Toward the Later Heidegger

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The hope of cutting through the Gordian knot of problems inherited from the tradition so as to make a new beginning is one which has been at the heart of every great philosopher—Husserl, Kant, and Hegel to name but a few. Heidegger too must be counted among the ranks of original philosophers, original not only in that he seeks to go back to the primordial experience of philosophical thought, but original also in that he doesn’t simply repeat that beginning. Rather he lets that experience speak in a new, original way. It is with Heidegger, the pioneer, that Professor Caputo is concerned in his book, and he attempts to show that this two-fold originality of Heidegger’s overcoming of metaphysics has an analogue in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart.

This is not to say that Caputo attempts to make Eckhart into a 14th century Heideggerian, or to make Heidegger into an Eckhartian mystic. Caputo describes the mystical element when he writes: “This likeness of Heidegger to the mystic, this kinship between overcoming metaphysics and the mystical leap, is what we mean by the mystical element in Heidegger’s thought.” He warns, though, that likeness should not be taken as identity, that the analogy between the two contains a profound “disanalogy.”

Caputo’s point of departure is the concept of *Gelassenheit* which is central to the thought of both Heidegger and Eckhart, and he discerns two movements in *Gelassenheit* which articulates the basis for the analogy between Heidegger and Eckhart. The first movement, which has a negative character, is best described as a departure (*Abschied*), or a
detachment. The second movement has the character of a return in which things are allowed to be what they are as they are, free from the distorting spectacles of metaphysical reason. Taken together the two movements constitute a purification or a clearing of the way for the advent of truth that entails an encounter with Nothing (Nichts). According to Caputo, it is this two-fold movement of turning away from things towards that which surpasses both things and man, yet that from which things and man receive their essence, which describes the leap of Gelassenheit in both the Eckhartian and Heideggerian sense.

The rose is without why: it
blooms because it blooms
It cares not for itself, asks not
if it's seen.

In this poem Heidegger finds an expression of a realm of thinking which lies outside that of representational thought, which experiences the question of ground in a 'new' way. Heidegger doesn't deny that the rose has a ground, but says that the rose doesn't ask to be given a grounding through a proposition. The rose doesn't ask us to explain why it blooms—if it asks anything, it simply asks to be allowed to be what it is, a rose. The most fundamental thing one can say is that the rose is, that its ground is in its Being. With this the bottom drops out of the ground as the terra firma sought by Leibniz, for Being is a groundless ground—it is an abyss. Hence Heidegger changes the emphasis of Leibniz's 'Nothing is without ground' to 'Nothing is without ground.' This change in emphasis undermines the captive character of man's relationship to things in which, on the one hand, man is held by the claim placed on him by the thing, and, on the other hand, the thing is held in an 'ontological purgatory' by a representing subject until that subject delivers the thing unto itself by rendering its sufficient ground. Through this undermining in which Being is discovered to be ground-less, i.e., an abyss, there is a 'play of Being' inaugurated in which both Dasein and things are released from each other's grasp into their proper Being. This experience of the gift of Being of Dasein and of things is the experience of their groundlessness, of Nothing, and this is the primordial truth of their Being. Hence "man first enters into his essential nature (Wesen), Heidegger says, when he too is 'without why'.' In doing so, thought enters a realm in which both Dasein, beings and Being are released from the metaphysics of formulation. It has stepped beyond metaphysics in the two-fold movement of Gelassenheit.