Phenomenology and the Question of God Forty Years Later

Thinking God in France

A Timeless Question and a Timely Event

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Abstract

Organized by Richard Kearney and Joseph S. O'Leary, the 1979 Colloquium *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* was of critical importance for the development of phenomenology of religion in France. This special issue introduces the event and its ensuing publication to the English-speaking world. The editors' historical and thematic contextualizing essay is followed by contributions from six leading philosophers. Richard Kearney sets the stage by updating his original foreword, while Jean-Yves Lacoste presents the central moments in the history of Heidegger's complicated relationship to Christian thinking. Paul Ricoeur's "Introductory Note" delivers a well-known challenge to Heidegger in a piece whose brevity belies its impact. Finally, three participants of the 1979 Colloquium, Joseph S. O'Leary, Jean Greisch, and Jean-Luc Marion, reflect back on the significance of this event and its role in developing their own groundbreaking work. The special issue closes with a brief reflection on where we find ourselves in philosophy today.

Keywords

God – Heidegger – phenomenology – hermeneutics – religion – history of French philosophy – theology – revelation

“Clearly this publication marks the arrival of a new force on the European theological scene.”¹ This high praise for the proceedings of the 1979 colloquium at the Collège des Irlandais in Paris is not isolated.² Entitled *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* and organized by Richard Kearney and Joseph S. O’Leary, then two young Irish scholars researching in Paris, it was singled out by Dominique Janicaud’s reception history as “the most interesting” of the flourishing tributes and studies in the period following Heidegger’s death; for both this event and the “rich volume” of “remarkable quality”³ that followed it would go on to have a major impact on the work of many of those present. Jean Greisch calls it a “peak” in his intellectual journey, raising questions that continue to accompany him, to the extent that in some sense his thinking is still very much rooted within the Collège des Irlandais.⁴ O’Leary is “tempted to say the conference never ended,” for the discussions generated there continue to mark his intellectual journey into the present moment.⁵ On a number of occasions Jean-Luc Marion has highlighted the importance of this colloquium as the moment which generated *Dieu sans l’être*, which has been a decisive cornerstone in discussions of the place of God in continental philosophy. It was also the moment where Kearney first introduced the idea of the “Possible God,” decades in advance of his trilogy beginning with *The God Who May Be*. It is clear why O’Leary describes this conference as the moment when “the ‘theological turn of French phenomenology’ was getting into full stride.”⁶ The colloquium has thus been heralded for propitiously seizing the historical moment as it has been recognized for the dialogical synergy that had a major impact on its participants. The subsequent volume is well-known among francophone philosophers, popular at its release and even earning a second edition printing through

1 “First author” credit is shared by both authors for this article and the editing of the journal. Citation from N.D. O’Donoghue, “Heidegger et la question de Dieu,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35:3 (1982), pp. 273–274.

2 *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu*, Richard Kearney and Joseph S. O’Leary, eds (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1980; PUF, 2009). Henceforth HQD, translations by authors.

3 Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France* (Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 180.

4 p. 206, below.

5 p. 186, below.

6 p. 176, below.

PUF's "Quadrige" series for philosophical classics in 2009; the chapters gathered under the iconic red cover are "perfectly timeless," as Jean-Yves Lacoste writes in a special preface written for the occasion. However, in the English-speaking world, the story of this vital moment remains untold.

Now on the fortieth anniversary of the event, this special issue seeks to introduce this conference to a wider audience. To this end, we have gathered major philosophers reflecting on the significance of this unique event. Richard Kearney sets the stage by updating the original editors' foreword to *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* for this contemporary discussion. Jean-Yves Lacoste's preface for the second edition is a philosophical contribution in its own right; in a few dense, scholarly pages, he lays out some of the central moments in the history of Heidegger's complicated relationship to Christian thinking. Next comes the first contribution of the original volume, Ricoeur's "Introductory Note," which delivers a well-known challenge to Heidegger in a piece whose brevity belies its impact. This is followed by original pieces by three participants of the 1979 colloquium, Joseph O'Leary, Jean Greisch, and Jean-Luc Marion, who reflect back on the significance of this event and its role in their own groundbreaking work.

To prepare the ground for what follows, we retrieve the rich historical context that set the stage for this moment, and introduce the principle themes that emerged in this event. For, contrary to what a newcomer to this field of studies might assume, it was not Levinas, Marion, Chrétien, or Henry who first opened the question of God in twentieth century France. Indeed, despite a widely cherished ritual – the shared beating of Janicaud's polemic against the "Theological Turn" – God did not first break the brackets of §58 of Husserl's *Ideas* in 1991.⁷ And despite the public declarations that "God is dead," some of us forget that phenomenology was in mortal danger at around the same time. One might even say that this tradition of thinking begun by Husserl and widened by Heidegger would not have flourished in France without the reinvigoration from spheres of inquiry which have at times been consigned to the theological sphere, not the least of which was the question of God.

7 Dominique Janicaud, *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas: L'Éclat, 1991), trans. by Bernard G. Prusak and Jeffrey L. Kosky in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

1 The History of the Question

1.1 *Heidegger and Atheist Humanism*

Phenomenology first arrived in France through the writings of Husserl, which were initially the terrain of philosophers studying logic and mathematics. His 1929 lectures at the Sorbonne became the basis for the *Cartesian Meditations*, first published in French (the German edition waited until 1950). The theme spoke to the deepest strains of the French philosophical heritage, which perhaps explained the mixed reaction, as in the early twentieth century major thinkers like Bergson and Blondel were struggling to find a way beyond idealism and to return thinking to real life. Some could see that path “to the things themselves” already in everyday things like apricot cocktails, like Raymond Aron, who ignited the interest of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in the potential of phenomenology one afternoon over drinks at a café.⁸ But that path, for many, led through Heidegger. France was introduced to him through a few early publications, like those of Jean Wahl and Emmanuel Levinas,⁹ through Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel at the École Pratique des Hautes Études from 1933–1939, and through Henry Corbin’s 1938 translations of a few of Heidegger’s texts.¹⁰ But it was really Sartre who first framed Heidegger as an exciting, cutting-edge thinker for the francophone audience. If his Heidegger-inspired *L’être et le néant* (1943) did not present Heidegger faithfully, Sartre’s own popularity meant Heidegger was nevertheless presented to a wider audience.¹¹ Sartre’s declaration that “Existentialism is a humanism” (1946) struck a powerful political chord in the post-war Liberation politics, which propelled his explosion of fame.¹² He ignited popular imagination and flooded the emerging youth culture overseas, which copied his attitude and style if not the substance, spawning everything from novels and films to the avant garde “existent-

8 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green (New York: World Publishing, 1962), p. 112.

9 Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Heidegger et l’ontologie,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 113 (1932), pp. 395–431; Jean Wahl, “Heidegger et Kierkegaard. Recherche des éléments originaux de la philosophie de Heidegger,” *Recherches philosophiques* 11 (1932–1933), pp. 349–370.

10 This included “What is Metaphysics?,” selections of *Sein und Zeit*, and a piece on Hölderlin, *Les Essais VII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

11 See Janicaud, “The Sartre Bomb,” *Heidegger in France*, pp. 32–48.

12 Edward Baring, “Humanist Pretensions: Catholics, Communists, and Sartre’s Struggle for Existentialism in Postwar France,” from *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 21–47; Samuel Pruvot, *Monseigneur Charles, aumônier de la Sorbonne 1944–1959* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), pp. 135–137.

tialist haircut” of the 1950s which would become the trademark of the Beatles. Many French philosophers of the day, from Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur to Étienne Gilson, were introduced to Heidegger through Sartre, and while they discarded Sartre along with the political movements he bound himself to, kept the Heidegger.¹³

But, of course, Sartre’s existentialist humanism was simultaneously an atheism. This explains the significance, then, of Heidegger’s letter to a young Jean Beaufret, at the first stages of what would become a very decisive friendship: Beaufret would become the major catalyst of Heidegger’s reception in France. They had not yet met in person in 1946, as Europe was still under wartime travel restrictions, and Beaufret had not anticipated that the list of questions he jotted down one afternoon in a cafe would be answered with a text that would become one of Heidegger’s most authoritative in France, the “Letter on Humanism.”¹⁴ In it Heidegger firmly declared that humanism was “over.” This anti-humanist stance was also very openly anti-atheist. While that by no means makes it pro-Christian, it is hardly surprising that it would be of great interest to many French thinkers who were friendly to religion. In fact, Sartre’s co-opting of existentialism as atheism was by no means self-evident; indeed, it was a hostile appropriation of power from the “Christian existentialists” who preceded him.¹⁵

Rather than an exclusive confessional affiliation, the title “Christian existentialists” was a newly coined title for an already established group of philosophers who were open to transcendence and who found inspiration in the Christian tradition from Augustine to Pascal and Kierkegaard. According to the personalist Emmanuel Mounier’s 1947 account, the branches of the “existentialist tree” included the Catholic Blondel, Marcel, Péguy, Paul-Ludwig Landsberg, and (sometimes) Max Scheler; the Russian Orthodox Nikolai Berdayaev and Vladimir Soloviev; the Jewish Bergson, Martin Buber, and Lev Shestov; and the Protestant Karl Jaspers and Karl Barth; Sartre was the only existentialist outgrowth that was explicitly atheist (despite the enormous attention he was attracting at the time).¹⁶ To Mounier’s list must be added others, Simone de Beauvoir, Louis Lavelle, René Le Senne, and Jean Wahl, the latter of whom were interested in the question of transcendence, although not necessarily explicitly

13 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 88; Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 337; see also Baring, *The Young Derrida*, pp. 48 ff.

14 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, pp. 68 ff.

15 Derrida recalls to Janicaud the significance of the rivalry during the post-war period: “One spoke of Christian Existentialism and Atheist Existentialism.” *Heidegger in France*, p. 338.

16 Baring, *The Young Derrida*, pp. 34–36; Baring also reprints the “existentialist tree” diagram from E. Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialismes* (Paris, 1947), p. 159.

through Christianity. The openly Catholic Gabriel Marcel is the most notable of these Christian existentialists, not only for the early significance of his work, but also for his impact on the intellectual community of Paris. His “Friday Evenings,” which began before the war, hosted discussions surrounding papers on phenomenology and existential philosophy, gathering weekly crowds of attendees which included many whose names were already well known on the French scene, such as Berdyaev and Wahl, as well as the developing scholars whose names soon would be, like Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur. Sartre, too, was an attendee.¹⁷ Thus, contrary to what Sartre would claim, existentialism included a diverse group of significant philosophers who were mostly very open to the question of God; the popularity of this movement was such that at the time even Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson framed themselves as “existential Thomists.”¹⁸

As Marxist pressure increased in the 1950s, one can thus imagine that many thinkers who had been trained in this existentialist tradition open to the question of God saw promise in Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” as he spoke of the “sacred” and the “holy” (in fact, it was a Jesuit, Roger Munier, SJ, who translated it into French). And, of course, his concern with “Being” resonated powerfully with Thomist-trained Catholics, even if they recognized differences.¹⁹ One sees this for example in Étienne Gilson, whose 1948 *L’être et l’essence* gave a strong critique of existentialism, with only a brief mention of Heidegger;²⁰ by the 1962 edition an appendix was added to clarify that Heidegger’s “existentialism” does not fall into the same subjectivist errors as Sartre, but in fact despite irreconcilable differences one might cautiously consider him, at least in some respects, as an ally. Henri Birault’s 1955 “La foi et la pensée d’après Heidegger” suggested that Heidegger’s move beyond humanism can be seen as a deflation of the arrogance of atheist modern subjectivity and lead us instead to a sense of the sacred which may yet be open to God.²¹ Perhaps then it is not so surprising that in that same year, when Heidegger finally came to France for the

17 It was here that Sartre first met Levinas, in fact; see *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 42–43.

18 Étienne Gilson claims, “Thomas is not another existential philosophy; it is the *only* one.” (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Random House, 1956], p. 368); Jacques Maritain agrees. (*Existence and the Existent* [New York: Pantheon, 1948], pp. 1–2). See also Baring’s chapters, “Christian Existentialism Across Europe” and “Postwar Phenomenology,” in *Converts to the Real: Catholicism and the Making of Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2019), pp. 151–182, 308–341.

19 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, pp. 85–87.

20 Paris: Vrin, 1948.

21 In *Recherches et débats* 10, “Philosophies chrétiennes” (1955), pp. 108–132.

first time for the famous ten-day conference at Cerisy-la-Salle, he found himself challenged by significant Christian thinkers, notably Gabriel Marcel and Paul Ricoeur. So while the “question of God” may have been eclipsed by the popular reception of Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus, God remained of interest to other philosophers in diverse ways.

1.2 *Vital Catholic Roots*

It can sometimes be difficult for young, “New World” countries to appreciate how deeply rooted Catholicism is in the fabric of French culture and thinking, if not necessarily dogma or practice; however real the force of atheism, however publicly *laïcité* is celebrated, history and tradition have a bond that cannot be quickly or easily severed, any more than the great cathedral of Notre Dame could be left in indifference to collapse and burn. (How quickly, rather, the tragic fire ignited among believers and nonbelievers alike a deep appreciation for the importance of their religious heritage!) Catholics have always been a significant influence within French intellectual culture, if not always in the majority, or in the most powerful parts of it. Parallel to the rise of atheist existentialism in the public sphere came many efforts to bring Catholic intellectuals and academics into public dialogue with modernity.

For example, Msgr. Maxime Charles founded the Centre Richelieu at the Sorbonne in 1944 as an outreach to Catholic students. Under his dynamic leadership, it became an intellectual and social alternative to rival the highly active and organized Communist student groups. Thousands of Catholic students flocked to the yearly winter pilgrimages to Montmartre, published articles for the journal *Tala Sorbonne*, took weekly theology courses, and attended academic conferences with speakers representing a plurality of perspectives, from Père Teilhard de Chardin to Albert Camus.²² Meanwhile, the *Centre catholique des intellectuels français* (CCIF), founded in 1941, served the intellectual development of Catholic adults, aiming to elevate religious culture to the level of secular culture.²³ It was by the CCIF’s invitation that Henri Birault had given his conference on Heidegger and faith mentioned above, for example, which was then published in their journal, *Recherches et débats*. In its 30 years of existence, the CCIF organized conferences that hosted over 3000 speakers: drawing from major Catholic scholars from diverse viewpoints, such as Henri de Lubac,

22 See Pruvot, *Monseigneur Charles*, especially chs. 7–14; the term “*tala*” indicates their spirit of camaraderie with the strong contingent of Catholics at the elite École normale supérieure from whom they borrowed this nickname; it is a slang derivation to refer to those who “*vont à la messe*.”

23 Claire Toupin-Guyot, *Les intellectuels catholiques dans la société française: le Centre catholique des intellectuels français, 1941–1976*. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002).

Henri-Irénée Marrou, Gaston Fessard, and Gabriel Marcel, as well as other significant scholars, whether atheists like Jean Beaufret, Jean Hyppolite, and Raymond Aron, or other Christians like Paul Ricoeur. They were also early to take part in ecumenical dialogue with the minority communities of Protestants and Orthodox Christians in France. As an intellectually-oriented organization, it is not surprising that their audience was not limited to confessional Catholics or confessional topics; Janicaud recounts attending a CCIF lecture by Ricoeur discussing Heidegger's text on Nietzsche's "Death of God" in 1955–1956.²⁴ One of the full-time organizers, Odette Laffoucrière, would eventually leave to write a dissertation on Heidegger under Ricoeur (and later contribute to the 1979 Colloquium).

But in organizations like the CCIF and the Centre Richelieu, the interest in philosophy often came second to the interest in theology, which leads us to point out what has sometimes been overlooked by philosophers: the enormous significance of Catholic theology in France during this time. Lacoste's Preface (pp. 159–174 below) speaks of the developments in German theology in the twentieth century in relation to Heidegger's thought, often from Protestant thinkers. In the Catholic-majority France, there was not yet a serious theological engagement with Heidegger in the post-War period, even while Catholic philosophers wrestled to understand how far they could see him as an ally. Yet we find in French theology a "step back" that is parallel to Heidegger's, even if not influenced by him. While the large part of Catholic thinking worldwide had built itself on what many considered to be the bedrock truth of ahistorical textbook scholasticism, pioneering French Catholic thinkers were breaking through this hardened topsoil to reveal the rich and fertile tradition beneath it, spaces where new ideas could take root.²⁵ It is not for nothing that Marion here calls Henri de Lubac "the first deconstructionist";²⁶ during these years Lubac, with other Jesuits like Claude Mondésert and Jean Daniélou, led a rediscovery of Patristic sources, making them widely accessible for the first time in their original languages alongside the modern vernacular through their series *Sources chrétiennes*. Such efforts would be an occasion for fruitful dialogue with the

24 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, pp. 87–88.

25 Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Théologie," *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, pp. 1130–1132; Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); it is worth noting that Mgrs. Charles was a great supporter of *nouvelle théologie*, and worked closely with Jean Daniélou; this theological tradition thus explicitly shaped the popular extracurricular theology courses he organized, impacting the intellectual formation of several generations of French Catholic students. Pruvot, *Monseigneur Charles*, pp. 145–162.

26 p. 212, below.

thriving community of Russian Orthodox Christians who had immigrated to Paris after 1917. And before them, Dominicans like Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar had helped excavate the living thinking of Thomas Aquinas beneath the layers of ossified conceptualizations. Others took the path opened by Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*, embarking upon a more historical-critical approach to the study of scriptures. Hitherto Catholics were strongly discouraged from following the advances of Protestant exegetes, with only a few exceptions tolerated, like Marie-Joseph Lagrange, the founder of the École biblique in Jerusalem. But now, what was previously only allowed in private study was openly permitted to be taught in Catholic seminaries, once again opening a broader retrieval of the tradition. This "*nouvelle*" *théologie* that ironically returned to the ancient sources of the faith ran counter to the "tradition" of the scholastic status quo, which was by contrast a distinctively modern invention. By breaking the old into the new, this theology in France was at the vanguard of Catholic thinking and played a major role in paving the way for the Second Vatican Council which began in 1962. One can imagine, then, the potential fruitfulness of an encounter of French theology and Heidegger, both seeking to return to the living roots of thinking.

1.3 *The Winter of Phenomenology and the Death of God*

However, things began to shift rapidly in the early 1960s. Ricoeur, who had been the first to translate Husserl's *Ideas* in the 1940s, had now come up against the limits of phenomenology in his ambitious examination of the human will. His recognition that the failure of will necessitated the interpretation of symbol and myth in his 1960 *Finitude et Culpabilité II: La Symbolique du mal* began his hermeneutic turn, which would prepare the ground for his narrative turn a decade later. The year 1961 saw what Janicaud calls the beginnings of the "theological swerve": the publication of Emmanuel Levinas' *Totalité et infini*, which delivered a powerful critique of Heidegger, breaking open the egocentrism of the phenomenological horizon to an irreducible alterity that preserved a space for the God question, but it would not find a large readership until the 1970s.²⁷

That same year, 1961, would mark the end of an era. Merleau-Ponty's influence was cut short by his sudden, untimely death. Jean Beaufret's contract was not renewed at the École normale supérieure, leaving the training of France's most elite philosophers in the hands of Louis Althusser, soon to be joined by

27 Janicaud, *The "Theological Turn,"* p. 36; Levinas, *Totalité et infini; essai sur l'extériorité*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), trans. Alphonso Lingis as *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011).

Jacques Derrida. The newly-formed Sociology Department at the Sorbonne began drawing students away from philosophy, and Claude Lévi-Strauss was elected to the Collège de France, portending the reign of structuralism. The influence of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan was on the rise. Derrida's lecture at Johns Hopkins, "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" (1966)²⁸ would be the death blow to structuralism, but poststructuralism would sustain and strengthen the power of what Ricoeur called the "masters of suspicion," Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Renaud Barbaras recalls that when he took up his studies in the 1970s, there was "no real place for phenomenology" in the university; Husserl and Heidegger were subject to "violent critique" while Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas were respectively "forgotten," "scorned," and "unknown"; the climate was dominated by Foucault, Lyotard, and Deleuze on the one hand, and Marxists on the other.²⁹

The political and human rights transgressions of Communist regimes were, or should have, been well-known by the time, but the dream of a humane Communism and its various addenda provided by Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao continued to capture the imagination of intellectuals, students, and trade unionists. Activists hungry for justice and change focused their ire on American capitalism, consumerism, and imperialism, accusations hard to deny in an America that was marked by civil unrest, crippled by racism and classism, and divided by an illegal war in Vietnam. While the global broadcast of the Beatles' "All You Need is Love" in '67 channeled a generation's aspirations for love and peace around the world, cultural and political revolution was also in the air and would first erupt in the sequence of events in Paris that became known as May '68. The disproportionate police response to a student protest at Nanterre escalated into solidarity strikes and massive sympathy walk-outs by unions which brought society to a standstill. While the uprisings subsided as quickly as they started, activists claimed a cultural victory, if not political one. The events touched the lives of the participants of the 1979 Colloquium, resumed just over a decade later, widening the gap between generations; the young Jean-Luc Marion was a student in May '68, barricaded in the École normale which was providing sanctuary for activists and tending those wounded in the riots, while Paul Ricoeur was forced out of his position as Dean at Nanterre after having been caught at the center of a no-win situation between police and students and outside

28 Published in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2002).

29 Renaud Barbaras, *Quiet Powers of the Possible*, pp. 145–146; Greisch emphasizes here that it was not until the 1980s that phenomenology could really be said to have come to life again, "like a phoenix reborn from its ashes," p. 198, below.

agitators.³⁰ (This was especially unfair for Ricoeur, who was by no means an institutional authoritarian, but precisely the opposite, having deliberately given up his prestigious post at the Sorbonne in order to join Nanterre's attempts to reform the educational system. Yet it was a significant gain for anglophone philosophy, as these events led Ricoeur to take up international visiting positions like his chair at University of Chicago). The aftermath of the uprisings of '68 left philosophers and society at large in a more reflective and eventually more open mood that allowed a questioning beyond that of which "ism" or which camp to belong to.

Despite everything happening during these years, rigorous religious reflection was not dead. Although he kept his confessional writings apart from his philosophical ones, Ricoeur's hermeneutic engagement with Biblical symbols, myths and narratives had an influence not only on Protestant thought but also on Catholic theology in the post-conciliar period. Meanwhile, while many institutions had collapsed after 1968, inside and outside of the Christian tradition local communities lived on. Even without the backing of major organizations, individuals like Odette Laffocurière continued to host local conferences that encouraged philosophical community and intellectual dialogue (it was at one such conference that Jean Greisch first made the acquaintance of Jean Beaufret).³¹ The Centre Richelieu at the Sorbonne passed to Jean-Marie Lustiger, future archbishop of Paris, and Msgr. Charles was assigned to Sacre Coeur, where he founded a new student community dedicated to prayer and theological education. This new center was to have a significant impact on the generation of thinkers who would one day be responsible for the "theological turn."³²

Perhaps most critically, during this time Derrida's "Violence et métaphysique," served as a point of access (or "Trojan horse" as Greisch describes it³³) for philosophers to approach Levinas' *Totalité et infini*, a text whose daring appeal to God in philosophy had to this point largely been passed over.³⁴ Despite his

30 See Jean-Luc Marion, *Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, trans. C. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 9–12, and Charles E. Reagan's *Paul Ricoeur, His Life and his Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 32–39, and *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with Françoise Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. K. Blamey (Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 34–40.

31 Greisch, *Heidegger in France*, p. 372.

32 Pruvot, *Monseigneur Charles*, pp. 303–311; Marion, *Rigor of Things*, pp. 20–21.

33 p. 194, below.

34 "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 97–192; Baring, *Young Derrida*, pp. 269–273.

confession, "I quite rightly pass for an atheist,"³⁵ Derrida had from the beginning been closer to the open questioning of "Christian existentialism" than the dogmatic atheism of Sartre.³⁶ Now, in the 1960s and 1970s, the dialogue and development of these two Jewish thinkers was slowly but surely drawing the question of humanism toward concerns about ethical obligation, the legacy of ontotheology, and the death of God.³⁷ Thus, even if in some ways the academic sphere was not a very agreeable climate for the question of God, this negative moment was not the end, but only the beginning. Far from stamping out the question of God, the era of the "death of God" became an ideal time to pose the question of God anew; indeed, this question, Marion recalls, "was really our daily bread."³⁸

2 Bridging the Dialogue in 1979

By the time Heidegger's *Der Spiegel* interview mysteriously proclaimed that "Only a god can save us," following his death in 1976, one might imagine that French philosophers were all ears. That same year, the first volume of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* was published, heralding the new age of Heideggerian scholarship to come, and soon afterwards *L'idole et la distance* by a young Jean-Luc Marion. It was to this Paris that Richard Kearney and Joseph S. O'Leary arrived. It did not take them long to enter the fray. After beginning his phenomenology of imagination in an M.A. with Charles Taylor, Kearney had come to Paris continue this research in a doctorate with Paul Ricoeur; he also studied closely with Levinas, who would be on his defense in 1980.³⁹ O'Leary had arrived to pursue postdoctoral research in Patristics through the seminars of Pierre Nautin and Charles Kannengiesser, but the influence of Greisch, Marion, and Kearney soon drew him into philosophical circles and lent his work a distinctively Heideggerian accent. The colloquium they planned together, entitled "Heidegger et la question de Dieu" took place at the Collège des Irlandais on June 24, 1979.

35 "Circumfession," in *Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida*, Jacques Derrida (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 154–155.

36 Baring, "Derrida's 'Christian' Existentialism," *Young Derrida*, pp. 48–81.

37 pp. 192–195, below.

38 p. 209, below.

39 Richard Kearney, "Where I speak from: A short intellectual autobiography," pp. 36–45, in *Debating Otherness with Richard Kearney: Perspectives from South Africa*, Yolande Steenkamp, Daniël P. Veldsman, eds (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018).

Janicaud would remark of the resulting publication “how instructive [it] is and continues to be for today’s reader” particularly because “it avoids no difficulty and opens the debate, to the greatest extent possible, between the scrupulous interpreters of Heidegger’s thought (Beaufret and Fédier) and his opponents (Stanislas Breton, Levinas, Ricoeur.)”⁴⁰ Kearney and O’Leary, attending seminars from both of these opposing camps, dared to extend an invitation to all of them.⁴¹ Kearney too modestly attributes this to the idealistic “naïveté” of youth, recounting the remarks of Ricoeur, that “only two naïve Irishmen would have dared invite us all. We haven’t talked to each other like this since the War.”⁴² Naïveté, or a keen instinct for dialogue? It takes a certain kind of genius to gather the right people at the right time around the right question. Jean-Luc Marion later praised “these two young and brilliant Irishmen” for their work organizing this conference, affirming that “what followed” in their remarkable careers “bore this out.”⁴³ Jean Greisch affirms this event could only have been possible through their “enthusiasm” and “cunning,” as well as their refusal to be defeated by the Parisian politics. This is all the more remarkable considering it was indeed, as Greisch also affirms, a coup of “youthful audacity” – Kearney was only twenty-four!

The intervention of outsiders and their choice of location helped to create a space of dialogue between parties that were deeply divided.⁴⁴ The Collège des Irlandais (known since 2002 as the Centre Culturel Irlandais) had always been a refuge for restoring muted voices, serving Irish and then Polish scholars fleeing political regimes hostile to their intellectual development. Lying at the heart of the Latin Quarter, steps away from the École normale supérieure and a short walk from the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, it was at once familiar and also unfamiliar ground, removed from the institutional politics of Paris and

40 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 291.

41 The full list of participants at the conference was larger than the table of contents of the book: from Ireland, there was John Chisholm, Timothy Lynch, Dermot Moran, Tony and Noreen O’Connor, as well as Mark Patrick Hederman, OSB, Richard Kearney, and Joseph S. O’Leary. From France, there was Jean Beaufret, Frédéric Bernard, Stanislas Breton, Hubert Carron, Jean-François Courtine, Dominique Dubarle, Bernard Dupuy, OP, François Fédier, Jean Greisch, Odette Laffoucrière, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Nenad Miscevic (a Croatian postdoc working with Ricoeur), Emmanuel Martineau, Paul Ricoeur, Marcel Régner, Rev. Daniel Pézéril, Maria Villela-Petit, Dorian Tiffeneau, and François Vézin. HQD, pp. 33–34.

42 See M.E. Littlejohn’s conversation with Richard Kearney in M.E. Littlejohn, ed, *Imagination Now: A Richard Kearney Reader* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), p. 310.

43 Marion, *Rigor of Things*, p. 108.

44 p. 191, below.

its deeply entrenched "*chapelles*." No one knew quite what to expect, and the twenty or thirty invited participants to this gathering arrived with some trepidation: Ricoeur the Protestant, Levinas the Jew, a small swarm of Catholic clergy, and the cult of anti-religious Heideggerians. The tension was palpable at first. There were some difficult moments, in Kearney's memory.⁴⁵ At one point, the Passionist priest Stanislas Breton reached for Levinas's Torah to quote a passage from Genesis, and Levinas quickly pulled it away. At another moment, Beaufret lit up his Gitane, clouding the room with thick smoke, and Ricoeur passed Kearney a note politely requesting it be put out due to his recent health problems, but the note Kearney tried to send to Beaufret was intercepted by one of Beaufret's zealously protective students, who passed it right back after scribbling "*Qu'il crève!*" – "Let him croak!" (Fortunately, Kearney caught the note before it returned to Ricoeur.)

But despite the occasional tensions, Kearney recalls the day was marked by "deeply collegial exchanges." O'Leary writes here of how "the highly-charged encounter of strong personalities old and young caught the promise of a particular moment":⁴⁶ indeed, it was a meeting between the older generation of Levinas, Beaufret, Ricoeur, Breton, and Laffoucrière, who had all passed the mandatory retirement age of 65, and the promising younger generation still at the beginning of their careers, Maria Villela-Petit, Greisch, and Marion, who was still in his early thirties. For Greisch, the conference was a "space of dialogue and confrontation marked by decisive encounters with some major philosophers of my time," and these "singular voices and faces" remain etched deeply into his memory.⁴⁷ Thus, even in the age of "*l'écriture*," Kearney reflects, the event was one of dialogue in a true hermeneutic spirit: "the colloquium somehow ambushed everyone, including ourselves, by working with the spoken word and physical presence of the participants. There were no prepared texts. We moved from speech to text back to speech again in a very Irish hermeneutic circle."⁴⁸ A contrast indeed from the very Germanic seminars led by Heidegger himself, who had never given up the role of master meticulously teaching texts to his disciples, even when among the brightest minds in French philosophy!⁴⁹ This Irish hermeneutical touch of course ended in a dinner, thanks to the hospitality of Emmanuel Martineau, where the wine flowed, tensions loosened, and conversations continued long into the night.

45 Kearney, *Imagination Now*, p. 310.

46 p. 176, below.

47 p. 206, below.

48 Kearney, *Imagination Now*, p. 311.

49 Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 146.

The significance of the personal exchange is certainly a major force behind the quality of the written volume that emerged from the conference. It is remarkable, first of all, for its appendix, a fascinating time capsule of reception history. Through the support of Jean Beaufret, the two young editors visited Fritz Heidegger in the Heidegger family house in Messkirch where Heidegger was born and where they stayed several days. Fritz, who helped them gather an extensive number of passages by Heidegger concerning God or theology – he insisted his brother was really more of a theologian than a philosopher! – some of which were previously unpublished at the time in French and even in German (rendered here in French thanks to Beaufret and Greisch). While the conversations of the day are cloaked in time and memory and the impact they had on the thinking of those present, the written chapters based on them remain of great interest. Some of these chapters are notable for the role that they have played in the history leading to the present moment. Others are quite striking in their contemporaneity, as they give their own answers to questions that we are still asking of each other today. Amidst the intriguing diversity of ideas presented here, three areas stand out as especially worthy of our attention: (I) God and the horizon of being, (II) the irreducible discourses of “philosophy” and “theology” and (III) the significance of the Hebraic heritage.

3 God and the Horizon of Being

During the initial phases of Heidegger’s reception in France, the critique of his engagement with God generally came from the outside, while those trained as Heideggerians had little interest in religious concerns. It was around the time of this colloquium, according to Janicaud, that we begin to find “a more critical perspective” from the inside.⁵⁰ The most significant effort in this regard is surely already well-known to the English-speaking world: Marion’s contribution this conference, “*Double idolâtrie: Remarques sur la différence ontologique et la pensée de Dieu*” would later make up the core of the second chapter of *Dieu sans l’être* (1982), translated in 1991 and his only book available in English for many years.⁵¹ However, when this paper was written for the 1979 Colloquium, Marion did not yet have these ambitions. It was still conceived of as a continuation of his earlier work, *L’idole et la Distance* (1977) which had quite recently

⁵⁰ Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 289.

⁵¹ Translated by Thomas Carlson as *God without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

set off sparks on the Parisian scene.⁵² O'Leary names this book as one of the primary sources of inspiration for this conference, and indeed, a large number of contributors find themselves in direct or indirect dialogue with Marion.⁵³ Its influence was also widely recognized as a central achievement by reviewers of the conference volume: Jean Grondin recognized Marion's prior text as "one of the most successful attempts to open the question of Heidegger and theology,"⁵⁴ and N.D. O'Donaghue highlights it as "perhaps the main theological event of the late seventies in France."⁵⁵

Briefly, *The Idol and Distance* affirmed with Nietzsche that, yes, the "god" defined by metaphysics was indeed dead; except that Marion also argues that this was never God in the first place, merely a "conceptual idol." Marion agreed that the idols must indeed fall, yet not all ways of speaking about God would fall under metaphysics and thus fall under Heidegger's critique of ontotheology. This does not yet give a positive solution in philosophical terms; one must approach God by "distance" which assumes the Divine incomprehensibility which becomes apparent once again in the wake of the death of the idol gods. Unlike Nietzsche, Marion states it is precisely there that God reveals himself: "the absence of God is a mode of the presence of God." The 1979 Colloquium was thus an excellent opportunity for Marion to extend these reflections with a more detailed engagement with Heidegger.

The continuity of these projects is evident in the final chapter of HQD, which gives Marion's response to five primary objections (or rather, his "objection to a few responses") to *The Idol and Distance* and "its prolongations here."⁵⁶ While they come both from the conference participants and from other recent publications, many of them may startle the reader with their contemporaneity: 1) on the terms "idol" and "icon" – he argues it is indeed legitimate to adopt them for use as philosophical concepts beyond their original biblical or Byzantine context (in response to Breton and Villela-Petit). It is worth pausing to report this gem: "Whoever wants to know whether or not he is an idolater has only to ask ... if he can critique the figure [of the divine], or if, to the contrary, it is this figure who critiques him – in other words, imposes on him conversion,

52 pp. 207–208, below.

53 p. 176 fn 1, below; incidentally, Marion himself was unexpectedly unable to attend the conference in person, but contributors had been given texts, including his, to read in advance. See Marion's interview with Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, p. 395.

54 Jean Grondin, "Heidegger et la théologie: A propos de quelques ouvrages récents." *Archives de Philosophie* 46:3 (July–September, 1983), pp. 459–464, at p. 463.

55 O'Donaghue, "Heidegger et la question de Dieu," 274.

56 HQD, p. 335.

the only non-suspect form of self-critique.”⁵⁷ (2) On metaphysics – he uses the term only in Heidegger’s limited sense (objections on this point come from outside readers, not from his Heideggerian-sympathetic audience); (3) on Thomas Aquinas, whether he an ontotheologian – Marion’s position at this point is still a strict yes⁵⁸ (once again, all direct challenges here coming from readers outside the conference); (4) On God as *Causa sui* (in response to Breton) – Marion concedes it should be understood as a symbolic culmination of ontotheology, not as a blanket description of the term’s varied historical uses; (5) On his “distance” vs. Heidegger’s “ontological difference” (in response to O’Leary) – that distance opens up a higher “hermeneutic,” that of the gift, although he admits the philosophical details are yet to be worked out (he will do this in the phenomenological phase of his work, notably *Étant donné*).

But what is notably absent here is a response to the “orthodox Heideggerians,” represented at this conference by the Master, Jean Beaufret, who had been a significant influence on Marion’s philosophical education as his *khâgne* teacher,⁵⁹ as well as François Fédier and François Vézin, Beaufret’s two closest students and associates (although Vézin was an active participant at the colloquium, he did not write for the volume). Up to this point of his education, Marion had been considered one of Beaufret’s Heideggerian flock, but he singles out the debate from this conference as the moment when he would shed his Heideggerian “armor.”⁶⁰ The Heideggerians, too, avoided any direct reference to Marion. How, then, are we to understand this supposedly decisive confrontation?

3.1 *Heidegger’s Double Idolatry*

Marion’s “Double Idolatry” begins with a brief clarification of terms introduced in his last book, “idol” and “icon.” Atheism is one such form of idolatry, for it does not reach God, only an idolatrous conception of a “God” that could easily be rejected.⁶¹ (§2) And yet the positive formulations of God bound by

57 HQD, p. 337. In support of his position on this point he also cites Breton as well as Jean-Yves Lacoste’s 1977 review in *Resurrection* 56, pp. 78–82.

58 He will correct this reading in a 1995 essay “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théologie” (appended as an eighth chapter to subsequent editions of *Dieu sans l’être*), where he recognizes the nuance of Thomas who avoids ontotheology, even if he paved the way for centuries of ontotheology to come by refusing to give God’s primary name as Love.

59 To be admitted to the elite École normale supérieure or other grands écoles, students must pass a very competitive entrance exam, which they study for with several years of preparatory classes after high school, informally named the *hypokhâgne* and *khâgne*.

60 Marion, *Rigor of Things*, p. 9.

61 HQD, p. 72.

any concepts fall under the same error. If the “God” of morality is one common idol, the “God” of ontotheology is even more pervasive. In § 3, Marion takes up Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysical tradition. Forgetful of the ontological difference between beings and being, such a metaphysical philosophy clears a place for the conceptual idol of “God” through a metaphysical concept of *causa sui* that inscribes him as a Supreme Being bound to the same rules as other beings, and which leads to the conceptual idolatry that results in atheism. If we truly wanted to escape such idolatry, to move from “God” to *God*, we would need to free our thinking still further.

But has Heidegger taken us far enough? (§ 4) Just as Nietzsche’s collapse of the idolatrous moral God still returns to an idolatry of the will to power, Marion argues that Heidegger’s collapse of the idolatrous ontotheology leads into a new idolatry, “more subtle, more insistant, and hence more dangerous”.⁶² no longer of beings, but still that of being, which continues to reign over God and creature alike. A passage from “Letter on Humanism” makes this especially clear:

Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word “God” is to signify.⁶³

Is this not to return our thinking of God to the finite concepts we are able to formulate on our own grounds, to establish the infinite on finite terms? This is the very definition of idolatry; an idol rooted to the finite aims of Dasein determining the conditions of truth and appearing.

If we cannot think God by concepts, which demand a finite comprehensive grasp, Marion suggests that God can yet be thought by love. Love cannot be understood as merely a concept like any other concept, for it gives itself over, abandons itself freely; love alone comes without any prior conditions, even our acceptance.⁶⁴ To meet it we cannot aim for it, achieve it, or comprehend it in our grasp; such things are the undoing of love, in placing it again under our control and our conditions. To meet it we need only accept its gift, by giving ourselves over to receive it. Marion will continue to draw on Heidegger as a resource for thinking in his later work. But this critique, and the

62 HQD, p. 81.

63 Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 267; GA 9, p. 351.

64 HQD, pp. 89–91, p. 216, below.

response it provoked, was decisive. "From that point on it was clearer than ever: I was no longer a Heideggerian."⁶⁵

3.2 *The Heideggerian Response*

The orthodox Heideggerians, here, do not openly acknowledge that fact, nor, it seems, Marion's argument. With his characteristic polemical and charismatic panache (launching a chicken-themed barb from La Fontaine indirectly at Marion, who later responded in kind),⁶⁶ Jean Beaufret insists that philosophy and theology are two different paths. He thus cites with approval Heidegger's rejection of Ricoeur's concern about the Hebraic heritage: there is no need to mix up the prophets and the philosophers. Heidegger would thus second Luther's skepticism that one could not do philosophy without losing one's faith; but where Luther chose to keep his faith Heidegger chose to keep his philosophy. For Beaufret, one must reject the practice of the medievals, who tried to invent a philosophy to justify their religious doctrines. Questioning being is no casual vocation one can inhabit from time to time like a summer home in the country. Philosophy is serious business and must be protected from such meddling. He illustrates this separation through Heidegger's reading of Echart, explaining how Heidegger's fourfold has nothing to do with the "theology" of a God who created heaven and earth.⁶⁷ The theologians have the right to read whatever they like, and so study of Heidegger need not be forbidden to them, but one should think twice before concluding that Heidegger has something to teach them in their wholly heterogenous task.

Yet while Beaufret's title traces the scope as "Heidegger and Theology," Fédier's targets the conference theme with his contribution "Heidegger and God." As Fédier's exegesis of sources explains, Heidegger has no faith, and while he is not necessarily an atheist, he has clearly taken his distance from Christianity. Yet for all of us, Heidegger claims, the gods have fled, and it is from this absence, where we await the god to save us, that we must come to a true thinking of

65 Marion, *Heidegger in France*, p. 395; p. 214, below.

66 Beaufret declares "one would have to learn to read [this passage of "Letter on Humanism"] otherwise than in the bind of 'a chicken who would come across a fork'" (*un poule qui aurait trouvé une fourchette*), HQD, p. 50. In *Dieu sans l'être*, Marion writes, "playing on that occasion the role of the 'chicken,' I would now like to talk about 'the fork,'" p. 76. Upon the conclusion of his argument, Marion fires back at Beaufret, "For if the chicken can be astonished to find a fork, it may occur that some find themselves 'ashamed like a fox caught by a chicken.'" (*Honteux comme un renard qu'une poule aurait pris*), p. 80. (Carlson's English translation spares us confusion by rendering these sentences less literally, pp. 49, 52.)

67 HQD, p. 54.

being. At the same time, we should acknowledge that while Heidegger admits in 1951 that he “would never try to think about God through being” it remains the case that, if God is to be encountered in human experience, “the experience of God and of his manifestation achieves itself in the dimension of being.”⁶⁸ Fédier clarifies further: this authentic experience of Christianity is that which is found in the scriptures, not in Church doctrine, or “theology,” that is, the Latinized Aristotle which has sometimes been called a “Christian philosophy.” If the latter is quite far from Heidegger, the former may not be so far from the Greek world that Heidegger is concerned with. The distinction remains clear: “Thinking being is the task of thinking, not of theology – theology’s task is to think God.”⁶⁹ And yet, there may be quite a distance, indeed, a “radical heterogeneity” between the God thought by this conceptualizing theology and Jesus Christ experienced in love. Fédier thus concludes by putting a question to the theologians: “Perhaps thinking about God is not the summit of the Christian *life*?”⁷⁰

3.3 *Lost in Translation*

Where Marion challenges Heideggerian approaches as inadequate to discuss God, it seems that if the Heideggerians have any response to Marion, it is this: if you only read Heidegger with a little more nuance, your problems would simply vanish. Did they fail to see what Marion tries to critique, or did Marion’s failure to nuance Heidegger to their liking rightly negate his question?

This tension is well illustrated in an interview where Marion later recounts a quote from Heidegger which served as inspiration for this initial essay: “God, if he is, is a being.” *“Auch der Gott ist, wenn er ist, ein Seiender.”*⁷¹ Marion comments:

Right there, such questions! First the obvious, banal question, which is in fact secondary, “Does God exist?” It presupposes another question, or rather, a response prior to the question: “Must God be?” And that was too unbearable for me – as if God had any obligation, and above all the obligation to be! Hence a double refusal: of the death of God and above all that God had to be!⁷²

68 HQD, p. 58, citing Heidegger’s comments in Zürich, 1951.

69 HQD, p. 63.

70 HQD, p. 65.

71 HQD, p. 86, citing Heidegger’s “Die Kehre”; English translation by William Lovitt in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York & London: Garland Publishing: 1977), p. 47.

72 Marion, *Heidegger in France*, p. 395.

While neither Fédier nor Beaufret comment on this particular text, one can easily imagine it being added to their many attempts to parse out from the text Heidegger's different senses of "God," "the god," "divinities," "the last god," "the sacred." Must one assume, as Marion does, that "*der Gott*" in this context is the "God" of Christian Revelation rather than "a god" of an earthly and poetic sort, as Lovitt's English translation interprets it?⁷³ And yet, whether we argue for uppercase or lowercase, Marion's primary point remains: the God who reveals himself in the scriptures has no real place in Heidegger. The strict Heideggerians either fail to recognize the significance of Marion's critique, or refuse to.

In *Dieu sans l'être* (1982), Marion thus asks, as if in exasperation, "How is it that [my] question arouses no other response than the implicit accusation of misinterpretation or the assurance of its banality?"⁷⁴ This question comes from §5 of chapter 2, a new section appended to his "*Double idolâtrie*" (§1–4) which begins with a short paragraph explaining the colloquium and volume and situating itself as an explicit response to the papers of Beaufret and Fédier. In these pages, Marion responds to exegesis with more exegesis, critiquing the Heideggerians especially for "minimizing the idolatrous violence" of the "Letter on Humanism," which is clear in Beaufret's interpretations: "Even more sacred than every God is consequently the world";⁷⁵ and "the Deity ... is no longer even the Deity but a vain pretension of a being, reputed to be All-Powerful, who usurps the center of that which he represents only one region."⁷⁶

This is no mere semantic quibble, says Marion: as soon as one defines God as being or places him in the horizon of being, he must take his place within the Fourfold alongside the mortals and sky and earth. To claim for God any prior condition like "being" is to negate claims of his absolute center as an "usurpation," as in Beaufret's exegesis, where God must be decentered to make room for the fourfold, which alone can make the world.⁷⁷ This, Marion claims, is exactly the point, and only serves to illustrate further his central thesis that Heidegger collapses "God" into a region of finite being, thus committing a second idolatry. Fédier's exegesis of this same passage is more amenable to Marion's mind, for he states that Heidegger does not pretend to submit God to being, but simply that every time we think God we must think being. And yet, by this reading, we must admit certain preliminary conditions: "All that is in the world, and even

73 Janicaud gives a similar critique of Marion on this point, *Heidegger in France*, p. 292.

74 Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 50.

75 HQD, p. 52.

76 HQD, p. 51.

77 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 50.

that which *comes* into it, like the god, is lit up by the light of being.”⁷⁸ Yet Marion will ask, “is the ‘light of being’ qualified to accommodate every revelation?” Is it enough to illuminate the “folly” of the “Jew on the cross”?⁷⁹

4 Irreducible Heteronomy: How to Negotiate Two Discourses

Are there indeed things that require a different manner of illumination than the light of being? If so, how would we categorize this different light, or what is illuminated by it? This brings us to another area of concern, which we might call a negotiation of the borders of philosophy and theology. In the foreword Kearney and O’Leary highlight a similar moment of crisis in each, a loss of direction, and a need to return to their respective traditions. But how would this work? Are the theologians who had finally been liberated from textbook Thomism now being asked to “substitute Heidegger’s spectacles for Scholastic ones”?⁸⁰ Kearney and O’Leary have nothing like this in mind. By their reading, Heidegger left it as an “open question” how to reconcile the discourses, yet it remains one with critical relevance for the formulation of the task for philosophers as well as the task for theologians.⁸¹ For, as Stanislas Breton observes here, the philosopher and the theologian are both unsure of who they are or what they must do today, almost “ashamed to exist” in this new world dominated by science; “after having been kings, they wonder whether they even have the right to be the ‘handmaids’ of the new lords.”⁸² It is not surprising, then, if theologians look to Heidegger for instruction on how to “step back,” for both theologians and philosophers require a renewed understanding of their traditions in the wake of the end of metaphysics.

4.1 *Negotiating the Terms of Comparison*

This approach is given more definition for many of the contributors by another inspiration behind the theme of the 1979 Colloquium: *The Later Heidegger and Theology*. The significance of this book is that it presents for an English audience the German debate culminating in the paper Heinrich Ott delivered to

78 HQD, p. 65.

79 Marion, *God without Being*, p. 52.

80 This question is how William J. Richardson, SJ, summarizes the concerns of many Catholic theologians during Vatican II, “Heidegger and Theology,” *Theological Studies* 26:1 (1965), pp. 86–100 at p. 87.

81 p. 158, below.

82 HQD, p. 288.

the “old Marburgers” (Bultmann’s former students) at a 1960 theology conference which Heidegger attended.⁸³ Ott argues here that Heidegger in his later work is in fact closer to Barth than to Bultmann, as he refuses any approach to God that would put him in terms of human reason. Barth, of course, rejected the Catholic strategy of finding a common ground for reason, famously referring to the *analogia entis* as an “invention of the antichrist.” Barth and the later Heidegger are thus similarly opposed to onto-theology, according to Ott, and can be seen instead to call for the recognition of a new kind of “correspondence” between two ways of responsive receiving which refuses to capture what it aims at within traditional conceptual frames.

Heidegger gave his blessing to Ott’s interpretation and proposed that the relation be understood according to the four terms of an *analogia proportionalitatis*, that is, $a : b :: c : d$. Rather than collapse the functions or objects of philosophy and theology under a shared predicate (as in the more common *analogia attributionis*, or $a : b :: c : b$), one can see here a similarity of relations between four terms which are themselves dissimilar. In Heidegger’s case, Robinson summarizes it thus: “As philosophical thinking is related to being, when being speaks to thinking, so faith’s thinking is related to God, when God is revealed in his word.”⁸⁴ In other words, rather than try to carve a space for God in the Heideggerian horizon alongside being, above it, or below it, Ott’s tactic exempts Heidegger from this question, demanding instead that theology develop its own terms and devices while taking structural inspiration from the Heideggerian thinking of being. This allows both kinds of questioning as parallel tracks, not one subordinate to the other. It is also a very strategic move for Heidegger: if it was primarily theologians who took interest in Heidegger after his Naziism had damaged his credibility in Germany, it was in his interests to encourage this study; all the better if he could do so in a way that would prevent them from interfering with what he was doing. This proportional approach thus seems to offer a way out of the stalemate that arises between those who want to reject or underplay either term of this relation.

In the 1979 Colloquium, the strict Heideggerians, along with Villela-Petit, want to reject the autonomy of theological thinking: one simply cannot escape being when one talks about God. Any thinking, theology or not, would have to fall under the conditions of being, and thus whether they declare it openly or not, philosophy would be truly the queen of the sciences. Levinas and Marion,

83 Heinrich Ott, “What is Systematic Theology?” in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds, *The Later Heidegger and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 77–111; see pp. 166–168, below.

84 Ibid., p. 43.

while they do not completely reverse the subordination, certainly might be suspected of tipping the scale of the proportion heavily to the other side. Levinas argues that the ethical injunction of the prophets can in no way can be understood through the totalizing horizon of being.⁸⁵ At this point of his work, Marion is still turning to theological thinking precisely at the points where he considers philosophical thinking falls short, but he nevertheless believes these shortcomings are phenomenologically articulable. Thus, while he professes an “irreducible heteronomy” between thinking and revelation, it’s doubtful he would be content to let philosophy part ways on its own path as separate and equal to theology.

In contrast to the contributors whose views put pressure on one side or the other, for those formed in hermeneutics, a proportional relationship is a perfect invitation. It seems to be an ideal way to free theological thinking from the authority of philosophy without positing a new, totalizing hierarchy, or at least to suspend final judgment on the question. Of course, one must first make a decision about exactly *what* is comparably heterogeneous. The relation is often framed through a number of different terms which aren’t exactly exchangeable, and which aren’t so simply captured by the simple label of “philosophy and theology.” As Philippe Capelle would later remark, the numerous attempts at such comparisons in Heidegger read as “a vague and vast constellation rightly in search of its axis.”⁸⁶ In this one thinker, Capelle argues, one must distinguish at least three possible understandings of philosophy that emerge across the development of Heidegger’s thought, as correlated to three primary ways of relating to theological themes (which are not all properly labeled “theology” plain and simple). We might further Capelle’s point, and argue that other definitions of theology outside those that Heidegger explicitly considered might push the debate further still.

Yet, as Capelle acknowledges, such work would have been impossible before the publication of scholarly texts that allow a clear periodization of Heidegger’s development. As such resources were lacking in 1979, it is hardly surprising to find that this one volume contains “a vast constellation” of such correlations, which raises a number of rich, complex ideas that are impossible to easily untangle. Levinas remarks on the June 24 discussion how quickly a “parallelism” or “non-convergence” emerged between the many different elaborations of the two themes of “Heidegger” and “theology.”⁸⁷ But in fact, while the major-

85 HQD, p. 264.

86 Philippe Capelle, *Philosophie et théologie dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Cerf, 1998, 2nd rev. ed. 2001), p. 9.

87 HQD, p. 259.

ity of contributors use the theme of the proportional analogy or other parallel comparisons, each seems to have their own interpretation, sometimes several, of *what* exactly is being compared. To name but a few, is it: (a) philosophy and faith that we are comparing? (Beaufret); (b) philosophy and Christian experience, or (c) philosophy and the *thinking* on the Christian experience? (both Fédier); (d) the thinking of being and the “thinking” of faith (strictly observing the quotation marks)? (O’Leary); (e) revelation and thinking, or the God who reveals himself and the “God” of the philosophers or poets (strictly observing quotation marks again)? (Marion); (f) theology and philosophy? (Kearney, Breton); (g) theological thinking and Heideggerian thinking? (Greisch); (h) Heidegger and theology; or (i) thinking from being and thinking from biblical texts? (Levinas and to some extent Villela-Petit). With the exception of Marion, Dupuy, and Laffoucrière, few proceed directly to the title’s theme of “Heidegger” and “the God question.” The diverse answers veer off into paths of consideration that no longer aim at precisely the same results. This plurality becomes all the more thought-provoking, and readers who do not tread carefully may lose their way between subtle and stark conflicts across the wide landscape of possibilities.

4.2 *Three Hermeneutic Responses*

In contrast to those who seek to sway the balance to one side or the other, Joseph O’Leary establishes plurality as the solution to finding equilibrium between the questions of Heidegger and those of believers. While he praises Marion’s development of “distance” and “icon” which allow a more positive sense of the alterity of Revelation than Barth’s absolute rupture,⁸⁸ he argues that it is “meaningless from a phenomenological point of view”⁸⁹ to try to unite under one horizon love and being (for example, by saying that all experiences are a gift of God). For O’Leary, no experience, in practice or theory, unites the two. It is as if Marion courts Monophysitism, the ancient heresy which conflates human nature with the Divine nature, thus covering over the integrity of created being.⁹⁰ O’Leary, by contrast, admits to courting the opposite extreme of Nestorianism, the heresy that completely separated the human and divine natures of Christ, which in this case means, “faith and thought differentiate themselves from one another without any of the two defining the other under its own categories.”⁹¹ Neither *requires* the other for its

88 HQD, p. 218.

89 HQD, p. 231.

90 HQD, p. 223.

91 HQD, p. 221.

full understanding; one can understand the Bible coherently without Heidegger, and Heidegger without the Bible. Nor does either one *help* the other to come to self-understanding; “there could be no Christian theory of being, neither would there be any possibility of thinking the phenomena of revelation in light of *Ereignis*.”⁹² For O’Leary, to unify faith and philosophy under one perspective is as arbitrary and incoherent as trying to combine Mozart and nuclear physics. The more we honestly seek after the two the more this difference comes out; humans live in the “domain of *Ereignis*” as well as “the domain of the Spirit,” and there is no third perspective, even in Revelation, that would reconcile the two, no phenomenological horizon that joins them both, no map that could correlate where they stand clearly in relation to each other.

Ultimately, O’Leary warns, clarifying our understanding of the thinking of being will only clarify our understanding of faith if theology has first understood its own task and its own domain. The virtue of Heidegger is precisely to underline the importance of this task. We are encouraged to mirror Heidegger’s “step back to” what has been covered over, to reinterpret the revealed texts “with all the questioning and creative radicality that Heidegger showed in his questioning of being.”⁹³ O’Leary models this himself through his Johanne reading of God as Spirit.

Jean Greisch takes a different approach to finding a balance. His masterful hermeneutic nuance delivered ever with a light touch, he asks: who is the Oedipus, and who is the Sphinx? Who questions who? Theology has learned so much from Heidegger, for example, the need to trace one’s own path of thinking from itself, not from outside authorities. Does Heidegger also have something to learn from theology? For Greisch, despite all his brushes with religious thinking, Heidegger has not really faced the question head on. Indeed, philosophers do not much like to cede their favorite role of Sphinx so easily, but theologians should not be so quick to let Heidegger off the hook.⁹⁴ Is it even possible that such a conversation should take place?

For Greisch, the initial indications leave us only with a negative clue: Heidegger and theology share a denunciation of ontotheology. But as for the positive, there is “no ecumenism of reason which guarantees in advance peaceful dialogue” – this was only an Enlightenment fairytale.⁹⁵ This does not mean we must be either left with empty comparisons, or that we should jettison a direct

92 Ibid.

93 HQD, pp. 256–257.

94 HQD, p. 190; p. 199, below.

95 HQD, p. 192.

dialogue. For theology and Heidegger are not like Mozart and nuclear physics, according to Greisch: they do seem to genuinely share ground. For a start, they have equal claim to the title of “thinking.” This means, following Heidegger, there is a proper way to resolve strife between them: a “*liebender Streit um die Sache selbst*,” a “lover’s quarrel” concerning the matter itself.⁹⁶ But how, exactly, this will play out is not something that can be decided in advance. We must roll up our sleeves and carry out the long and hard work of carefully reading the texts and weighing the tradition. Greisch’s own reading places Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* against Meister Eckhart’s, thus uncovering real and irreconcilable differences between Heideggerian serenity and Christian hope, yet with the open possibility that mutually enriching dialogue is not forever shut out.

Meanwhile, Richard Kearney’s contribution seeks other positive dimensions of this encounter. The later Heidegger does not want to critique the truth of Revelation proper to faith, as Kearney argues, “but only the false identification of this ‘truth’ with that of philosophy”; both are better off avoiding the “promiscuity” that reduces philosophy to Christianity (scholasticism) or Christianity to philosophy (German idealism). Both share the same error: they “dismiss the plurality of experience” of faith and of being and “reduce it to *one* totalitarian, hierarchical perspective.”⁹⁷ Thus Kearney sides with O’Leary on the pluralism of experience, and an (implicit) critique of Marion: “Those who critique Heidegger for reducing the God of transcendence to an ontological totality are themselves, despite themselves, part of a totalizing model.”⁹⁸ Heidegger has no interest in denying the transcendent God who would exist “beyond being.” He is simply a “nontheist,” concerned with preserving the separate space for his question of the horizon of being.⁹⁹

Once the difference is acknowledged, there is room for a fruitful dialogue, particularly through the proportional analogy between theological thinking on the experience of faith and the ontological thinking of being. Heidegger critiqued metaphysics for understanding being as permanent presence, substance, subsistence, prioritizing the actual over the possible.¹⁰⁰ Kearney thus suggests a similar liberating move for theology, setting “*posse*” over “*esse*,” in a remarkably early sketch of the “possible God,” twenty years before *The God*

96 HQD, pp. 192–193, where Greisch cites in French and German this line from Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism,” 256.

97 HQD, p. 150.

98 HQD, p. 150.

99 HQD, p. 151.

100 HQD, p. 145.

who May Be.¹⁰¹ Where the fully realized omnipotent God of metaphysics comes into tension with human freedom, a possible God “makes freedom possible,” “opposes every form of totalizing omnipotence” and consents to make himself vulnerable and dependent on his human “others” to build his kingdom.¹⁰² This helps avoid bad theodicies and totalizations: rather than “totalizing ego-centrism” of the metaphysical *Esse*-God, “the *Posse*-God of kenotic Love” is marked by “infinite opening to alterity.”¹⁰³ This vertical gap of infinite alterity (recognized in Levinas’ “face,” Marion’s “icon”) is significant as it is unique to theology, along with its genuinely eschatological dimension. Ignoring it will lead to “idolatry,” as will conflating it even with a philosophy like Heidegger’s which is non-totalizing and non-metaphysical. While the “possible” of faith must not be conflated with the “possible” of the thinking of being, each anticipates in some way a “redemptive and transfiguring experience” beyond the current moment (a technological world marked by the forgetting of being, as well as a world of injustice).¹⁰⁴ But ultimately faithful to the dialogical spirit of the event that he helped to curate, Kearney cedes his place with the invitation for a theological Sphinx to take up the task.

These three examples attempt in different ways to clear a space for theology to have an equal say. Indeed, as Greisch observes, this conference is notable for welcoming theological voices to the discussion.¹⁰⁵ While only Dupuy and O’Leary could claim the title of “theologian,” strictly speaking, there were nine Catholic clergy present, as O’Leary notes, all of whom would have received theological formation (and who would have been all the more conspicuous in the presence of a number of fervent atheists).¹⁰⁶ We must also note the presence of the Protestant Ricoeur (whose faith sometimes earned his dismissal as a “*curé*”) as well as Levinas, who openly draws from his Judaic tradition.¹⁰⁷ There was rightly reason for hope here that the dialogue between Heidegger and

101 The preface of *The God Who May Be* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001) cites this conference, as well as the Villanova conferences, as a source for these ideas; these ideas also appear in an early form in another French text, *Poétique du possible: Phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration* (Beauchesne Paris: 1984), especially chapter XII.

102 HQD, p. 166.

103 HQD, p. 167.

104 HQD, p. 177.

105 p. 198, below.

106 p. 177, below n. 4; this includes the parish priests, O’Leary and Greisch, as well as the Passionist priest Stanislas Breton and the Holy Ghost Father John Chisholm; the Benedictine Mark Patrick Hederman, OSB; the Dominicans Dominique Dubarle, OP and Bernard Dupuy, OP; the Jesuit Marcel Régner, SJ; and the auxiliary bishop of Paris, Rev. Daniel Pézéril.

107 Kearney, *Imagination Now*, pp. 309–310.

believers could become more than unidirectional, but serve as a real encounter that would bring each through what Ricoeur would call the “school of challenges” of the other.

And yet, this approach is not without risk. First, would hermeneutics then become kind of third discourse above both philosophy and theology, claiming to be able to situate the two and thus beginning an “onto-theology” in a new key? This is Marion’s concern: “what philosophical thinking is capable of on its own ... cannot be said because there is for us no third case by which it could be decided.”¹⁰⁸ This would be hermeneutical hypocrisy, of course, and the above authors explicitly recognize it as such. There is always the risk, however, that one might fail to practice what one preaches. To claim there is a distinction of a certain kind is not thereby to consistently respect it. Meanwhile, although Breton recognizes the danger of too quickly or too superficially conflating the two, he also warns against the danger of dividing them too far. At the heart of the question, Breton argues, a clear distinction matters little; whatever title one calls oneself, “the Spirit blows where it will, and it will recognize its own.”¹⁰⁹ Lacoste cites these words approvingly, adding: “God does not belong to the philosopher, nor to the theologian, nor to the religious man.”¹¹⁰

However, at times distinctions of roles can be necessary, not in principle, but in practice, to protect the integrity of a quieter voice against the voice that loudly dominates every conversation. We might then wonder: has the conversation as it is played out here really left enough room for theology to serve as a Sphinx against the philosopher’s compulsive appropriation of this role? Greisch observes that Janicaud’s complaints of the “theological turn” never took the time to ask what theology was, exactly, or whether the term should be assumed as monolithic.¹¹¹ We might apply this same concern to the questions here. Which theology, after all, are we speaking about? For both Beaufret and Fédier, at least, it seems the target is a scholastic metaphysics. But of course, by 1979, theology had opened up many more paths than ontotheological metaphysics. Is there room here for more than one theological approach?

108 Report in *Berichte aus der Arbeit der Evangelischen Akademie Hofgeismar*, 1, 1954 (trans. Hart and Maraud, p. 65), as quoted in *God Without Being*, p. 52.

109 HQD, p. 288.

110 p. 174, below.

111 pp. 197–198, below.

5 The Hebraic Tradition

This concern brings us to a final, critical point. Can Heidegger really be brought into dialogue with theological thinking without recognizing the importance of the scriptures, and in particular, the Jewish scriptures? The foreword to this conference writes of the need to “recognize and think anew our double belonging to the truth of being unveiled by Parmenides, Plato, and Greek philosophy and the truth of the transcendent God announced by Moses, the prophets, and Christ.”¹¹² Or, as Matthew Arnold writes, “Hebraism and Hellenism – between these two points of influence moves our world.” These words flatly refuse any supersessionism, even in philosophy.

Of course, on this point, Heidegger’s omission was not innocent. While Heidegger’s Nazism and antisemitism were not known in 1979 to the forensic detail we have today, they were not unknown either. Indeed, the lives of a number of the participants of the Colloquium had been touched by the heinous ideology Heidegger embraced. Levinas’ 1974 *Otherwise than Being* confronts the reader with a dedication to “those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists,” listing in Hebrew the names of family members lost in the Shoah. Levinas and Ricoeur, both soldiers in the French army, were captured early and spent most of the war as prisoners. Though Ireland was politically neutral in the conflict, Richard Kearney’s father enlisted as a doctor in the Royal Navy, healing the wounded but bearing the scars of war. Jean-Luc Marion’s father spent five years in a brutal Internment Camp for resisting Hitler’s cause by refusing to share with the Nazis his expertise as a weapons engineer. He returned alive but emaciated to have a son who would go on to recount many years later: “Under normal circumstances, he should not have come home, and my birth was a miracle. These kinds of things mark you.”¹¹³ Though some present at the Irish College may have believed Heidegger’s post-war cover story defending his brief tenure as Rector of Freiberg – he was only trying to mitigate Nazi damage to the academy, and after all he did have Jewish colleagues, friends, and lovers – others were not naïve to the issues surrounding Heidegger, nor were they under the spell of the Magus of Messkirch, even then. At this 1979 Colloquium, at least, they issued their challenges primarily on philosophical turf.¹¹⁴

¹¹² HQD, p. 29, p. 157, below.

¹¹³ *Rigor of Things*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 13.

¹¹⁴ pp. 204–205, below; other authors have examined these sensitive issues at greater length in both political details and philosophical nuance. See for example, Elliot R. Wolfson,

5.1 *The Forgetting of the Prophetic Tradition*

In the first contribution of the volume Ricoeur reformulates his challenge to Heidegger at Cerisy, in a brief yet incisive critique. It is not enough to recognize that Heidegger was influenced by the Gospels and Christian theology, that he was strongly influenced by Kierkegaard or Augustine: "Does the task of rethinking the Christian tradition by a 'step back' not demand that one recognize the radically Hebraic dimension of Christianity, which is first rooted in Judaism and only afterwards in the Greek tradition?"¹¹⁵ Without the Psalms and prophets, the Hebraic Messiah and his Hebraic followers, what is even left of Christianity? Robbed of this essential heritage it comes as little surprise that Christ would then be competing with Apollo and Dionysius for Heidegger's attention in his poetic use of Hölderlin. Emmanuel Levinas furthers this point, criticizing theologians for too quickly looking to Heidegger for a renewal of their thinking, as if they feared that the way of understanding suggested by the biblical tradition "had no vigor or intellectual fecundity of its own."¹¹⁶ By passing over the core of the prophetic tradition, Levinas argues, Heidegger has neglected the ethical injunction, the concern for justice, the recognition of the other which is prior to any discussion of ontological difference.

Some contributors to this conference try to mediate the differences. Mark Patrick Hederman gives a reading of Heidegger that could temper Levinas', offering other texts that seem to indicate that Heidegger in his poetic influences did have a sense of the ethical and the religious. Maria Villela-Petit argues that the Hebrew Scriptures should be seen as the origin of the language of theology, perhaps parallel to Heidegger's Hölderlin, granting a new reserve of powerful symbols that can expand and confirm Heidegger's fourfold. This follows from a scriptural account of "idolatry," which she sets against Marion's appropriation of the term for phenomenological uses. Of course, as Villela-Petit uses the text of the scriptures in the same register as Hölderlin's poetry, it might be argued, she consents to them being placed under Heidegger's authority.

While this conference considered both philosophical and theological questions, the larger number of philosophers meant less attention was paid to the depths of the Hebraic, biblical heritage, and once again, the lack of a clear

The Duplicity of Philosophy's Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), who concludes, "I will repeat without hesitation or ambiguity that Heidegger's indiscretions and lapses in judgment were deliberate and reflect poorly on him, no matter how sublime his thinking. I would contend nonetheless that it is equally misguided to say either that Heidegger's anti-Semitic tendencies have nothing to do with his philosophy or that they are at its core." p. 170.

115 p. 175, below; for the original Cerisy exchange see p. 183, below, citing HQD, p. 42.

116 HQD, pp. 259–260.

corpus of Heideggerian texts would have made any analysis of this point only partial and provisional. One would need to wait another ten years for Marlène Zarader to take Ricoeur's challenge as an invitation. *The Unthought Debt* opens with Ricoeur's lines from this volume (reprinted here, p. 175, below) and illustrates in depth many ways in which Heidegger made use of the Hebraic tradition without acknowledging it, or arrived at promising places of resonance with it, particularly in language, the hearing of the call, and Heidegger's almost scriptural meditation on poetry.¹¹⁷

5.2 *The Forgetting of Creation*

But of the contributors of the 1979 Colloquium, the most explicit and extended attention to the challenge of the Hebrew scriptures comes from Bernard Dupuy, a Dominican who played a significant role in Christian-Jewish dialogue in France and Rome. Dupuy calls attention to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics":

[A]nyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth already has the answer to the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" before it is even asked: beings, with the exception of God Himself, are created by Him. God Himself "is" as the uncreated Creator ... by referring to safety in faith as a special way of standing in the truth, we are not saying that citing the words of the Bible, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth, etc.," represents an answer to our question. Quite aside from whether this sentence of the Bible is true or untrue for faith, it can represent no answer at all to our question, because it has no relation to this question. It has no relation to it, because it simply cannot come into such a relation.¹¹⁸

This passage is well known to those who seek to understand Heidegger's relation to theology, and indeed, is cited by several other colloquium participants. Creation is referenced here in opposition to the primary philosophical question, the question of being, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Heidegger argues that anyone who appeals to the creating work of God has given a lazy, easy answer that eliminates this essential question of being,

117 Marlène Zarader, *La dette impensée: Heidegger et l'héritage hébraïque* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990; 2nd ed. Vrin, 2013); trans. Bettina Bergo as *The Unthought Debt: Heidegger and the Hebraic Heritage* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press: 2006).

118 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 7–8 [GA, pp. 5–6].

without really listening to it or letting it challenge one's thinking. Heidegger thus concedes that there may be "a certain way" in which the one who believes in creation can "emulate and participate in" the question of questions, "but he cannot authentically question without giving himself up as a believer, with all the consequences of this step. He can act only 'as if.'"¹¹⁹ It is essentially a game of pretending that the question is a live one, when in fact it is already firmly settled in the believer's mind. Heidegger concludes: "A 'Christian philosophy' is a round square and a misunderstanding."¹²⁰ What we see here is a dismissal of the possibility of Christian thinking by its immediate identification with faith, and the immediate identification of faith with fundamentalist dogmatism.

But Dupuy brings up this passage not to reference the question of Christian philosophers, but to challenge the way that Heidegger's method entirely ignores one of the most central elements of the Jewish scriptures: this passage was at the time Heidegger's only known mention of the term "creation." Heidegger has interpreted creation as the sufficient explanation to the question of being, whether this is fundamentalist fideism or an appeal to metaphysical efficient causality (Beaufret and Fédier interpret it by the latter). But, Dupuy argues, this is a flat refusal of the God of Israel, whose primary names of "Creator" and "Father" have nothing to do with Aristotelian causality and the metaphysical tradition. If Heidegger had actually heeded the tradition where this word "creation" is rooted, he would have recognized that it does not erase the "question of questions," but raises it all the more profoundly. Creation is not a philosophical, but a theological question, Marion stresses here.¹²¹

Lacoste furthers this point in his preface: had Heidegger paid even a fraction of the linguistic attention to Hebrew that he paid to Greek or German, he would have recognized that the biblical word for "creation" (*bâra'*) is used exclusively as an action of God. Some verbs of human activity like "making" (*âsâh*), "molding" (*yâçâr*), and so on, are used to describe God's creating activity (as when he forms man out of clay), but the only legitimate subject of *bâra'* is God.¹²² This clear linguistic distinction indicates all the more that to conflate the exclusively divine "creation" and any kind of creaturely "fabricating" is

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid., 8 [6].

121 pp. 219–220, below.

122 p. 173, below; for more on this point see the very informative entry on "Création" by Paul Beauchamp and Irène Fernandez in Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed, *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, (Paris: Quadrige, 1998), pp. 340–348. See also Kearney's *Wake of the Imagination* for a discussion of *yâçâr* and how the "creating" of God in this sense can be understood to relate to the human power of imagination, pp. 37–78.

the very definition of idolatry for the Jewish scriptures. God's creative action, according to the Hebraic tradition, is very clearly outside any worldly causality.

This is but one example of how the forgetting of the Hebraic tradition also empties the Christian tradition. But it would be unfair to pin this flaw to Heidegger without recognizing where it comes from: this neglect of the scriptural tradition was a result of his Christian influences. Luther's Marcionism meant he had very little concern for the Old Testament, and in his work one finds a strong intellectual antisemitism, in *On the Romans*, for example. Heidegger would have been primed for such simplifications of the scriptural tradition after the neo-Scholastic theology he learned in his student years.¹²³ When the scholastic reading Exodus of 3:14 links the primary name of God to *ipsum esse*, and interprets it primarily based on its function in the subsequent metaphysical system, one could argue that these scholastics are guilty of this same forgetting of their own Hebraic roots (and sometimes the same antisemitism, which was deeply rooted in Heidegger's traditional Bavarian Catholic culture). Kearney also approaches the above passage from "Introduction to Metaphysics," arguing that with the adoption of *posse* the theological meaning of creation necessarily breaks out of any ontotheological causality: "It's possible that we could only really understand the human being as free if we understand divine 'creation' as a possibilization of a world and not as its realization."¹²⁴ No easy answers here would dismiss the task of thinking, and freedom would then be a matter of accepting or refusing this "world possibilized by God." This philosophical suggestion to theology has been developed in some cases, but not always as widely as it merits. As O'Leary argues, even after the scripture-focused theology legitimated by Vatican II, "uncritical reliance on metaphysics, or on bland syntheses of the biblical and philosophical, has by no means been overcome."¹²⁵ Any theology of creation that prefers scholastic metaphysical categories to the rich literary and symbolic meaning of the Priestly account of Genesis 1–2:4a and the older "J" account of Genesis 2:2:4bff is an impoverishment indeed.

Then again, O'Leary would also support Stanislas Breton, who challenges those who try to eliminate the metaphysical tradition too quickly, wryly noting ontotheology seems to have become the new "quasi-original sin."¹²⁶ Through calling attention to the Neo-Platonic strains of the tradition, Breton argues that metaphysics, and even the concept of "*causa sui*," is more nuanced and less

123 See Fergus Kerr on this point; *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997), pp. 66–67.

124 HQD, p. 163.

125 p. 185, below.

126 HQD, p. 272; p. 179, below, pp. 184–185, below.

immediately “idolatrous” than some of these authors assume. For Breton, this much-maligned Latin theology may still have something to teach us! Greisch, too, lives up to his advice here to “Hasten slowly,”¹²⁷ noting that the urgency with which some are striving to eliminate ontotheology is rather suspicious, “like the furtive burial of a cadaver.”¹²⁸ It takes time and nuance to place a theoretical possibility in history; it would take some years to draw out the association of the blanket term “metaphysics” or “ontotheology” to a more precise historical period beginning with Suarez. Or, as Lacoste suggests, we might also see metaphysics not as a monolithic historical period that must be disposed of once and for all, but as a temptation that repeatedly emerges in thinking.¹²⁹

6 The Question of God Forty Years Later

There are many more points of interest from this volume, and many more conversations took place than are printed here. We have no chapter from Emmanuel Martineau, a Heideggerian who within a few short years would release the first full (and illicit) French translation of *Sein und Zeit*; nor do we have a piece from the Heideggerian François Vézin, who instead received Beaufret’s blessing to take charge of the official Gallimard translation, which came out a year after that (in the harsh and bitter feud which followed, Martineau’s readability was widely preferred to Vézin’s obscure Germano-French, but this 1979 Colloquium was prior to their definitive break).¹³⁰ Vézin nevertheless was an important part of the Heideggerian response to Marion’s provocation, while Martineau captivated Levinas by suggesting that Augustine’s *veritas lucens* (illuminating truth) could refer to the ontological horizon and the *veritas redarguens* (accusing truth) could refer to revelation; all that remains of this animated exchange is a brief reference in the chapter by Levinas.¹³¹ Yet, this reminds us all the more that the history of philosophy is made up of events and encounters as much as the reading of texts, and that the question

127 p. 207, below.

128 HQD, p. 191.

129 pp. 171–172, below.

130 Heidegger, *L’être et temps*, trans. Emmanuel Martineau (Paris: Authentica, 1985), and trans. by Frédéric Vézin (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). The ensuing drama was such that Janicaud dedicates the better part of a chapter to the affair: see chapter 9, “Letter and the Spirit” of *Heidegger in France*, pp. 190–207.

131 HQD, p. 261; see Augustine’s *Confessions*, X, 23, 34.

of God has been a significant part of this discourse in France and elsewhere. What follows below is a testimony to the importance of these dialogues and exchanges whose reverberations are still felt by their participants, whose thinking in turn continues to make an impact on us today.