

- 52 *Réduction et Donation*, 304.
- 53 Marion, *Sur le Prisme Métaphysique de Descartes*, 338–69; Vincent Carraud ‘La Généalogie de la Politique: Pascal’ in *Communio* no IX. 3. May–June 1984, 26–37.
- 54 S.T. II II Q. 35. a3. resp. Marion cites this passage (*God Without Being*, 135) yet does not reflect that if, for Aquinas, *accidie* is essentially boredom about Charity (the gift) as much or more than it is boredom about being, then the sensation of melancholy or awareness of vanity is not neutrally ‘transitional’ in Christian thought as it could be for paganism. It is rather the intrusion of sin under the mask of reflectiveness and profundity.
- 55 *God Without Being*, 3.
- 56 F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy* trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge U.P. Cambridge, 1994) 54–6.
- 57 See Antoine Delzant, ‘Redemption et Ontologie’ in *L’Être et Dieu*, 81–103.
- 58 See J-L. Marion ‘Le Phénomène saturé’ in *Phénoménologie et Théologie*, 79–128. Also my unpublished paper, ‘On the sublime subject of Modernity.’
- 59 See Marcel Detienne, *Les Maîtres de la Vérité dans la Grèce Archaïque* (Maspero, Paris, 1967); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la Philosophie* (Eds. de Minuit, Paris, 1991) 38–60. See also Catherine Pickstock’s unpublished essay ‘Socrates goes outside the City: Writing and Exteriority’.

## Reading Heidegger: Is God Without Being? Jean-Luc Marion’s reading of Martin Heidegger in *God Without Being*

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Jean-Luc Marion is one of the first theologians to take seriously the force of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics *as a whole*, which means he takes seriously Heidegger’s claims about the “overcoming” (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics. In other words, when in the work of Martin Heidegger the whole of metaphysics is thrown into question, any and all of its determinations become “questionable”, that is, worthy of being questioned. Marion concedes the impact this may have for theology.

This study concerns itself with how Jean Luc-Marion attempts in the work *God Without Being* to speak of God after Martin Heidegger’s claims for the overcoming of metaphysics. This arises as a question about

the extent to which Jean-Luc Marion has been attentive to what Heidegger says. Marion appeals to an accepted *philosophical* reading of Heidegger in order to inaugurate a fresh *theological* reading of Heidegger. Underlying this study is the view that Marion is insufficiently attentive to the complexity of Heidegger's thinking.

In order to show how this is so in the limited space available here, I propose to undertake a re-reading of two of the key texts upon which Marion rests for his case against Heidegger in *God Without Being*, with, I hope, surprising results for Marion's project. Finally, I wish to conclude with some more general remarks about the Icon, which may at least point us in the direction of a more constructive reading of Heidegger's work.

This does not diminish the importance of *God Without Being*, rather it reinforces what Marion has achieved, for he has opened up once again the question of what Martin Heidegger means for theology. Both of the texts I wish to consider are concerned with the "ontological difference," the difference between *das Sein* and *das Seiende*, usually understood in English as the difference between Being and being or beings. Both texts are examined by Marion in some detail.

In the first text, Marion considers God as a being, which means that he considers God in relation to what it *is* to be a being. In the second text Marion considers God in his relation to Being as such, which means he considers whether what Heidegger has to say about Being can in any way inform our understanding of God. Marion concludes by wishing to separate God from the ontological difference. In considering God and each of the terms of the difference, I believe Marion has fundamentally misread Heidegger. If this is so, then the question of the relation of God to the ontological difference is still open, and Marion's claim that it is necessary to "transgress" Being and the difference in order to propose a theology of revelation may yet prove to be unfounded.

In the *Envoi to Dieu sans l'être* Marion remarks "God, before all else, has to be. ... But does Being relate, more than anything, to God? ... and what if God did not have first to be, since he loved us first, when we were not?"<sup>1</sup> For Marion, this question takes place in the attempt to contrast the idol and the icon "in order to advance to Being the name of God that in theology is assumed to be the first."<sup>2</sup> The contrast of the idol and the icon shows Being as acting (the verb is *jouer*, to play or perform) as an idol so that "it becomes thinkable to release (untie) oneself from it—to suspend it."<sup>3</sup> This untying leads us "without Being" (*sans l'être*) to two new "instances" where an opening to God is "destined" (*se destine*), "la vanité et, à l'envers, la charité." Marion concludes the movement of the suspension of Being which is *thinkable* into two moments, the transgression of Being and the gift. In this study my

concern is with the first of these moments — the transgression of Being.

Marion identifies in Heidegger a move from the (atheistic) phenomenological analytic of *Dasein* accomplished “in fact *definitely*”<sup>74</sup> in his earlier work to a second (later) moment, that of the anteriority of *Sein* over *Dasein*. The analytic of *Dasein* prepares for the possibility of the movement towards the isolation of Being, and makes possible the “double idolatry” of “theologically an instance anterior to ‘God’, hence that point from which idolatry could dawn.”<sup>75</sup> We are therefore offered a reading of the whole of the Heideggerian corpus, the “early” (existentialist) and the “late”, and to overcoming it at the same time, by proposing to “outwit” Being and so to think God without Being.

When Marion considers Heidegger’s view of God’s being, he cites the first of the texts I intend to consider, from the 1949 lecture *Die Kehre* (The Turning):

“... God is ... when he is — a being, and stands as a being in Being.”

Marion asks “But is it self-evident that God should have to be, hence to be as a being (supreme, plural — however one wants) in order to give himself as God? How is it that Being finds itself admitted without question...?”<sup>78</sup> It is this text from *Die Kehre* that leads him to the project of thinking God without Being, the critical demand — *exigence critique* — that we must attempt to think God outside the ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings.

This phrase from *Die Kehre* does not, however, say that Being is admitted *without question* in relation to God. It precisely puts the relation between God and Being *into question*, for it does not say “*that*” but “*when*” God is a being. Marion has missed the thrust, for “when” opens God to temporality, for if there is a “when he is a being” there must also be a “when he is not.” The essential thought here is “when.” Most crucially, if God *as a being* is put into question, then *God as a being standing in Being* is also put into question, which means that God *does not always stand in Being*. Being is *precisely not* admitted without question. For Heidegger, Being and being (*das Sein, die Seienden*) always belong together. It is impossible to think one without also the other playing a part in that thought (even in a concealed way). The suggestion therefore must be that Marion, unlike Heidegger, does not always think Being and being together. Marion reads Heidegger’s phrase as if it said “God is (always) a being.” If this is so, then Marion is already thinking outside the terms of the ontological difference when he reads the text from *Die Kehre*.

In the whole history of metaphysics the thought recurs “God is (always) a being.” To think God is *always* a being is to attempt to think

of a being without temporality. Put in a different way, this means to think beings, and one particular being (God) in terms of “eternity”.

Marion already thinks God without Being before he announces or even becomes aware of his “critical demand.” For to understand Heidegger’s sentence from *Die Kehre* as saying “God is a being (unquestionably and eternally)” is to reverse its sense, as if it said “God is a being irrespective of (whether or not) world or Being.” I suggest that we can only understand Heidegger as saying “*when* God is, Being offers the world where God may come as a being.” The essential thought is “when.” To think God in connection with world and Being (and so also with time) is, for Heidegger at least, to think at all. The sentence says not *that* but *if* God is a being. This can only mean *if* God shows himself at all he shows himself *as* a being (within Being, time and the world).

Marion’s understanding of the ontological difference means that he thinks beings as subordinated to Being, Being “has priority”. When therefore, he finds in the later Heidegger (in the lecture *Die Kehre*) the thought which he reads as “God is a being” this must mean (for him) “God, as a being, is subordinated to Being. Being has priority over God”. Marion has leapt out of the temporal horizon that Heidegger insists is essential for all thought to take place in order to think “God is a being—eternally.” If “God is a being—eternally”, then God is always consequent to what deploys beings which (in Marion’s reading of Heidegger) is Being. He is forced to want to think God outside the ontological difference because otherwise the ontological difference *deploys God*. “We admit therefore, without arguing or even explaining it (*sans la discuter*) here, the radical anteriority of ontological difference as that through and as which the *Geschick* of Being deploys beings...”

Marion is *never* concerned whether or not God is a being. We learn from the first page of the *Preface to the English Edition* that “The whole book suffered from the inevitable and assumed equivocation of its title: was it insinuating that God ‘without being’ is not, or does not exist? Let me repeat now the answer I gave then; no, definitely not. God is, exists, and that is the least of things.”<sup>10</sup>

So far, we have, I believe, established (1) that whether or not God is a being is without question for Marion, but open to question for Heidegger, and (2) that Marion does not recognize that Heidegger has opened up the question of whether, and this must also mean *how*, God is a being.

Having looked at Marion’s understanding of God as a being, it is now necessary to look at how Marion understands God’s being in relation to Being (as he thinks Heidegger understands it). How does Marion understand Being (within a theological horizon)? To tell us, he

quotes from Heidegger the second text I want to examine. It is worth citing in full:

Being and God are not identical and I would never attempt to think the essence of God by means of Being. Some among you perhaps know that I come from theology, that I still guard an old love for it and that I am not without a certain understanding of it. If I were yet to write a theology — to which I sometimes feel inclined — then the word *Being* would not occur in it. Faith does not need the thought of Being. When faith has recourse to this thought, it is no longer faith. This is what Luther understood. Even within his own church this seems to be forgotten. One could not be more reserved than I before every attempt to employ Being to think theologically in what way God is God. Of Being, there is nothing here to expect. I believe that Being can never be thought as the the ground and essence of God, but that nevertheless, the experience of God and of his manifestedness (*Offenbarkeit*), to the extent that the latter can indeed meet man, flashes (*sich ereignet*) in the dimension of Being, which in no way signifies that Being might be regarded as a possible predicate for God. On this point one would have to establish completely new distinctions and dimensions.<sup>11</sup>

How does Marion read this passage? He says “a single indication comes to us: the word *Being* must not intervene in a theological discourse.”<sup>12</sup> This passage does not say, however, “the word Being must not intervene in theological discourse”. It says, “I (Heidegger) would never attempt to think the essence of God by means of Being”. If we read this passage as Marion reads it, then it contains a contradiction, for Heidegger having said that the essence of God does not belong to Being, immediately speaks of Being in relation to the “manifestedness” (*Offenbarkeit*) of God. Immediately after citing this passage, Marion draws our attention to the distinction to be made between the disciplines of philosophy and theology and concludes by quoting a comment of Heidegger’s from his *Nietzsche* lectures. “The caesura clearly appears; though here philosophy concentrates on the open manifestation (*Offenbarkeit*) of Being, theology is attached to the revelation (*Offenbarkeit*) of ‘God’ ... they remain ‘separated by an abyss’ ...”<sup>13</sup>

The passage I have cited in full, however, speaks not of the “*Offenbarung des Gottes*”, but “*seiner Offenbarkeit*”. Has Marion caught Heidegger crossing his own abyss? Does Heidegger want to write a theology without any reference to Being and yet (according to Marion) presume to subordinate God to Being? Is Heidegger undertaking not a theology (a project of faith) but a *theology*, which Marion says is not the concern of theology but “the possibility of a strictly philosophical science

of the divine ..."?<sup>14</sup> “*Theology*” is another name for the Onto-Theological constitution of metaphysics. For Heidegger, this comes to an end with the overcoming of metaphysics. How could he want to undertake a *theology*? Are we now not riddled with contradictions? In order to overcome the contradictions, must we not follow Marion in attempting to exclude God from the ontological difference, and must we not therefore “transgress” Being?

The key to this text is Heidegger’s use of the words “*sich ereignet*” which Marion renders into French as “*fulgure*” and are rendered in the English text as “*flashes*”. What does “*sich*” mean in this text? It means: “God (himself) flashes (in the realm of Being)”. This passage does not think God in relation to Being, nor even God subordinated to Being, it thinks the flashing *appearance* of God deploying himself in the “dimension” of Being as a “manifestedness” — *Offenbarkeit*. God enters the realm of Being as *a being*. Then and only then does God become a being, deploying himself (*sich ereignet*). Moreover, God, in deploying himself, is not deployed by the ontological difference.

Where is Marion’s abyss between *Offenbarkeit* and *Offenbarung*? When Heidegger speaks of revelation (*Offenbarung*) in the *Nietzsche* lectures he is referring (on the very same page to that quoted by Marion in our text) to “Church teaching (*die Kirchenlehrer*) ... the doctrine of the Doctors of the Church”, “truth” as it is thought by Christian metaphysics.<sup>15</sup>

*Offenbarung* is that discipline which the Church teaches (the tradition of metaphysics, of *theology*) as *opposed* to the God who manifests himself, who flashes in Being. The abyss stands between metaphysics, the “square circle” of a “Christian philosophy”, and God’s manifestedness. To think God apart from metaphysics therefore disbars theology from thinking along the lines of *die Kirchenlehrer*, which prompts theology to think new “distinctions and delimitations”. Theology itself is given a new direction, an essential task, by the thought of Being. Read in this way, there are no contradictions in this second text.

To free God from Being, to free “God” from the quotation marks Marion places around the name, does not mean that God cannot enter the “dimension” of Being. It means never to think the essence of God by thinking “God is a being,” only his appearance. Heidegger does not raise the question of God, he raises only the *Seinsfrage*, the question of Being. On his own account, to raise the question of the *essence* of God would mean *not* to raise the *Seinsfrage*. Our conclusion must be that Heidegger’s understanding of the ontological difference, the *Ereignis*, already freed God from Being, literally placed God *without* or outside

Being before ever Marion put pen to paper. Furthermore, Marion never takes seriously enough the claims of the ontological difference, so that before even raising the “critical demand” to think outside the difference, he has not yet understood what it means to think within it.

Heidegger, *quite the opposite* to Marion, never thinks “God is a being” is a statement about what God really “is” *in himself* essentially. Only the manifestedness, the appearance, of God is being. The *Ereignis* of Being makes it impossible for us to accept Marion’s characterization of a “double idolatry” represented by the work of the late Heidegger. If we follow Heidegger’s directive and refuse to think the *essence* of God in relation to Being, then to raise the question of God is to attempt to think the essence of God *without* Being. If, however, for Marion, God is a Being (eternally), then *as* a being, God (eternally) belongs to Being, so Being would assume priority over God (which is itself potentially a temporal contradiction).

If Marion attempts to think “God is a being” without reference to Being, then Being lies forgotten from the path of his thought. Marion cannot however forget Being as a forgetfulness that has not yet come to light (as what comes to light in Heidegger’s understanding of metaphysics as the history of Being, the *Seinsgeschichte*), for Marion is in dialogue with Heidegger, which means that he is aware that the *Seinsfrage* has come to light as a question. Not to undertake metaphysics because it is the forgotten history of Being, yet to need to “forget” Being because of the directive he has received, means that Marion must proceed in the direction of attempting to “forget” Being all over again. The reader familiar with the structure of Marion’s work will recognise that this is precisely the project Marion undertakes in the second half of *God without Being*.

We come, at last, to a conclusion. This conclusion presents itself as a question: Why is there no worked out Christology in *God without Being*? At the most, Marion says that Christ is the icon of God. It may be that Marion has not said enough about the Christocentricity of the icon. Marion, misappropriating the directives of Heideggerian phenomenology, is driven towards the attempt to think the essence of “God” within the thought “God is a being (eternally).” This has the effect of eradicating the need for a Christology because it is to accord thinking the essence of God priority over the appearance of God (as Christ). To think the essence of God without Christ in a Christian theology is to eradicate the need for revelation, for revelation *is* the icon, *is* Christ.

The “prohibitions of nihilism” mean that it is no longer possible to think the essence of God in moving on the path of the question concerning Being. Is it for this reason that Heidegger remains silent in

the face of the prompting to write a theology? Heidegger cannot answer the question about God *philosophically* as a consequence of the question concerning Being precisely because the emergence of this question makes possible *faith* in revelation. For Heidegger, there are no more *philosophical* proofs or discussions of the existence of God.

When the icon takes place, it does so as a being. What comes about as a being also belongs to Being, for it takes place in time and the world. This does not mean that “world” secures priority over what the icon offers out of its concealment (God) nor that the site of the icon (the world) secures priority over the icon. For the icon may deploy itself in the site that the world offers or it may withhold itself. The icon precedes “world” and the site as what waits for the world and site to be offered before coming about.

When God comes to be, he deploys himself as *the* icon: as a being who moves within Being. This means that God who is not a being engages with human destiny iconistically, as a being. In an inversion, we could perhaps invert the sign of God marked with the cross of St. Andrew. To invert this cross, which has four points, we need move it only 45° in any direction: Gxd becomes G+d as *the* figure of the icon. The final thought of the icon is to be marked with the Cross, not this time of St. Andrew, but of Christ: εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου.

In 1959, at a meeting of the ‘old Marburgers’ in Höchst, Heidegger concluded that “the door remains open for a nonmetaphysical God”. I have attempted to show in a brief sketch how Heidegger’s thought might point toward such an understanding of God, and how the radicality of that thought remains uninvestigated and unread, even by so careful a reader of Heidegger as Jean-Luc Marion.

1 *God without Being* p. 2.

2 *ibid.* p. 3.

3 *ibid.* p. 3.

4 *ibid.* p. 42.

5 *ibid.* p. 42.

6 *ibid.* p. 43.

7 Martin Heidegger *Die Technik und die Kehre*, Neske, Pfullingen 1962 p. 45. published in English in *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays* trans. William Lovitt, Harper, London 1977, p. 47.

8 cf. *God without Being* p. 44. Marion cites the passage from *Die Kehre*.

9 *ibid.* p. 33.

10 *ibid.* p. xix

11 From *Seminaire de Zürich*, quoted in full in *God without Being* p. 61.

12 *ibid.* p. 63.

13 *ibid.* p. 62 (citing Heidegger *Nietzsche II* Neske, Pfullingen, 1961, p. 132).

14 *ibid.* p. 64.

15 *Nietzsche II* p. 132.