhart, can perhaps be thought of as a moment of "absolute emptiness" – to use a Buddhist concept – an emptiness

³ Ibid., p. 251.

which is not an absence, in the sense of being a void of things, but is instead, as D. T. Suzuki states, an "absolute emptiness," which makes itself felt as

transcending all forms of mutual relationship, of subject and object, birth and death, God and the world, something and nothing, yes and no, affirmation and negation. In Buddhist Emptiness there is no time, no space, no becoming, *no-thing-ness*; it is what makes all things possible... it is a void of inexhaustible contents.⁴

From this perspective, therefore, we could say that there is neither a religious thought for which *Gelassenheit* refers to a relation with a God that gives assurances to man, nor a thought that is too "radically worldly and secular, and drained of absolute and divine assurances,"⁵ for whom the path of *Gelassenheit* becomes a path towards a situation of fear and anxiety. If we consider *Gelassenheit* as "absolute emptiness," as "nothingness," as a persistent indwelling in "waiting," then we find before us a path of authentic thought which leads to *Gelassenheit* and, at the same time, "holds sway" [*west*] as *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* would thus reveal itself as an enduring moment of "absolute emptiness," fecund of "inexhaustible contents" in which man can be *Dasein* and rest in "*Da-sein*," thereby becoming "the one to come."

What I have attempted in this investigation is to maintain focus on moments of "turning." These moments, which constitute the signposts of this investigation, simultaneously constitute leaps of thought that need to remain as such. Enacted in these leaps is the thinking transformation that needs to be "t/here" in order to actually understand the meaning of both Heidegger and Eckhart's saying. That Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, as waiting and being open to be-ing itself, could appear in its darkness, for it suggests remaining steadfast before the play of be-ing, over which we have no power, is not where this investigation has led us. This darkness, I claim, does not belong to Heidegger's

⁴ D. T. Suzuki, as quoted in: Brian J. Pierce OP, "Empty Fullness in the Eternal Now: Eckhart and Buddhists," *Eckhart Review*, 15, 2006, pp. 4-16, 6.

⁵ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, p. 252.

path towards *Gelassenheit*, in that, when we point this out, in our thinking we are expecting, we have already projected ourselves out in what is to come, and that causes fear and anxiety. But this, in my view, is not *Gelassenheit*. It is not *Gelassenheit* for Heidegger, for whom the path towards *Gelassenheit* means waiting without awaiting, to be steadfast in waiting, to in-dwell in waiting and, in so doing, to remain open for be-ing itself. The "higher acting" that is "waiting" means to suspend any expectations, and with that any fear or anxiety, as well as to remain in the pure act of waiting, as the moment in which the openness occurs.

And when we understand and experience this moment, we need to further suspend, let-go, any temptation to define that moment as a moment of anxiety before a lack of hope. We need, instead, to remain firm and resolute in that moment in which the expanse reveals itself. This expanse, I claim, is that non-metaphysical dimension of thought out of which Eckhart's speaks the language of the enowning. In Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* we need to let go of everything – expectations, desires, will, fears. Everything of ourselves must be given up, in order for us to be that enduring moment of emptiness for God's coming. In this enduring moment, which I suggest is to be conceived as the moment in which the path is revealed as *Gelassenheit* itself, Heidegger and Eckhart converge. In *Gelassenheit*, man can rest in an enduring moment of "stillness," in which the expanse opens up, and the thinker and the mystic come together. Borrowing Heidegger's words, on the pathway, here for us the path towards *Gelassenheit*,

... the child's game and the elder's wisdom gaze at each other.
And in a unique harmony, whose echo the pathway carries with it
silently here and there, everything is sparked serene.⁶

Now, before concluding this investigation, by giving Heidegger the stage, I would like to offer one last remark. The proposed interpretation of Heidegger and Eckhart's sameness of path that is hinted at in the present study could, I think,

⁶ Martin Heidegger (1949), "The Pathway," tr. T. F. O'Meara, in: Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York-London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 77-79.

constitute a starting point for further research, whose aim would be to explore Eckhart's own path towards *Gelassenheit* from the perspective of the enowning. Just as Heidegger's thought has challenged us to think anew the history of philosophy, in order to explore the history of being underway, it would likewise be important to take this challenge as allowing for the emergence of those "few and rare" persons who speak from within the history of metaphysics, but who do not belong to this history, in that they think from out of the other beginning, "future thinking." I believe that Meister Eckhart could be interpreted as one of "the ones to come" who, from within the history of metaphysics, and from within a religious context, speaks of *Gelassenheit* as the true relation between man and God – but as a relation which, from the perspective of the other beginning of thinking, could be revealed not as a relation of metaphysical categories (the *animal rationale* and the Christian God), but of what is most inceptual and original in those categories.

Let me conclude, at last, this investigation with a quote from Heidegger, in which the moment of *Gelassenheit* towards which we attempted to move throughout this work, and in which perhaps we have glimpsed Eckhart's saying as spoken out of enowning, opens up in poetic words:

Scholar: Ἀγχιβασιῆ: 'moving-into-nearness'. The word could rather, so it seems to me now, be the name for our walk today along this country path.

Teacher: Which guided us deep into the night...

Scientist:...that gleams ever more splendidly...

Scholar:...and overwhelms the stars...

Teacher:...because it nears their distances in the heavens...

Scientist:...at least for the naïve observer, although not for the exact scientist.

Teacher: Ever to the child in man, night neighbors the stars.

Scholar: She binds together without seam or edge or thread

Scientist: She neighbors; because she works only with nearness.

Scholar: If she ever works rather than rests...

Teacher:...while wondering upon the depths of the height.

Scholar: Then wonder can open what is locked?

Scientist: By way of waiting...

Teacher: ...if this is released...

Scholar: ...and human nature remains appropriated to that...

Teacher: ...from whence we are called. (C 89-90 [70-71])

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