



# “THE LAST GOD” IN HEIDEGGER’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY

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*In the years after 1919, Heidegger began to call for a “deconstruction” (Abbau) or “destruction” (Destruktion) of Western intellectual traditions in an attempt to “save culture.” He proposed that the “deconstruction” and “destruction” of intellectual traditions should proceed from a re-examination of the original Greek interpretation of Being, which had been misunderstood completely and utterly trivialized. From hereon, he began to articulate Being within the sphere of the world; Being as unveiled and revealed in Dasein. But the investigation of Being did not stop in Being and Time. The meaning of Being lies in occurrence, that is, that the gods are not extant characters, but rather figures of remembrance and expectation. Only in dasein’s moment of existential longing can god be really empty of any claim and intention. This opens us to the “Last God” of the Contributions.*

Keywords: God, Ontology, Metaphysics, Problem of Being, Heidegger

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## WHAT IS “IS”? : RAISING ONCE MORE THE PROBLEM OF BEING

Heidegger is famous, or perhaps notorious for some, for his unwavering discussion and tireless exposition of what Being is. He wrote in his essay “What Calls for Thinking?”: “Every great thinker thinks only a single thought.”<sup>1</sup> This is such an extraordinary statement if not unusual one. The history of philosophy attests that philosophers across the ages have discussed questions that are so varied and diverse. Is not this the very spirit of Aristotle’s definition of philosophy as the science of all things? So the philosopher is expected to answer, or to give his opinions about “all things” and “everything” that require understanding and rigorous analysis. But Heidegger is saying the exact opposite. The statement may not be true to other thinkers, and even great thinkers for that matter, but insofar as Heidegger is concerned, this is without doubt very true of him. The ultimate and perpetual question of his philosophy is “Being”, and to stress it more, only “Being”. The project of Heidegger in “Being and Time” is directed to answer the question “What is Being?”. He remarked very explicitly in the untitled first page: “For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression ‘being’. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed. Do we in our time have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word ‘being’? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew the question of the meaning of Being.”<sup>2</sup> This is

the most fundamental question (*Grundfrage*) of Heidegger’s inquiry.

Now, it is very important to note that *Grundfrage* must be distinguished from what he calls *Leitfrage*, or guide question which has been the project of classical thinkers. This *Leitfrage* remains within the province and sphere of what is insofar as Being perceived as “object”, which, for Heidegger, is a forgetting of Being. “And yet the question should not be about some particular, individual being. Given the unrestricted range of the question, every being counts as much as any other.”<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, *Grundfrage* is posited with utmost precision, a question that stresses its phenomenological priority over *Leitfrage*. It is in this condition that Rosenstein remarked: “Heidegger’s philosophical analysis cannot proceed by traditional means. It cannot begin by enumerating fundamentals or positing axioms explicit or implicit; it cannot mark off a region of analysis because there is nothing which does not fall within its scope.”<sup>4</sup>

“Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question. Presumably, it is no arbitrary question. ‘Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?’ – this is obviously the first of all questions.”<sup>5</sup> Thus is the opening statement of Heidegger’s first work ever translated and made available in the English language. We are now confronted with a question hoping against hope that Heidegger will provide a reply into. Unfortunately, no satisfactory answer was given. It is a common knowledge that he failed to finish

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*. David Farrell Krell, ed. (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 381.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 1. Gelven comments that in the untitled first page of *Being and Time*, Heidegger wishes to emphasize the value of understanding the meaning of Being and the existential analytic of what it means to be. By quoting a passage from Plato, Heidegger recognizes the uniqueness of relating the problem of Being with the problems of the human being. Plato, among others, has anchored his “Theory of Forms” from the existential needs of love, death, and justice. “This untitled first page emphasizes that a major task of the entire enterprise of *Being and Time* is to awaken the significance of the problem of Being. . . . It is precisely the theme of the entire existential

analytic that the vague and unexamined understanding of Being is the ultimate source for, and yet an impediment to, a genuine comprehension of what it means to be.” Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time*. (Chicago: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 22

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Rosenstein, “Mysticism as Preontology: A Note on the Heideggerian Connection” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1978): 62.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.





the second half of “Being and Time”, of which the published part refers only to a “Preparatory”, that is, an analysis of Dasein, the human way of being. The moment he arrives at the juncture of describing Being as such, he laments. The traditional language of metaphysics is no good, it failed him. He writes:

The question of Being does not achieve its concreteness until we have carried through the process of destroying the ontological tradition. In this way we can fully prove that the question of the meaning of Being is one that we cannot avoid, and we can demonstrate what it means to talk about ‘restating’ the question<sup>6</sup>

Since the publication of “Being and Time” in 1927, he has only brought out essays, and some of them greatly suggests the definitive answer to the question “What is Being?”. But the promised second half of “Being and Time” never came. His stance stalwartly suggests that the work of establishing the meaning of Being cannot be done by one man, or even by a generation of thinkers. It requires more than that. He would regard himself only as a guide, an initiator of pathmarks (*Holzwege*), a giver of directions. But nonetheless, in his essays following “Being and Time”, particularly the later ones, he was able to succeed in defining Being in the most indirect, circumlocutory, and tentative way, that is, in conveying to us of what Being is in *via negativa* – the false ways of understanding Being.

To begin with, for Heidegger there is nothing cryptic or mystifying in Being. Being is not simply a concept that only those who are good enough in philosophy could fathom. On the contrary, Being is very simply, supremely simple for complex modern consciousness to understand and grasp.<sup>7</sup> “Being denies itself every concept

and every determination and illumination, and does so in every respect and for every attempt at an explanation. Being simply withholds itself from any grasping on the basis of beings.”<sup>8</sup> Only those thinkers who have abandoned or stripped away the superfluities of conceptual thinking and feelings or emotion are aware of what it means to traverse the path of Being.

To take notice of something neglected, to learn to take notice of it without the hasty urge to immediately seek out utility and purpose. In the realm of this reflection, it is a matter of having the courage not to be as ‘daring’ as the usual and exclusive calculation of what is actual in each case. It is matter of having the courage to look around the domain of difference between beings and (B)eing and simply to recognize what holds sway here.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, Being is not beyond time, rather it is temporal through and through. Heidegger’s assertion is definitely a departure from the Greek Philosophers from whom he had learned so much. For the Greeks, Being is understood as the *Ousia*, as Essence, as Substance, as the anchor of all existence. That which is Absolute and enduring, the unchanging and immovable, has nothing to do with time, with the past and the future. It is in this mindset that Being was understood and defined by Plato and Aristotle. Recognizing the authority of these great Greek thinkers, Scholastic philosophy inherited such a metaphysical understanding and identified Being with the timeless, the supreme, and the ultimate Subject passed on to Theology. Heidegger steers

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ontological difference.” ROSENSTEIN, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Basic Concepts*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> *Basic Concepts*, 64. In Nicholson’s discussion regarding the beginning of the inquiry on the problem of Being, he points to a pre-ontological moment that discloses Being. And this disclosure is what he referred to as “ontological truth”. He said: “We might be helped here by an extract from the 1929 *Vom Wesen des Grundes*. In the immediate context, Heidegger has been making the case that true statements about beings (ontic statements, we would say) depend upon some pre-predicative disclosure of the beings themselves, and that this disclosure must be guided by a disclosure of being. In this conjuncture, he calls the disclosure of being ‘ontological truth’. His suggestion, though, is that there is a graded continuity between what I have been calling ‘awareness’ of being and a full-fledged ontological interpretation of being.” Cf. GRAEME NICHOLSON, *Illustrations of Being: Drawing Upon Heidegger and Metaphysics* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Being and Time*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenstein pointed out that “strictly speaking, the subject matter of Heidegger’s inquiry is *das Sein schlechthin* (‘Being absolutely’). We may enumerate its non-equivalents as follows: (1) Being (‘das Sein’) is not equivalent to ‘das Seiendes’ (‘being’, ‘entity’, ‘existent’, ‘thing’, or most generally ‘what is’). This distinction constitutes the fundamental





clear away from these ontological traditions. For him, Being is not God. Temporality is of the essence here. We cannot think of Being without grounding it in time and temporality. And definitely, there is no dualism in his thought of reality and what appears to the consciousness, of unchanging form and inconsistent matter. Accordingly,

“Being” has the meaning we have indicated, which recalls the Greek conception of the essence of Being – a definiteness, then, which has not come to us from just anywhere, but which has long ruled our *historical Dasein*. At one blow, our search for the definiteness of the meaning of the word “Being” thus becomes explicitly what it is: a meditation on the provenance of our *concealed history*.<sup>10</sup>

No thinking of Being is possible outside the realm of time, in fact what constitutes the thinking of Being is reflection upon it within the sphere of temporality. He was more explicit in “Being and Time” when he said: “Dasein is in such a way as to be something which understands something like Being. Keeping this interconnection firmly in mind, we shall show that whenever Dasein tacitly understands something like Being, it does so with *time* as its standpoint. Time must be brought to light – and genuinely conceived – as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it.”<sup>11</sup>

And thirdly, Being is objective to man, to Dasein, and it exists apart from him. The human dimension of being is only one aspect, and is hemmed within a larger reality. Anthropocentrism and Subjectivism is a problematique for Heidegger, the beginnings of which can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle. This is the reason behind his dissociation from Existentialism to the point of repudiating the name itself. He expressed this in his famous “Letter on Humanism” when he

wrote: “Man is not the lord of existing things. Man is the shepherd of Being.”<sup>12</sup> Similar to that of a shepherd, the real and authentic identity of man consists in his responsibility of taking care of, of being a guardian and a custodian. Man’s being is Care (*Sorge*) in the most extensive sense of the word. Man does not create Being, rather he must be open to the infinite possibilities of Being, and this openness is being responsible for it. This is the case because without man, without his thinking and remembering, Being is without any illumination, no understanding, no word, no expression. “Only if the temporal entrancement is ruptured do beings as a whole no longer refuse themselves, i.e., only then do they give up their own possibilities, make themselves graspable for each specific Dasein and give this Dasein itself the possibility of existing in the midst of beings in one particular respect, in one particular possibility in each case.”<sup>13</sup>

For Heidegger, it may be true that man finds himself *in Being* and definitely he does not make or create it, nevertheless Being is not properly grasped by the categories of reality. This posits a problem because there is a tendency to understand Being in this way. He expressed it in saying:

The word “Being” is a universal name, it is true, and seemingly one word among others. But this seeming is deceptive. The name and what it names are one of a kind. Therefore we distort it fundamentally if we try to illustrate it by examples – precisely because every example in this case manifests not too much, as one might say, but always too little. . . . The necessity for us to already understand the word “Being” is the highest and is incomparable. So the “universality of Being” in regard to all beings does not imply that we should turn away from this universality as fast as possible and turn to the particular; instead, it implies the opposite, that we should remain there, and raise

<sup>10</sup> “The Question of the Essence of Being” in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 97.

<sup>11</sup> *Being and Time*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> “Letter on Humanism” in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. William Levitt, trans. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 49.

<sup>13</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 151.





the uniqueness of this name and its naming to the level of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Heidegger has this penchant in calling “reality” as “being-at-hand” (*das Vorhandensein*). Now this being-at-hand is not Being (*Sein*) but only a part of it, something that is within Being. It is in this case that for him the ontological status of reality or being-at-hand is not prior to man. It is at this juncture that Heidegger disputed from one of the most classical, most ancient, and most accepted proposition of western thinking – that man is a rational animal. He regarded it as the greatest error committed by most previous thinkers in the metaphysical tradition. For him, to think and conceive of man as a “real” creature, endowed with understanding and consciousness, is misleading us in understanding the meaning of Being. Rather, Being must be thought of in temporality and Dasein has to be open to such a possibility. He made it explicit in one of his works saying: “If we undertake to elucidate the existence of the Dasein, we are fulfilling a twofold task – not only that of ontologically distinguishing one being of a particular sort from other beings but also that of exhibiting the being to whose being (existence) *an understanding of being* belongs and to the *interpretation of which all the problems of ontology generally return*.”<sup>15</sup> Such an error would therefore lead to conceive Being in terms that are false, namely, in terms of “nature”, “substance”, “categories”, and the like, thinking that we are able to penetrate into the real meaning of what Being really means. For Heidegger, man’s essence can be found in existence and not from properties added to or subtracted from it. Man’s being is his capacity to stand out from Being. Gray comments: “Man’s essence is found in his *ex-sistence*”<sup>16</sup>

So far we have tackled the first part of the most fundamental question of Metaphysics: “Why are there beings at all?” And here the questioning is revolving around definite beings and raising the question about their ground. But the second part of the question: “rather than nothing”, appears to be simply accidental, disposable, and neglected. But this is not the case. Heidegger said: “Our introduction of talk about Nothing here is not a careless and overly enthusiastic manner of speaking, not our own invention, but merely strict respect for the originary tradition regarding the sense of the fundamental question.”<sup>17</sup> But to talk about Nothing is in itself a contradiction. To consider Nothing as though it were something defies the laws of logic. And Heidegger regarded this as a symptom of Being’s oblivion. “Its ground is the lack of understanding that has long ruled the question about beings. But this lack of understanding stems from an oblivion of Being that is getting increasingly rigid.”<sup>18</sup> The approach then of Heidegger in this respect is necessarily unscientific, since the scientific investigation is deeply rooted in the rules and norms of logical analysis.<sup>19</sup>

Whoever truly wants to talk about Nothing must necessarily become unscientific. But this is a great misfortune only if one believes that scientific thinking alone is the authentic, rigorous thinking, that it alone can and must be made the measure of philosophical thinking. But the reverse is the case. All scientific thinking is just a derivative and rigidified form of philosophical thinking. Philosophy can never belong to the same order as the sciences.<sup>20</sup>

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Being can be discovered through the investigation of, and listening to, and meditating upon the language of genuine thinkers and poets. Language is conceived by Heidegger in a directly contrary to most modern thinking. It is no mere tool or instrument, nor does its essence consist entirely in being a means of transmitting information. Language is the supreme event of human existence because it enables man to affirm what he is.

<sup>14</sup> “The Question of the Essence of Being” in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Albert Hofstadter, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 154.

<sup>18</sup> J. Glenn Gray, “Heidegger’s ‘Being’” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 49, no. 12 (1992): 416. Gray posited a hypothetical question: But how is Being discovered? In his answer, Gray pointed out that for Heidegger

<sup>19</sup> A very thorough analysis of Heidegger’s consideration of Nothingness can be found in James Lawler, “Heidegger’s Theory of Metaphysics and Dialectics,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1975): 366.

<sup>20</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 27–28.





For Heidegger the same oblivion produced metaphysics, ontotheologies that has reduced Being into beings, is responsible for the formation of logical analysis and scientific inquiry. And this brand of metaphysics is the kind of metaphysics that he wishes to surpass and overcome. He concluded: “The man who truly wishes to speak about Nothing must of necessity become unscientific. . . . Authentic speaking about Nothing always remains extraordinary. It cannot be vulgarized. It dissolves if it is placed in the cheap acid of logical intelligence.”<sup>21</sup>

Heidegger’s scientific method assumes a more primordial position in the question of Being. To be scientific is to experience a certain development or articulation in the awareness and consciousness of Being. It assumes a procedure or a specific formation of questioning and thereby finds application to this or that group of entities. The supposed “grounding” concepts of entities, of ontotheologies, delineate the conditions that an entity must fulfil to be regarded as a physical being or even a historical moment. In its primordial form, the understanding of Being is always projective, a projection of Dasein aware of his temporality. It is first and foremost a self-projection, a drive to a possibility, the plan of life, the urge and desire to an ideal. It is not all representations we constantly carry in our minds.

As an existential structure, it is accessible only by the same method that discloses the other structures of Dasein – the philosophical method that is attuned, not only to the human being, but also to the Being of the human being. In “Being and Time” he writes:

The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. But to the extent that by uncovering the meaning of Being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we

may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein, this hermeneutic also becomes a “hermeneutic” in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends. And finally, to the extent that Dasein, as an entity with the possibility of existence, has ontological priority over every other entity, “hermeneutic”, as an interpretation of Dasein’s Being, has the third and specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence; and this is the sense which is philosophically primary.<sup>22</sup>

Philosophy for Heidegger then is always a phenomenological inquiry, a hermeneutic, that moves between the primordial pre-ontological understanding of Being and the ontologies and ontotheologies that ground a given field of entities of a given science. His philosophy is an attempt in understanding of Being, what Being is, what is “is”.

#### THE LAST GOD OF *THE CONTRIBUTIONS*

Readers and scholars of Martin Heidegger are often surprised to find a different Heidegger in the “Contributions to Philosophy”, very different from the Heidegger of “Being and Time”. In fact, the text appears to be strange and difficult to read. The difficulty lies not only to the extremely concise and sketchy style of the work but also to the very thoughts and ideas articulated in it. Most often than not, the text seems to be unfinished and appears to be written for self-understanding and not really meant for other readers. We turn our attention now to the very brief but dense section of the “Contributions to Philosophy” entitled by Heidegger as “The Last God.” Throughout the section, we encounter the question of “The Last God”, and what makes it more enigmatic is Heidegger’s allusion to “God” and “gods”, an oscillation between the singular

<sup>21</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> *Being and Time*, 62.





and the plural,<sup>23</sup> the relation of god and be-ing<sup>24</sup>, and specifically the question of “the passing of the last god.”

It must be stressed at this point that Heidegger’s treatment of the question of “The Last God” is not addressed either to a vindication of a particular belief or to its repudiation. He was very explicit when he asks the question: “But the last god, is that not debasing god, nay the greatest blasphemy? But what if the last god has to be so named because in the end the decision about gods brings under and among gods and thus makes what is ownmost to the uniqueness of the divine being (*Gottwesen*) most prominent?”<sup>25</sup> There is definitely an appearance that Heidegger seems to be in such a blasphemous stance, but he categorically denies it. The question speaks of “The Last” and it requires profound thinking, and he insists that it will not be very easy. “The last is that which not only needs the longest fore-runnership but also itself is: not the ceasing, but the deepest beginning, but reaches out the furthest and catches up with itself with greatest difficulty.”<sup>26</sup> In his view, truth is disclosedness<sup>27</sup> and is inseparable from misdirection and even inauthenticity.<sup>28</sup> “Last,” then does not mean last in a chain of events and therefore the “end.” Rather, Heidegger thinks “last” with respect to the inceptive character of the swaying of

the gods. It assumes a double temporality as the word “beginning” in the “other beginning.” Beginning means both the one beginning, that is the most originary inceptive occurrence of being in its truth, and the beginning again in a more futural sense, but of a “future,” a coming to be that is already there, but not yet in being.<sup>29</sup> The word last also refers to refusal,<sup>30</sup> an utmost refusal which is the most originary “not” or denial of being of which alone the hint of the last god can become manifest. Heidegger says: “The last god is not an end but rather the beginning as it sways into itself (*Insichschwängen*) and thus the highest shape of not granting.”<sup>31</sup> The last god sways in the not-granting, that is, in the utmost refusal and at the same time the farthest going ahead.

Heidegger’s objective is not to vindicate or discredit faith in God or belief in the gods. God is not a higher being, even the highest being. It is not the “creator” of being, nor is it the “enowner” of being, nor does it stand in any other way higher than being. In fact, the “Last God” is regarded by Heidegger as needing enowning, that is, it is in need of being. It was his project to point out and indicate the extremities in which the question of God arises and how it is contextualized. These extremities include the basic occurrence of Dasein and the determinate configurations of history and communities, that is, Dasein’s facticity. Dasein’s basic occurrence speaks of the inescapable exigency of human existence, and incomprehensible task of being-there, and the constant weight of not fulfilling Dasein’s ownmost possibilities. Heidegger referred to it in “Contributions to Philosophy” as the “refusal of enownment.” He wrote:

The greatest nearness of the last god is enowned when enowning as hesitating self-refusal increases in not-

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger refers to it as the swaying of Being, a “Playing-forth”. “The last god has its essential swaying within the hint, the onset and staying-away of the arrival as well as the flight of the gods who have been, and within their sheltered and hidden transformation. The last god is not enowning itself; rather, it needs enowning as that to which the founder the *t/here* (*Dagrunder*) belongs.” Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning*. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 288.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Contributions to Philosophy*, 288-289.

<sup>25</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 285.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Parmenides*, 12-15.

<sup>28</sup> David Crownfield commented that the affirmation or the denial of God and the gods mark also an essential untruth. Being is historical, that is, it is actual precisely in the sayings and practices, and artworks, in the communities and institutions, where it occurs and is articulable. God is this god in the texts, in the architecture and literature, the works and sacrifices, crusades and inquisitions, prayers and confessions, in which the name or names of god or gods have their meaning, signification, and context. And actual also, in all of them, is the absence, default, and negativity of gods. Cf. Charles Scott, et. al., eds, *Companion to Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 213.

<sup>29</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 288-289.

<sup>30</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 285.

<sup>31</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 293.





granting. This is essentially other than mere absence. Not-granting as belonging to enowning can be experienced only out of the more originary essential sway of be-ing, as it lights up in the thinking of the other beginning.<sup>32</sup>

Dasein is constantly plagued by the every renewed radicality or paradox of what charmed us in the present and the constant novelty of what is to come. This basic occurrence of dasein, the seeming contradiction of human existence, holds sway be-ing. Remember that this is once again the experience of nihilism which Nietzsche himself already prophesied.

At the opposite end of such extremities, dasein is challenged by the determinations and configurations of history and community. Heidegger writes: “Those who are on the way back are also totally other than the many who only ‘re-act’, whose ‘action’ is consumed solely by the blind clinging to the heretofore (i.e., history and community), briefly seen by them. What has been as it reaches over into the futural, as well as the futural in its call to what has been – this has never been manifest to them.”<sup>33</sup> Heidegger does not mean here that this form of extremity is not a universal essence abstracted from particularities, rather, he speaks of dasein’s facticity. These facticities are the specific forms, practices, associations, and concepts in which a community already lives with. He is referring to the engagements of man with his society, with a God or gods, together with their absences.<sup>34</sup> Thus the passing away of God in the age of nihilism points to a possible remote future whole long preparation we can at most only wait and seek to anticipate.<sup>35</sup>

Heidegger also speaks of the undecidability of the gods in the Contributions. Whether they are passing finally away or again coming toward us is the paradox of how the gods act and decide. He also says that his frequent use of the word “gods” does not in any way pertain to polytheism, neither the use of singular “God” is directed to monotheism. Rather, the plural “gods” indicate the inherent richness and the immeasurable possibilities of the question. The singular “God” is definitely not a quantitative indicator, rather it marks the singularity of the question. He writes:

The last god has its most unique uniqueness and stands outside those calculating determinations meant by titles such as “mono-theism,” “pan-theism,” and “a-theism.” “Monotheism” and all types of “theism” exist only since Judaeo-Christian “apologetics,” which has its metaphysics as its intellectual presupposition. With the death of this god, all theisms collapse. The multitude of gods cannot be quantified but rather is subjected to the inner richness of the grounds and abgrounds in the site for the moment of the shining and sheltering-concealing of the hint of the last god.<sup>36</sup>

He also speaks, and without any explanation, of the gods’ decision about their god which suggests very strongly a kind of “god beyond god.”<sup>37</sup> “Be-ing is the enquivering of gods’ godding (of echoing ahead the gods’ decision about their god).”<sup>38</sup>

God, Heidegger says, do not have being, and because of such a privation, they need it. “God needs be-ing and man as Da-sein must have grounded the belongingness to be-ing.”<sup>39</sup> Heidegger did not elaborate what does it mean for anything, including god, to “have” being, but one thing is very clear, the notion that god “needs” being, or anything at all, is offensive to the

<sup>32</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 289.

<sup>33</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 289.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Contributions to Philosophy*, 290.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Scott, 214. Crownfield also argued that throughout Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy*, he repeatedly speaks of the undecidability of whether the gods are, in their present remoteness, passing finally away or again coming toward us, and whether their remoteness is their assault or default (their wrath and their failure). *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 289.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Scott, 215.

<sup>38</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 169. The meaning of this statement was never explained by Heidegger.

<sup>39</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 292.







theistic tradition.<sup>40</sup> We have already discussed in the preceding topics that Heidegger's expression is essentially a repudiation of ontotheological theism, a kind of metaphysics that identifies God as the first and the highest being, the ground or the cause of being, and being-itself. For Heidegger, the meaning of being lies in occurrence, that is, that the gods are not extant characters, but rather figures of remembrance and expectation. Only in *dasein's* moment of existential longing can god be really empty of any claim and intention. "Enthinking of the truth of being", according to Heidegger, "succeeds only when, within the passing of god, the empowering of man to god's necessity becomes manifest."<sup>41</sup> We have to remember that the word "God" is a word within a language. And because it is within a language it has become determined by social components and the articulations of men. Both theism and atheism assume this particular ontotheological stance. But Heidegger insists that only "within the passing of god" can men authentically need god.

"The Last God" concludes and brings to a close Heidegger's *Contributions*, it is a joining that articulates the "last" as it reaches furthest into the beginning. The hinting and the swaying of the last god emerges out from the echo of being, in the distress of being's abandonment and forgetfulness. Thus, in reaching out to the other beginning, which is not simply the first in

the sequence of events that thinking traverses, *dasein* opens up a whole domain of the truth of being as enowning which each joining and each reaching out unfolds anew from a different angle.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Luc Marion advances a controversial argument for a God free from all categories of Being. Heidegger definitely shaped his field of theologizing. Taking a characteristically postmodern stance, Marion challenges a fundamental premise of both metaphysics and neo-Thomist theology: that God, before all else, must be. Rather, he locates a "God without Being" in the realm of agape, Christian charity, or love. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). However, in her study of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy*, Vallega-Neu pointed to us the Heidegger's expression "last god needs being," does not mean that there is an entity, god, that needs enowning. The needing of the last god is not separate from or an attribute of its swaying. 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 that the god, or gods, becomes manifest in the hinting. Cf. Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 102.

<sup>41</sup> *Contributions to Philosophy*, 291.



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