Heidegger's Three Gods

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Part I. Heidegger's Gods

In his controversial interview with *Der Spiegel*, withheld from publication until after his death in 1976, Heidegger made the startling claim that 'only a god can save us now' (*nur ein Gott kann uns retten*). What did he mean by this? And what is the 'god' he is referring to? God of the Bible? God of metaphysics? God of poetry?

It is my contention that the 'god' invoked by Heidegger is almost certainly of the last kind - the god of the 'sacred' as initially experienced by Greek poetics and commemorated by such modern poets as Hölderlin and Rilke. Here we are concerned with that dimension of the world's 'fourfold' (*Geviert*) occupied by the gods - the other three dimensions being those of 'mortals', 'sky' and 'earth'. What Heidegger is almost certainly not referring to in his *Der Spiegel* invocation is the 'god of the philosophers' or the 'god of Abraham, Isaac and the prophets' (to borrow the Pascalian formula familiar to Heidegger). In what follows I will give you a brief account of Heidegger's treatment of each of these 'gods' before concluding with a critique of Heidegger's poetical god and a suggestion that it needs to be supplemented by an ethical one. In this study the relationship between poetics, ethics and religion - Kierkegaard's trinity of values - is an abiding preoccupation.

i) *God of Revelation*

I begin with Heidegger's account of the God of biblical Revelation. One of his earliest publications on this subject is 'Phenomenology and Theology', first delivered as a lecture in Tübingen in March 1927 - the same year as *Being and Time* was published. In this seminal essay, Heidegger makes the point that theology presupposes the givens of biblical Revelation - the *positum* of the old and new Testaments. To this extent it may be termed a 'positive science', unlike phenomenology (or any other form of philosophy) which presupposes nothing but its own questions. Thus, for example, while phenomenology approaches the experience of *'angst'* as an existential mood of nothingness, vacillation, unhomeliness and questioning, theology will approach it as an expression of original sin and the fall. Or again, where phenomenology asks the fundamental philosophical question 'why is there something rather than nothing', theology already has the answer - to wit, 'because God created the world'.

This is why in a later text, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), Heidegger will actually go so far as to declare the idea of a 'Christian philosophy' to be 'round square and a misunderstanding'[1]. This is not because he rejects Christianity or biblical Revelation *per se*; indeed, he sees them as the entirely legitimate and appropriate subject for inquiry by a different discipline - theology. It is only for the philosophical, or more specifically phenomenological, attitude that the 'God of Revelation' is unthinkable, and consequently an irrelevance. The biblical God is a matter of faith not philosophy. And St. Paul was quite right to call the mystery of the Judeo-Christian message a 'folly for philosophers'. For the philosopher concerned with the question of being and nothing, it is folly to suggest that the question does not exist because God has created the world and will redeem us. And not merely folly, but

worse, a 'scandal' and 'offence' as Kierkegaard keeps reminding us. On this precise point, Heidegger and Kierkegaard find themselves in entire agreement (albeit from different sides of the fence). Heidegger could hardly be less ambiguous on the matter: 'Theology is a positive science and as such is absolutely different from philosophy...The occurrence of revelation, which is passed down to faith and which accordingly occurs through faithfulness itself, discloses itself only to faith...Theology has a meaning and a value only if it functions as an ingredient of faith, of this particular kind of historical occurrence'[2].

Heidegger returns to this crucial point long after the famous 'turn', though the reference to theology as a 'positive science' is more or less abandoned. Speaking to students at the University of Zurich in November, 1951, Heidegger makes the following autobiographical allusion, as reported by Jean Beaufret: 'Some of you will know that I come from theology and still have for it an old affection and even a certain understanding. If, however, I was to undertake a work of theology, which I have often been inclined to do, the word 'being' would not occur once. Faith has no need for the thinking of being'. Why? Because Being and God are not the same thing'. Which means, for Heidegger: 'I never try to think of God by means of Being'. Heidegger adds that Luther was well aware of this, though he is prepared to concede that

> ... the experience of God and his manifestation - in so far as it is part of a meeting with man - occurs in a dimension of Being. However, this must not be taken to mean that Being could serve as a possible predicate of God.

Here, he insists, 'we are in need of radically new distinctions'[3]. Heidegger did not expand on what such

distinctions might be on that particular occasion. But in a number of subsequent, albeit rare, exchanges, he returns to this subject with uncharacteristic candour. In interview with A. Noack in 1953, for instance, Heidegger states that 'nothing can occur in (philosophical) thinking which could serve to prepare or confirm that which occurs by way of faith or grace'[4]. And in another informal exchange, this time at the Protestant Academy of Hofgeismar in December, 1953, Heidegger makes a further confession:

> If I was summoned by faith, I'd close down my workshop ... Philosophy deals only with that thought which man can procure from his own means: as soon as it is summoned by Revelation, philosophy ceases.

He concludes accordingly, with this advice to the theologians in attendance:

> Theologians generally have too little confidence in their own terrain and quarrel too much with philosophy ... Theologians should remain in the exclusive domain of Revelation...The Christian experience is something so different that there is no need for it to enter into competition with philosophy.

When theology claims that philosophy is 'folly',

> ... the mysterious nature of Revelation is much better preserved ... Philosophical thinking always remains exposed to the questionability of Being; whereas faith, on the contrary, remains a matter of trust'.[5]

Such trust, furthermore, implies an attitude of urgency or expectancy with regard to the coming - or second coming - of the Saviour. And such an attitude, as Heidegger notes in his 1921 lectures on Augustine and neo-Platonism, is radically different from the mythological attitude to time. Where Christianity sees history as a commitment to preparing for the coming of the Kingdom, ontological thinking prefers to allow things to be as they are, *Gelassenheit*. Or as he observes in his *Letter on Humanism* (1947), the Christian is not primarily a being of this world but a 'child of God' who hears the call of the Father in Christ - a call beyond this world as a transitory passage towards a Kingdom yet to come[5a].

Heidegger, it would appear, had no axe to grind with the God of Revelation as such. Indeed, as we shall see below, he goes to pains on occasion to defend this God from the God of metaphysics (or onto-theology) which he would argue takes all the mystery and authority out of Revelation by trying to reduce the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and the Prophets' to logical categories of objectifying presence - what he would call 'representational thinking', and what Derrida would call 'logocentrism'. That said, and we will have more to say about it in a moment, Heidegger's main concern in making these 'radical new distinctions' is not with biblical considerations per se, but with establishing the line of demarcation between 1) such biblical considerations of god (as the proper subject of theology); 2) the various metaphysical concepts of God as first cause or entity; and 3) the poetical (post-metaphysical) versions of 'god' on the other. This last kind of 'god' - the 'god' of the poets, the 'god' of a phenomenology of the sacred, the 'god' of the fourfold - is clearly the one that interests Heidegger. And this is the only 'god' which Heidegger believes 'can save us now'.

ii) *God of Metaphysics*

In his essay on 'The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics', published in *Identity and Difference* (1957), Heidegger elaborates on his critique of the metaphysical concept of God as *'theos'* or the highest being which grounds. Instead of attending to the 'sacred' manifestation of the gods as part of the event of being, as the Greek poets and pre-Socratics had done, metaphysical thinking (even from its earliest days with Plato and Aristotle) contrived to reduce the ontological play of *Sein* to a mere 'being' (*Seiend*)- albeit the most supreme and self-sufficient of all beings, the divine being or *theos*. The various metaphysical versions of this objectifying conceptualisation of *Sein*, as sacred happening, ranged from Plato's *Agathon* and Aristotle's *Telos* to the scholastic concept of God as *Ens Perfectissimum* or *Ens Causa Sui*. What all these versions shared was a common determination to reify the enigmatic play of the sacred - in which gods and mortals related dramatically and often tragically to each other - in terms of a first or final 'cause' which served as the founding principle of a speculative system which logically explained how all things come to be and pass away. Heidegger has these strong words for this, 'God of the philosophers':

> The cause as *causa sui*. This is the right name for the god of philosophy. Man can neither pray nor sacrifice to this god. Before the *cause sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god.

And he adds this challenging remark:

> The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the

> divine God. Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to Him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.[6]

In a later text, the first volume on Nietzsche (1962), Heidegger is adamant that his destruction of the god of metaphysics does not imply a repudiation of all gods. On the contrary, he insists that the desire to de-devinize being is not a desire for a atheism - but a desire to undo the onto-theo-logical blindfolds of western metaphysics so that 'the gods may come towards mankind'[7]. One of the greatest barriers to such an advent of the gods is not, as is commonly thought, atheism but the metaphysical obsession with providing proofs for God's existence. Kierkegaard once argued that anyone who tries to prove God's existence by means of a logical syllogism is *ipso facto* a heathen; and Heidegger offers the following echo of this same conviction: 'A proof for the existence of God - notwithstanding its construction with all the means of a rigorous formal logic, proves nothing: because a God whose existence must first of all be proved is, in the final analysis, a God with very little divinity and whose proof results ultimately in blasphemy'[8].

The error of metaphysics, according to Heidegger, has been to try to reduce the mystery of the divine - as experienced in different but powerful ways by both the poets of the sacred and the prophets of the Bible - to the idea of an absolute supreme entity. But the question of whether god exists or not is not a matter for metaphysics at all. And Heidegger is unyielding on this point in his meeting with R. Scherer in 1947. Metaphysics, he says,

> ... cannot itself affirm whether such a god is really a god, independently of the religious experience of the Word of God ... God is a given of religious experience not of philosophy.[9]

The gods revealed to us by the prophets of the Bible or by the poets of Greece are irreducible to the logical categories of metaphysics - though they are by no means necessarily the same gods.

But as we will have more to say about the difference between these gods in the sections which follow, suffice it to conclude this cursory glance at Heidegger's critique of the God of metaphysics with this declaration from his Winter Semester Lectures of 1950-51, where a sharp distinction is drawn between the Aristotelian and Lutheran - that is to say, onto-theological and theological - approaches to the divine. It is evident where Heidegger's own sympathies lie, in spite of his scholastic formation in a Catholic seminary. 'Christian theology', he says here, 'as opposed to onto-theology, speaks on the basis of a faith in Revelation. The Catholic theory of creation has tended to go against this by rationalizing Revelation. And so doing, it often refers to Aristotle. This not only leads to falsehoods but is quite unnecessary. It is even a degradation of the authentically religious content of theology. Revelation has no need of Aristotle; and we must also be very wary of interpreting Greek philosophy in scholastic (Christian) terms'[10]. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If onto-theology is bad for theology it is also bad for ontology. And if theology is to be safeguarded from metaphysical reductions by returning to the prophets of Revelation; ontology, with its genuinely phenomenological experience of the sacred, is to be safeguarded from such reductions by attending to the originary words of the pre-Socratics and the poets.

It is this originary phenomenology of the sacred which Heidegger advocates in his *Letter on Humanism* (1947) as the indispensable groundwork of all human experience of god, be it understood theologically or metaphysically. It comprises a 'fundamental ontology'

of the sacred which is presupposed by metaphysics and theology and which, perhaps, also points beyond both. Before we talk about proving or disproving the existence of God, we first need to know what our existential experience of God actually is. Hence the logic behind Heidegger's controversial statement in *Letter on Humanism*: 'Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy can the essence of divinity be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought and said what the word 'God' is to signify. Or must we not first be able to understand and hear these words carefully if we are men i.e., as existing beings, are to have the privilege of experiencing a relation of God to man?' At which point, Heidegger proceeds to ask the leading question: 'How, then, is the man of the present epoch even to be able to ask seriously and firmly whether God approaches or withdraws when man omits the primary steps of thinking deeply in the one dimension where this question can be asked: that is, the dimension of the holy, which...remains closed unless the openness of Being is cleared and in its clearing is close to man?' And he hazards this quasi-religious guess: 'Perhaps the distinction of this age consists in the fact that the dimension of grace has been closed. Perhaps this is its unique dis-grace'. But whatever the response to this rhetorical 'perhaps', Heidegger is unequivocal in this decisive passage that the suspension of metaphysical concerns with the existence or non-existence, possibility or impossibility of God, in no way implies a declaration for or against theism. A phenomenology of the sacred, he insists, 'can no more be theistic than it can be atheistic'[10a]. It is not a matter of proving the existence of a First Cause but of 'naming the holy'. And this is a role, above all, for the poets.

iii) *God of the Poets*

And so we come to the third category of 'god' in Heidegger's thinking. The god of poetics. This is neither God as cause nor God as creator but god as sacred. This is the god 'who surprises us' in the very midst of the visible. It is a god of phenomenological experiences as manifest in different ways in different religions - as Mircea Eliade has shown in his richly comparative phenomenologies of religion - but which experiences never claim to provide us with proofs or evidence or revelation concerning the 'true' existence of one particular god rather than another. Here 'Christ and Apollo are brothers'[11]. The sense of the sacred is equally registered in a Greek temple or Jewish synagogue, Muslim mosque or Christian Cathedral. All faiths are fair game here. Or to be more exact, all faiths are suspended *qua* faith in order to allow for a non-confessional experience of the sacred *qua* sacred. The claims of metaphysics and Revelation alike to identify and isolate one exclusive concept of the divine absolute, are passed over in favour of a poetic openness to the phenomenological play of gods and mortals. Perhaps it was the poets after all who first invented the practice of phenomenological bracketing. At least when it came to the existence of god. For the poets god is 'without why'. Theological dogmas and metaphysical syllogism are equally irrelevant.

I suspect this is what Gabriel Marcel had in mind when he declared that 'Heidegger is a Greek'[12]. Or what lies behind Paul Ricoeur's observation that 'Heidegger systematically eluded a confrontation with Hebrew thought...which remains the absolute stranger to Greek discourse'[13]. It is quite certain that when Heidegger thinks of the *Logos* that governs the world he has Heraclitus rather than St John in mind. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* he boldly states that 'Christianity was responsible for the misinterpretation of Heraclitus' in viewing the Heraclitean doctrine of

the *Logos* as a mere forerunner of the Prologue to John's Gospel where *Logos* is identified with Christ. And he goes on to pour scorn on the 'widespread interpretation' of the Greeks as 'not yet full-grown Christian theologians'[14].

It is also certain that when he declares that 'the sacred is the being of nature' it is the gods of Greek mythology, tragedy and art he has in mind[15]. The 'word' that names the sacred or holy dimension of being is that of Greek poetics. Commenting on three examples of such naming in 'The Origin of the Work of Art'(1935-36) - the creation of a statue, a temple and a tragic drama - Heidegger has this to say: 'To dedicate means to consecrate, in the sense that in setting up the work the holy (*das Heilige*) is opened up as holy and the god is invoked into the openness of the presence. Praise belongs to dedication as doing honour to the dignity and splendour of the god. Dignity and splendour are not properties beside and behind which the god, too, stands as something distinct, but it is rather in the dignity, in the splendour that the god is present. In the reflected glory of this splendour there glows, i.e., there lightens itself, what we called the word'[16]. Here in all its pagan resplendence is the god of Greek *mythos*, the god of originary aesthetic experience which Heidegger claims is the first kind of phenomenology. Here poetry is indeed a 'naming of the holy' - an integral part of a larger cosmic *poiesis* where the gods showed themselves, appeared, were phenomenologically present.

Heidegger has no illusions, however, about the past nature of this essentially 'Greek' experience. And while he does see the great poets of modernity - Hölderlin in particular - as guarding over the Greek memory, it is precisely *as* memory. Poetry still retains, of course, its vocation of naming the holy; but with this crucial difference, it now recognizes that the holy is absent, the gods fled, the names lacking. Modernity experiences

the gods as an absence or missingness (*Fehl Gottes*). And if Heidegger can still claim in his essay on Hölderlin that 'the word is the advent of the sacred' it is an advent that signals a presence in and through its absence, it is advent that can only come when we have fully experienced the modern condition of homelessness, of being lost, of lacking the home in which to poetically dwell[17]. Heidegger gives the historical-metaphysical genesis of modern homelessness in the section on 'European Nihilism' in his second *Nietzsche* volume:

> When the unconcealment of Being as such stays away (*bleibt aus*) everything salutary disappears among beings. With the disappearance of the salutary the open space of the holy is occluded. This occlusion of the holy darkens any radiance of the divine. And this darkening seals and conceals the missingness of God. The dark absence leaves all beings stranded, not at home: while that which is, as the objective in the limitless act of objectification (i.e. technology), appears to be in certain possession and familiar everywhere and in every respect. The unhominess of what is as such (or beings) brings to light the homelessness of historical man within the totality of beings...[18]

A key question for our modern technological society is therefore whether an openness can be created which would allow the gods to return. Can the earth be made hale and whole again, made 'salutary' and 'saving' by being made fit for 'poetic dwelling' once more? Can the poets reassume their vocation of naming the holy so that 'Being may be once again capable of god'[19]? In such 'destitute times', as Heidegger asks in a remarkable essay on Rilke, 'what are poets for?' In this

same essay he offers one of his most dramatic accounts of the role poets can play in preparing for the advent/return of the gods. The poets so prepare by answering the nihilistic challenge of technology, that is, the systematic and relentless self-assertion of modern man's will to power. The following passage, which I quote at some length, contains the core of this account:

> The essence of technology comes to the light of day only slowly. This day is the world's night, rearranged into merely technological day. This day is the shortest day. It threatens a single endless winter. Not only does protection now withhold itself from man but the integralness of the whole of what is remains now in darkness. The wholesome and sound withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy. Not only does the holy, as the track of the godhead, thereby remain concealed: even the track to the holy, the hale and whole, seems to be effaced.

But that is, unless there are still some mortals capable of seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy, as such. Heidegger writes:

> They would have to discern the danger that is assailing man. The danger consists in the threat that assaults man's nature in his relation to Being itself, and not in accidental perils. This danger is the danger. It conceals itself in the abyss that underlies all beings. To see this danger and point it out, there must be mortals who reach sooner into the abyss.[20]

These mortals are, of course, the poets. The only way the poets can hope to make the holy present again is, accordingly, by first recognizing its absence. The holy can only be named again by acknowledging that it has become nameless, surrounded by danger. This is what Hölderlin means by his enigmatic formula: 'where there is danger, there grows also what saves'. To be a poet in destitute time is to be attentive, in one's song, to the traces of the flown gods. This is why in the time of the world's night the poet names the holy. And it is why, again in Hölderlin's words, the world's night is a 'holy night'. The poets, as the most mortal of all mortals, surpass by far the 'daring' of the technological man's will to power and self-assertion by facing into the abyss and outfacing the destitution of modernity.[21] In this sense, the daring of the poet who names the holy in the midst of the unholy might be described as 'post-modern'.

One final point about the gods of the poets before we move on to our concluding remarks. What is to be done? as Lenin might have asked Heidegger on reading the above account. Where or how do we find the 'god' that will save us? Who is this god? What is its name? On this specific matter of the god's identity, Heidegger is characteristically vague. And probably the closest he ever comes to addressing the issue at all is in rehearsing Hölderlin's view that the names of Dionysius and Herakles, no less than that of Christ who displaced them, are lacking today. If the arrival of Christ ushered in the end of the daylight of the gods, when he departed from this world so too did his 'brother gods', Dionysius and Herakles. And ever since the disparition of these 'three fraternal gods', the worlds twilight has been declining into night. When Hölderlin and Heidegger conclude accordingly that our modern age is epitomized by the 'missingness of god' they do not mean that Christians or other religious denominations have ceased to believe in their god (this belief is an historical fact it would be folly to

deny). What they mean is that there no longer exists any god who 'visibly' or 'phenomenologically' presents itself to us, bringing together human beings and things and gathering them into a historical world where mortals may poetically dwell. With the flight of the gods the 'light and splendour' of the sacred has disappeared from the world.

The answer, if there is any, does not reside in the attempt to revive the departed gods or to invent some new god, but in the preparation of an opening, a clearing in Being for the advent or *Ereignis* of god. This *u-topos* of being signals the possibility of the light of the divine shining again in all that is. It represents a readiness to open ourselves to the splendour of the sacred, to listen to names for the nameless god. But how can the god speak its name to us or show itself, if we, mortals, have not created a place for this god beforehand?

But here Heidegger's poetics seem incapable of allowing the possibility of some political or ethical action being undertaken by human beings in order to prepare, the possibility of something that can be willed or produced by mortals. Rather, preparation and god naming are given to us as part of the destiny of Being. Heidegger's quietism on this matter is inseparable from his pessimism, his deep and incorrigible sense of impending apocalypse. That is why it is the poet who stares into the abyss, rather than the person of action, who alone can play a role in the advent of god. But this role is purely passive, a matter of bearing patient witness to the traces of the fugitive gods, to the omnipresent lack of sacred names in our present doomed era of technological will to power. Modernity, after all, is a matter of sitting it out in one long waiting room - a matter of enduring an in-between time 'too late for the gods and too early for Being'. Ours not to reason why - and act accordingly to improve our world. Or to paraphrase Angelus Silesius, Heidegger's

favourite mystic, 'the god is without why: it blooms because it blooms'.

Ours only to let things be in their being. And such being, it seems, can only get better if it first gets worse. That is why to 'think deeply is to err dangerously': and why the greatest danger harbours the greatest salvation. Whatever the implications of such an apocalyptic poetics for a pliable attitude to political evils like fascism and war - and in Heidegger's case they are serious indeed - its implications for the question of god are those of a non-commital quietism. An endless waiting for godot. Heidegger says as much: 'I do not deny God. I state his absence. My philosophy is waiting for God. Here is the problem of our world'[21]. At this point, we find ourselves at the very core of Heidegger's fatalistic attitude as expressed in his *Der Spiegel* statement invoked at the outset - a statement which serves, in many respects, as an *apologia pro sua vita*. Let us restate the phrase in question this time in its full context:

> Philosophy cannot produce an immediate effect which would change the present state of the world. This is not only true for philosophy but for all specifically human endeavours. Only a God can save us now. The only possibility remaining to us in thought and in poetry is to remain available for the manifestation of this God or for the absence of this God in our decline.[22]

Part II: God of the Possible

In this second part of our study I propose to expand on the critical rapport between a Heideggerean *poetics of the possible* - as outlined above - and a religious *eschatology of the possible* culminating in an ethics of justice. In terms of comparison, both approaches demand a reversal of the metaphysical priority of actuality over possibility. In terms of contrast, however, I will be exploring the suggestion that Heidegger's ontological poetics lack the ethical commitment which a genuinely theological understanding of the possible retains and reaffirms. Such an understanding I call *eschatological*.

For Heidegger, as we know, the history of western metaphysics is the history of onto-theology. It is, in other words, an epoche where being manifests itself as the highest divine entity (*theos*) and the most general grounding entity (*on*). The list of onto-theological formulations of being as substantified presence include: the Platonic concept of *eidos* as timeless and immutable oneness; the Aristotelian concept of *telos* as self-thinking thought; the Augustinian concept of divine being as self-loving love (*amor quo deus se ipsum amat*); the Thomistic/Scholastic concept of divine being as permanent subsistence (*ipsum esse subsistens*); the Cartesian and Spinozist concept of the *res cogitans* as a self-sufficient substance echoing the divine self-causing cause (*ens causa sui*); or the modern rationalist concepts of objectivity (*Gegenwärtigung*), representation (*Repräsentanz*) and presence (*Vorhandenheit*).

Heidegger's project of overcoming metaphysics poses a challenge to the traditional-onto-theological priority of actuality over possibility. The implications of this for an alternative - i.e. post-metaphysical - understanding of God are radical. At its most basic, it implies that God is no longer to be thought of as some atemporal,

static *esse* but rather as a temporalizing, empowering *posse*.

The God of onto-theology was a God devoid of possibility. As *summum ens, ultima ratio* or *causa prima et essendi*, God was precisely that being which needed no other being to fulfil it. Thomas Aquinas was quite explicit on this decisive point, writing in the *Summa* I pars. Q.3-4 that '*deus est actus purus non habens aliquid de potentialitate*'. Heidegger's impassioned claim that before such a God of onto-theology one cannot pray or dance or offer sacrifice is especially relevant in this context.[23]

Heidegger himself was reticent, as we noted, to explore the ultimate implications of overcoming the metaphysics of presence (*esse*) for a different thinking about God. His primary concern was always with Being, not God. As he insisted in *Letter on Humanism*,

> With the existential determination of the essence of man (in its relation to the truth of Being) nothing has been decided about the "existence" or "non-existence", nor about the possibility or impossibility of God.[24]

And so it was to remain. Heidegger's chosen preoccupation was with ontology rather than theology. Such reservations notwithstanding, I will endeavour in the remainder of this study to sketch out some of the more critical consequences entailed by a post-metaphysical thinking about God as *posse*.

First, it could be argued that the eschatological notion of *posse* better enables us to understand God according to the original scriptural notion of *kenosis*. Recalling Heidegger's own suggestive etymological linkage between the German terms *vermögen* (to possibilize) and *mögen* (to love), it would appear at least

conceivable that the eschatological notion of God as possibilization approximates more accurately to the biblical notion of divine *Kenosis* (as self-emptying love), than to the metaphysical concept of self-sufficient self-love. If divine love is that which grants the promise of a Kingdom to come, is it not more appropriate to interpret this love as *possibilizing* this Kingdom on earth - in giving itself to human beings as a possibility to be freely and creatively realized - rather than as a Kingdom already self-realized elsewhere irrespective of human freedom? Is the eschatological Kingdom not more true to its word as dialogical possibilization than as monological actualization? Indeed, is not such a view of things the only way to surmount the age-old ontotheological antinomy between divine omnipotence and human freedom? To understand God as *posse* - which I choose to render as *May-Be* - is to appreciate that we are entirely free to realize, or not to realize, the Kingdom possibilized by God. God's love is *kenosis* precisely because it is the gift of that which is most proper and precious to Christ - his life with the Father - in order to liberate his creatures by possibilizing a divine Kingdom in 'a new heaven and on a new earth'. This might also be related, incidentally, to Nicholas of Cusa's much neglected claim that the conception of God as *Posse Ipsum* or *Possest* is prior to all standard metaphysical notions of God as *esse*.[25]

Second, the eschatological interpretation of God as *posse* offers a way out of the traditional antinomy concerning the incompatibility of God's goodness with the existence of evil. The historical scandal of theodicies and theocracies may be overcome if we acknowledge the *posse* as an on-going dialogue between a divine love which possibilizes itself out of itself and a human *praxis* which strives to realize this possibilizing love. In this context, evil can now be understood as a consequence of the absence of such dialogue (in a revised form of the *privatio boni* argument). The evil in our world is not due to God but

to us human beings to the extent that we refuse to realize the divine *posse* in our everyday existence. Evil results from our own unchecked expression of the will to dominate and possess (*libido dominandi*), from our closure to the gift of *other* possibilities of being from beyond ourselves. The eschatological God of the bible is not an Emperor of the World, as ontotheology proposed, but a 'voice crying in the wilderness', a voice which cannot speak until we hear it and speak for it.

Third, the eschatological concept of *posse* enables us to surmount another antinomy in the metaphysical understanding of God - namely, that he exists for himself and for others (*per se et per alio*) as a love of self and of others. Aristotle had no illusions about the ontotheological implications of the definition of God as Unmoved Mover. This meant that the Divine as pure actuality could motivate others to desire but could not itself desire others. The Divine qua Self-Thinking-Thought is utterly without potentiality (*dunamis*) and so has no motivation in itself to seek actualization outside of itself. God is pure self-sufficient act. Anselm reiterates this ontotheological view when he defines God as *aseitas - a se esse*, a being unto himself. And Aquinas is working from a similar metaphysical framework when he concedes that '*necesse est quod deus primo et principaliter suam bonitatem et seipsum amet*'. It was from just such a definition of God as self-loving love, moreover, that arose the substantialist notion of the Trinity as a *commercium* or *nexis amoris* in which Father, Son and Spirit exult in their self-regarding 'common possession' of each other. A far cry from the voice crying in the wilderness. The polar opposite of *kenosis*.

To understand God as kenotic *posse* is to see his love as a vulnerable and generous desire to be made fully incarnate in the eschatological kingdom - a kingdom possibilized by God but only realizable if and when we, human creatures, freely choose to respond to the

divine call in word and action. Is this not the God of Abraham, Isaac and the Prophets whom Pascal contrasts with the God of the philosophers? Is this not a God before whom, in Heidegger's words, we could dance and kneel and pray - like David in the bible? Is this not the God who reveals himself, as Levinas claims, in the naked and vulnerable face of the widow, orphan or famine victim - a God who created man because '*on est mieux à deux*'? Or whom Kierkegaard signalled when he wrote that 'Jesus Christ, even though he was one with the Father and the Spirit, still felt the need to love and be loved by man', adding: 'If one denies this one can spiritualize God to the abstract point where he becomes cruelty itself'?

The eschatological God announced in the Old and New Testaments can now be recognized as a *deus adventurus* rather than a *deus absconditus* - as a God who *is not* but *may be*. Here is a God, in short, who negates and transcends all metaphysical conceptualizations of the divine in terms of a self-accomplished and self-adquate *esse* in order to reveal God as a *posse* whose Kingdom may yet come and whose will may yet be done on earth.

This brings us to the fourth and final point introduced by an eschatology of the possible - the relation of divine revelation to history. Traditional metaphysics could not convincingly account for the fact that God was at once timeless and temporal, at once transcendent of history and manifest in the world. In contradistinction to ontotheology, which tended to define God as a *nunc aeternum* residing outside of historical time, the post-metaphysical concept of *posse* suggests how God as transcendent possibility can give himself to human beings (as enacters of this possibility) through the adventure of history. The divine *posse* remains other not because it possesses an *esse* over and above the phenomenological being of our world. Its otherness takes the form of a radical transcendence of

possibility which depends for its *actualization* on the historical actions of prophecy, covenant and salvation. The divine *posse* is not an 'other being' but an 'otherwise than being'. As Emmanuel Levinas observes: 'Man is indispensable to God's plan or, to be more exact, man is nothing other than the divine plan within being. Man can do what he must do; he can master the hostile forces of history by helping to bring about a messianic reign, a reign of justice foretold by the prophets. The waiting for the Messiah marks the very duration of time.'[25a]

The God of transcendence revealed to us in the Bible is not the God of ontology (i.e. of the philosophers), but the God of eschatology (i.e. of Abraham, Isaac and the prophets). To rethink God according to the Heideggerian analogy of *Vermögen* is to recognize new options for appreciating the religious belief in a God who may be *at* the end, and *as* the end of history. It opens a way to understanding God not as a *topos* of being but as a *utopos* other than being.

While Heidegger does not explore these options himself, he does make it clear that any theological interpretations of his own philosophical deconstructions of metaphysics - such as the metaphysical concept of the possible - must observe the critical procedures of an anaology of proper proportionality. This means that instead of grafting God directly onto being, or rather a deconstructive re-thinking of being, we must observe the hermeneutic difference between the presuppositions of religious faith, on the one hand, and the philosophical questioning of being, on the other. The analogy of proper proportionality recommended by Heidegger reads as follows: *Dasein* is to *Sein* what the religious thinker is to God. So that what we are exploring in the concluding section of this study is not - if we are to be true to Heidegger - an identification of God and Being as *Vermögen/Posse* but rather a properly proportionate

analogizing of two parallel post-metaphysical concepts of the possible: the one as applied to being, the other as applied to God. And such analogies inevitably carry differences as well as similarities. (These differences in the ontology/theology analogy are analysed by Heidegger in Part I of *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and have already been discussed by this author at some length elsewhere[26]).

If being as *Vermögen* discloses itself to *Dasein* as a wonder that things exist (*thaumazein*), a care for being (*Sorge*) and a questioning of being (*Seinsfrage*), the eschatological *posse* reveals itself to believers as a call to faith and to ethical *praxis*. Heidegger's notion of *Vermögen* as a 'possibilizing love' which cares for (*sorgen*) and watches over (*wahren*) the *topos* of being is, we have been suggesting, closely analogous to the eschatological notion of 'possibilizing love' as kenotic charity. However, the love of being is very much a guarding over beings in their topological being-there as things of the world; whereas the eschatological love of God is strictly (or at least scripturally) speaking *not* 'of this world'. As Heidegger explains in the *Letter on Humanism*: '*Etwas vermögen bedeutet heir es in seinem wesen wahren*'. Indeed, even when we are dealing with the guarding over of acathedral or a holy mountain - we are, from an ontological point of view, dealing with one of the fourfold divisions of being, and not with the revelation of a divine kenotic love *per se*. The latter implies an act of faith which reads the sacred in terms of eschatological revelation. So that it would seem fair to say that the phenomenological disclosure of the sacred serves as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the eschatological revelation of God.

A phenomenology of sacred places, rituals or symbols - as practised by the later Heidegger or Eliade for example - can teach us about the ways in which the divine manifests itself in and through the phenomenological horizon of our being-in-the-world.

The eschatological *posse*, by contrast - while revealing itself phenomenologically through sacred places, rituals and symbols - remains radically transcendent and other. For a phenomenology of the sacred, as we saw, Christ and Apollo are brothers. And it is only if we adopt a hermeneutic of faith that we privilege one of these - e.g. the privileging of Christ in the Christian hermeneutic - as a unique incarnation of the eschatological *posse*. In this example, the God of Christian faith is not identical with a phenomenological concept of the sacred which is by definition polytheistic. For although the Christian God does, of course, reveal itself through icons of incarnation - ranging from the prophets and Christ to the saints, holy scripture and other objects of worship - it does so in a way that bears witness to a radical distance between the divine Other as vertical possibilization and being as a finite horizontal possibilization (*Vermögen*). This significant disparity between the infinite otherness of eschatological divinity and the finite being-there of the phenomenological sacred is keenly preserved by the analogy of proper proportionality which enables us to both compare and contrast these two orders of possibilization. And the difference is ultimately a matter of belief.

Let us tease out, finally, some consequences of this difference. As that which *may be*, the eschatological *posse* is also that which *should be*. Or to put it another way, while the ontological *posse* expresses itself as a *seinkönnen* (or capacity to be), the eschatological *posse* reveals itself as a *seinsollen* (or duty to be). It is this ethical exigency of the divine *posse* which Dostoyevsky alludes to when he declares that if God is dead all is permitted. From the point of view of an ontology of *Vermögen*, all *is* permitted. But this does not mean that ontology is immoral. It simply means that it is a-moral, or if one prefers non-moral. Heidegger's fundamental ontology attempts to surpass the metaphysical

framework which, since Plato, identified being and the good. Unlike Platonism which defined the highest Idea as the *Agathon*, or Thomism which declared that *ens et bonum convertuntur*, Heidegger affirms that the questioning of being is a strictly phenomenological activity which describes beings as they appear, as *phainomena* - without judging morally as to whether they *should* or *should not* appear. Genuine ontology, Heidegger insists, is phenomenological description, not ethical prescription. And he is equally reticent with respect to theology, making no claims about which manifestations of the holy are true or false (e.g. as appearances of the one true God).

This does not mean that Heidegger is either anti-ethical or anti-religious. It is simply a matter of recognizing the gap separating a phenomenology of finite being from an ethico-religious concern with that which is transcendent vis-à-vis the phenomenological horizon of Dasein's historicity. Heidegger is not concerned with God's existence or inexistence but with his phenomenological absence or presence. He does not deny the possibility of a transcendent deity; he merely acknowledges that such questions surpass the finite limits of phenomenological ontology. And this is in keeping with Heidegger's admission to Herman Noack that the divine which he invoked in the *Letter on Humanism* is the divine of poetic experience (e.g. of Hölderlin and Rilke) rather than with the God of biblical revelation *per se*.

Where Heidegger and the poets speak of the contemporary 'lack' of gods as a phenomenological event in the history of being, an eschatology of the possible might read this absence as a lack of human fidelity to the ethical exigencies of the new and old Testaments - e.g. as a moral failure to realize the divine *posse* of social justice. Eschatologically viewed, the promised return of God is not just something which *may* happen but *must* happen, something believers

have an ethical duty to bring about in this world through their historical actions. Heidegger's ontological approach to the return of the divine - as in the *Der Spiegel* claim that 'only a God can save us now' - has no such connotations of moral exigency. It is a *warten* rather an *erwarten*, a will-less waiting rather than an urgent expectancy or hope for the coming of a kingdom which impells us to moral and social action. The ontological *Vermögen*, unlike the eschatological *posse*, does not depend on human intervention for its advent or return. The *Ereignis* of being *can be* independently of human action because it is, by Heidegger's own admission, a 'decree of Being itself'. But the *eschaton* of God, by contrast, *may be* realised in history only if and when humans respond to the ethical call of revelation.

Whereas Being and God can both be analogously described in terms of Heidegger's notion of the 'loving possible' (*vermögend-mögende*), there are notable differences to be respected. And the most important of these may be expressed, in sum, as follows: the eschatological view of the possible departs from the ontological in viewing mortals as being who transcend being toward what is *other* than being, towards the eschatological possibility of a kingdom yet to come.

When all is said and one, one is tempted to conclude nonetheless that whatever kingdom comes, and however divine it be, it should be one in which we can poetically dwell. In such a kingdom the claims of God and Being should no longer be viewed as incompatible. Surely an eschatology of divine justice, if such exists, demands no less - demands, in short, that ethics and poetics become one.[27]

Notes

1) M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim, Anchor, New York, 1961, p.6.
2) M. Heidegger, 'Phenomenology and Theology' in *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, trans. J.G. Hart and J.C. Maraldo, Indiana U.P., 1976, pp.7, 10-11.
3) Jean Beaufret in *Magazine Littéraire*, No. 196, 1976, p.3; see also the reported citations on this subject translated into French by Jean Beaufret and Jean Greish in *Heidegger et La Question de Dieu*, ed. R. Kearney and J. O'Leary, Grasset, Paris, 1980, pp.334-336.
4) See *The Piety of Thinking*, p.34; and *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, p. 165.
5) *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, pp.334-336.
5a) M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, trans. E. Lohner in *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. R. Zaner and D. Ihde, Capricorn Books, New York, 1973, pp.147-181; see also *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, p.317.
6) M. Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh. Harper and Row, 1957, p.72.
7) M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, 1962 as quoted *Heidegger et la question d Dieu*, p.331.
8) *Ibid.* p.331.
9) *Ibid*, p.332.
10) *Ibid*, p.333.
10a) *Letter on Humanism*, pp.172-3.
11) See François Fédier, 'Heidegger et Dieu' in *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, pp.37-45.
12) See *The Piety of Thinking*, p.193.
13) Paul Ricoeur, 'Note Introductive' in *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, p.17: 'Ce qui n'a souvent étonné chez Heidegger, c'est qu'il ait, semble-t-il, systématiquement éludé la confrontation avec le bloc de la pensée hébraïque. Il lui est

parfois arrivé de penser à partir de l'Evangile et de la théologie chrétienne; mais toujours en évitant le massif hébraïque, qui est l'étranger absolu par rapport au discours grec, il évite la pensée éthique avec ses dimensions de relation à l'autre et à la justice, dont a tant parlé Lévinas. Il traite la pensée éthique très sommairement comme pensée de la valeur...et ne reconnaît pas sa différence radicale avec la pensée ontologique ... La tâche de repenser la traditional chrétienne par un 'pas en arrière' n'exige-t-elle pas qu'on reconnaisse la dimension radicalement hébraïque du christianisme, qui est d'abord enraciné dans le judaïsme et seulement áprès dans la tradition grecque? Pourquoi réfléchir seulement sur Hölderlin et non pas sur les Psaumes, sur Jérémie?'

14) *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.107.

15) See M. Heidegger, *Erlauterungen zu Hölderlin Dichtung*, 1951; quoted in *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, pp.323-325.

16) 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p.44.

17) *Erlauterungen zu Hölderlin Dichtung*; quoted *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, p.325.

18) M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche II*, quoted *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, pp.192-3.

19) M. Heidegger, *The Time of the World Picture*, quoted in *The Piety of Thinking*.

20) *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.117.

21) Quoted *Partisan Review*, 1948; see *The Piety of Thinking*.

22) M. Heidegger, *Der Spiegel* Interview, 1976.

23) For details on this and subsequent references in this last section, see my earlier version of this argument in 'Heidegger, le possible et Dieu' in *Hiedegger et la Question de Dieu*, pp.125-168.

24) *Letter on Humanism*, p.172.

25) See Nicholas of Cusa, *Trailogue de Possest*, ed. R. Steiger, hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1973. I

am grateful to my colleague in University College Dublin, Dermot Moran, for bringing this text to my attentin. See also 'Nicholas of Cusa and the Power of the Possible' by P.J. Casarella in the *American Catholic Philosophical Journal*, Vol. LXIV, 1990, no.I, pp.7-35 where the author explores the striking and suggestive similarities between Cusanus and Heidegger on the notion of the possible as a sacred event of giving and loving - as a poetics of *posse*.

25a) Emmanuel Levinas. 'Judaism', in *The Levinas Reader*. Ed. S. Hand. Blackwells, 1989, p. 252.

26) See my discussion of Heidegger's analogy between ontological and theological thinking as one of 'as if' or proportionality in my 'Heidegger, le possible et Dieu', pp. 123-168.

27) Since the completion of this essay my attention was brought to a recent publication by George Kovacs entitled *The question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, 1990. The author divides Heidegger's treatment of God into three phases: 1) the problem of God implied, but not developed, in *Being and Time*; 2) the problem of God taken as an explicit and separate question from that of Being; and 3) Heidegger's later and post-metaphysical thinking about Being in terms of a 'truly divine notion of God'. Our own study concurs with serveral of Kovacs' conclusions, namely, that there *is* a question of God in Heidegger's thought, that the thinking of the ontological difference and the destruction of metaphysics implies a rethinking of the metaphysical problem of God, and finally, that 'there is a need to think not only with but also *further* than Heidegger, to continue the questioning about Being and about God even beyond his pathway of thought' (p.xx).

Heideggerian Theology: A Response to Richard Kearney

Martin Warner

I find Richard Kearney's paper an impressive attempt to continue Heidegger's 'questioning about Being and about God even beyond his pathway of thought' while continuing in the same general direction. The relating of the problems associated with the ethical implications of Heidegger's thinking to religious quietism is suggestive, and the related claim that Heidegger's poetical god needs to be supplemented by an ethical one is challenging. Within its own terms of reference there are just three apparent - and related - loose ends in the paper to which I should like to draw attention.

The first concerns the adoption of a 'hermeneutic of faith' which privileges one symbol of the sacred over another; this is variously designated 'an act of faith' and 'ultimately a matter of belief', but the status of these designations is radically unclear. The example given is the privileging of Christ over Apollo, but since its significance is in part intended to be ethical and political in the contemporary world it would be better to take live possibilities - say Christ or the Koran; Islam as well as Christianity can speak of 'the eschatological possibility of a kingdom yet to come', but the ethical and political imperatives are different. For many choice for or against *Sharia* law is a serious issue, in some cases one of life or death. Does designating the adoption of a hermeneutic which gives a decision procedure 'an act of faith' imply that choices here are 'ultimately' criterionless? If so, what content can be given to 'belief'. If not, how are we to test the 'voices crying in the wilderness' to decide which are and which are not of God? (One remembers that one of the

most demanding voices crying in the German wilderness in Heidegger's day was that of *Mein Kampf* - and that the New Testament insists that 'many false prophets are gone out into the world' (I John iv 1).) According to Christian tradition this is, in part, the role of natural theology; God, says St Paul, 'left not himself without witness' in the order and blessings of nature (Acts xiv 17), and writes his law in the hearts of the Gentiles, apart from any special revelation, so that they 'do by nature the things contained in the law' (Romans ii 14-15). However, Kearney follows Heidegger in a radical Protestant reading of Paul's 'unto the Greeks foolishness' or 'folly for philosophers' (I Cor i 23) and Pascal's opposition of the 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob' to that of 'philosophers and scholars', so that natural theology is rejected and the use of the categories of natural reason to articulate or commend 'what is ultimately a matter of belief' is categorised as no better than 'round square and a misunderstanding'.

This brings me to the second loose end. The disparity between the phenomenology of the sacred, which makes no judgements between true or false manifestations of the holy and hence is ethically inert, and what Kearney calls 'the infinite otherness of eschatological divinity' is said to be preserved by 'the analogy of proper proportionality'. But of course it is well known that while this anology is well suited for preserving discrepancies it is far less well placed for preserving intelligibility. In the despised tradition of natural theology from which this category is, remarkably, taken, God's goodness stands to God's nature as a man or woman's goodness stands to human nature; this appears to ensure a disparity between human and divine goodness but since, as St Thomas insists, we cannot answer with respect to God the question *quid est?* (What is God's nature?), except negatively, this analogy leaves radically unclear what is meant by the claim that God is good; the analogy is

disabled where more than one of the four items related is unknown. One traditional response to the problem is to invoke here the analogy of attribution whereby we may attribute to a primary *per se* cause some likeness to its effects; but this raises three difficulties: first, we are talking here of a 'first' cause and this qualifier suggests that we interpret the term 'cause' itself in terms of the analogy of proper proportionality; second, it depends on the highly problematic Aristotelian analysis of causality and also, arguably, forms an integral part of the even more dubious notion of a Great Chain of Being; third, it is precisely the conception of God as *Ens Perfectissimum* which this form of analogy sponsors that is in Heidegger's sights in his rejection of natural theology. So one looks with interest to see how Kearney's proportionality works: here we have '*Dasein* is to *Sein* what the religious thinker is to God'; if this is to be informative we must, once again, not have more than one unknown, but how much clearer are we about *Sein* than about God? If the answer is, as I suspect, 'not much', then this may explain why we appear to be left without criteria to 'try the spirits whether they be of God' (I John iv 1). It will, I think, hardly do simply to maintain that Heidegger gives us sufficient understanding of the relation between *Dasein* and *Sein* adequately to clarify the parallel relation, for 'the religious thinker' is a particular exemplification of *Dasein*, but it is difficult to see how one could both maintain that God is a particular exemplification of *Sein* and insist that theology and philosophy are radically different disciplines.

The third loose end is of a string that goes to the heart of the Heideggerian enterprise. Kearney's proportionality, he tells us, is 'of two parallel post-metaphysical concepts of the possible' understood in the context of 'Heidegger's project of overcoming metaphysics'. This claim to post-metaphysical status is certainly Heideggerian but it should perhaps be questioned. Both Heidegger's 'poetics of the possible'

and Kearney's 'eschatology of the possible' demand, we are told, 'a reversal of the metaphysical priority of actuality over possibility'; but such a reversal is itself a metaphysical operation unless we narrow the term 'metaphysical' to include only those doctrines and operations which are incompatible with such a reversal. Heidegger's idiosyncratic synoptic vision of the history of philosophy sponsors such narrowing of the term, allowing him to disallow not only natural theology but all that would traditionally have been regarded as radical metaphysical questioning save that which fits his own preferred canons of 'strict' (post-metaphysical) thinking, but Nicholas of Cusa and his contemporaries understood themselves to be thinking metaphysically in considering his similar proposed reversal. It would be odd to characterise the neoplatonist Nicholas as post-metaphysical, but it is never made clear what makes Kearney's proposed reversal so very different. One may reasonably note that the last two centuries are littered with claims to overcome metaphysics, and wonder whether they represent anything more than virility symbols for a certain type of mind. Kearney's use of such traditional notions as proper proportionality suggests that one should not be hypnotised by this aspect of Heideggerian *hubris*, hence my pointing out with respect to the limits of intelligibility sponsored by such analogies that what is sauce for the Thomist goose is sauce for the Heideggerian gander.

Rather than pull further on these loose ends to see what unravels it is probably more profitable to work on the principle of knowing a tree by its fruits, looking at the four consequences Kearney sees as being entailed by his conception of God as *posse*. Here I just raise the obvious difficulties; no doubt there are responses possible and responses to those responses, but I no space here to explore the ramifying dialectic.

Under the first heading, the invocation of the alleged 'biblical notion of divine *Kenosis*' (so popular among 19th century Lutheran theologians) does not appear to be entirely biblical; the Pauline text in question (Philippians ii 5-11) speaks of a contrast between Christ's 'being in the form of God' and his self emptying to become 'found in fashion as a man'; it is not clear to me that Kearney's account allows this - if it does not, the invocation of biblical warrant requires justification. Relatedly, the opposition between 'the promise of a Kingdom to come' and 'a Kingdom self-realized elsewhere' appears to conflict with the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come, in earth *as it is* in heaven'. This is symptomatic of Kearney's (and Heidegger's) projects; they see oppositions which they proceed to play off against each other where the tradition affirms complementarities.

Second, we are promised a way out of 'the traditional antinomy' of God's goodness and the existence of evil - a jewel indeed beyond price. But on inspection I wonder about the Trade Descriptions Act. Part of the claim is the familiar contention that evil results from human sin (here described as 'unchecked expression of the will to dominate and possess' - a thoroughly traditional formula), which leaves out of account evils brought about by the natural order and animal suffering independent of human sin (say dinosaurs with rheumatism). The remainder of the claim is remarkably obscure but appears to involved the thesis that the divine *posse* can only be actualised by responsible human activity - a curiously anthropocentric (indeed speciesist) perspective - which simply eliminates the traditional problem of evil by denying the predicate 'Almighty' of God. One does not have to be post-metaphysical to remove the antinomy by redefining God; John Stuart Mill's limited deity, who depends for the completion of his work on the cooperation of men and woman using the power he

has given them in calling them into existence, does the trick just as well - and in much the same way.

Third, Kearney claims to overcome a supposed antinomy of God's existence both for himself and for others which the tradition sees as a complementarity. He notes the role played by the doctrine of the Trinity in making sense of a form of divine self-love that is not simply selfishness (and thereby, without apparently noticing it, undercuts the notion of a Divine 'monological actualisation' of the Kingdom which he uses as a foil for his preferred 'dialogical possibilization') but sees this as 'the polar opposite of *kenosis*'. For the New Testament there is no such opposition - rather complementarity: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' (John iii 16); the form of the Divine love shown in Revelation is not self-enclosed and any conception of the *nexis amoris* that implies otherwise is, by Christian standards, heretical.

Fourth, the relating of divine revelation to history is in part traditional orthodoxy (though not always apparently recognised as such - for example God not as a *topos* of being but as a *utopos* other than being), and in part an apparent variant of Process Theology with God giving himself to human beings 'through the adventure of history' (coupled with the Levinasion anthropomorphism of 'the divine plans within being' being identified with man). I am not clear about the force of 'adventure', but does it imply that God can be taken by surprise? If so, I am reminded of Peter Geach's criticism of a certain false god 'such as some contemporaries honour, who is so far from constituting truth that he doesn't even always attain it'[1].

The conclusion of the paper uses the proposed hermeneutic of an eschatology of the possible to read Heidegger's talk of 'the contemporary "lack" of gods' as 'a lack of human fidelity to the ethical exigencies of the

new and old Testaments'. This, I am afraid, baffles me. Heidegger's alleged 'lack' is historically situated in the present and not very distant past, but Old Testament prophets and New Testament epistle writers (and the author of the Book of Revelation) constantly testify to the 'lack of human fidelity' among their contemporaries. It has not been made clear why we should believe human fidelity in our age to be uniquely improverished; such claims have frequently been made in past ages, and more often than not represent a form of sentimentalising of the past.

Most of these criticisms have their root, I think, in my dissatisfaction with the Heideggerian framework within which Kearney is operating. This strikes me as grounded not merely in historical fantasy but in a remarkably influential mediaeval fantasy - that of Joachim of Fiore. Joachim proposed a Trinitarian conception of history: the age of the Father was that of the Old Testament dispensation; that of the Son, the New Testament dispensation in which he lived; the coming age of the Spirit was one in which mankind will be filled with the Spirit, living with a form of liberty and immediacy to the divine which will render traditional ecclesiastical and political structures redundant. Heidegger, as Ricoeur notes, does not fully confront Hebrew thought, but his age of the Greek gods which preceded the New Testament dispensation provides a touchstone of nostalgia in terms of which his own desiderated age of the Spirit - for which, listening to the poets, we prepare 'a clearing in Being for the advent or *Ereignis* of god' - is adumbrated.

But such periodisation seems to me highly suspect. In the religious tradition that has formed modern Europe, the God of revelation and of the poets is intertwined in both the Old and New Testament dispensations, and the Spirit descended at Pentecost. In the Old Testament prophecy and poetry were closely combined, and Elijah knew of the god 'who surprises

us' in the very midst of the visible in his encounter with 'the still small voice' (I Kings xix 12); analogous remarks could be made of the author of the Book of Revelation, and in both cases there was an ethical charge. Indeed, both for Elijah and for John there was also a horror of the worship of false gods; any adequate phenomenology of the encounter with the holy should show the problem with the claim that here 'Christ and Apollo are brothers' - sometimes they are Cain and Abel; the oddly complacent hope of 'a non-confessional experience of the sacred qua sacred' dissolves in the face of an encounter such as Job's (in the light of which the Comforters are seen as worshippers of a false god) or one which evokes the response 'My Lord and my God' (John xx 28). Here, of course, is the role of the despised natural theology - so systematically and radically distorted by Heidegger - to help distinguish credible voices in the wilderness from incredible, John the Baptist from Joseph Smith and Brigham Young or Mary Baker Eddy.

As in biblical times, so today, the words of poetry may be 'the advent of the sacred', but there are poets other than Hölderlin. Heidegger maintains that such advent 'can only come when we have fully experienced the modern condition of homelessness'. This condition has many aspects; Stanley Cavell, for example, sees it as dramatised in Shakespeare and finding philosophical expression in modern scepticism, and seeks to bring us back to our home in what he calls the 'ordinary' - for him the gods have fled more finally than for Heidegger, and the sacred is no longer a possibility. But the major English speaking poet of 'the modern condition of homelessness' is the author of *The Waste Land;* that poem indeed comes close to playing the role Heidegger allots to 'the poets': 'attentive, in one's song, to the traces of the flown gods' - but it has a sequel in which the God returns 'With flame of incandescent terror'. Incarnation is named, and not only Heraclitus but also the whole metaphysical tradition rejected by

Heidegger is accepted but 'renewed, transfigured, in another pattern', and Heidegger's three gods - of Revelation, Metaphysics and Poetry - are 'folded in a single party'. There may, that is, be another option beside the radical secularism of Cavell and the radical Protestantism of Heidegger and Kearney.

This is not the place to discuss Cavell, but I suspect that ultimately Kearney needs to temper his radical Protestant rejection of natural reason in religious matters. The nerve of his, and Heidegger's, objection to natural theology is that it involves 'rationalizing Revelation'. There is a clear sense in which this is both objectionable and one to which the tradition has frequently succumbed. In terms of the categories used earlier, it so interprets the divine by means of the analogy of attribution that it dispels the divine mystery, and God is seen as one entity among others with specially 'eminent' qualities and capacities. This certainly is idolatry, but not a necessary feature of the tradition. In St Thomas, for example, the danger is much more that of unintelligibility and agnosticism, and Nicholas of Cusa's 'Learned Ignorance' is just that - ignorance. The Protestant tradition, too, has to grapple with the problem of the interpretation of the Divine Names; Karl Barth, whose conception of theology as at once 'Dogmatics' and a 'science' has close affinities with Heidegger's understanding of it as a 'positive science', found himself driven to elaborate an 'analogy of faith' to fill the void left by the 'analogy of being' (though his doctrine turns out to have rather more in common with that of St Thomas than he may have wished). Here Cajetan's not wholly benignly influential commentary on St Thomas's teaching may be suggestive. He distinguishes between the analogy of proper proportionality (which, as we have seen, by itself has a tendency to agnosticism) and that of metaphorical proportionality; he downgrades the latter, but this is in part because of his somewhat limited and mechanical conception of metaphorical predication. In our

understanding of language at least we may have made advances in the last five centuries, and it may be that our richer understanding of the role of metaphor in discourse should point us to a rather different conclusion - a way of speaking about the sacred which will account for the key role of the poets, allow us to make sense of Revelation, and provide a role for reason in our balancing of sacred parables, metaphors and symbols and our relating of them to other aspects of our lives and understandings. I have attempted elsewhere[2] to sketch how the analysis of metaphor as a mode of analogical discourse makes possible the exploring of the rules of use employed in sacred and poetic discourse that enables us to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable inferences - but that is another story.

Notes

1) Peter Geach, 'The Meaning of "God"', in Martin Warner, ed., *Religion and Philosophy* Cambridge University Press, 1992. p. 90.
2) Martin Warner, 'Language, Interpretation and Worship', in *Religion and Philosophy* Cambridge University Press, 1992.