



Philosophy of Religion

## The Concept of Transcendence in Heidegger

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**ABSTRACT:** The history of Heideggerian commentaries confront us with a string of parallel concepts: metaphysics and theology, onto-theology and Christian theology, thought and faith, Being and God, and so on. It should also be noted that these different dual concepts have served, in various ways, several strategies for the interpretation of Heidegger. These various strategies are summarized as follows: the relation between philosophy and theology in the thought of Heidegger is threefold and should be read to the rhythm of his thinking according to the themes of facticity and transcendence.

History of heideggerian commentaries confronts us with a series of parallel notions : "Metaphysics and Theology", "Onto-Theology and Christian Theology", "Theology and Faith" and finally "Being and God". I should also point out that these different dual concepts organise several strategies to interpret Heidegger.

These strategies can be gathered under four grand points.

First of all, a diagnosis in terms of "secularised Theology" coupled with an existentialisation of the fundamental concepts presiding over the duality of the Dasein. According to this diagnosis, Heidegger's work is seen, in the best case, as a veiled revival of christian Theology.

In this perspective it is appropriate to recapture the existential analysis and to open it up towards the theological language, since he has never really been far from it.

A second way of reading the relation between Philosophy and Theology in Heidegger's work consist in organising a "theological deconstruction" within christian Theology.

A third strategy prefers to read the link between Philosophy and Theology in terms of territorial delimitation, a sort of epistemological "Yalta" between two speculative exercises.

Finally, I should mention a fourth type of strategy which finds its origin in the "ontological difference" and wants to renew the terms of proximity to the divine.

The recent publication of some of Heidegger's unpublished works pleads for a renewed reading and gives credit to the hypothesis which I summarise as follows : the relation between Philosophy and Theology in Heidegger's thought is threefold and coextensive with Heidegger's thinking itself, according to the two themes of "facticity" and "transcendence".

(1)

## I. THREE TOPICS

The different meanings of the concept of Philosophy and Theology point to three topics concerning the relation of Philosophy and Theology as such. These topics should be formulated as follows : first of all as the relation between "Philosophy and Scriptural Theology". Ontology, as a science, while distancing itself from whatever "Weltanschauung", happens in rigorous fidelity to the philosophical adventure. It faces Christian Theology, an ontical science elaborated in the "Positum" of the Faith in a crucified God. The lecture "Phenomenology and Theology" (1927), the first part of the lesson "Einführung in die Metaphysics" (1935) and the letters dated 1928 recently published as part of the correspondence with E. Blochmann, should be read in this perspective and only in this perspective.

Second topic : both Philosophy and Theology (wether it is christian Philosophy or philosophical Theology) find their field of development in the dimorphic structure, that is to say in the onto-theological structure of western metaphysics.

The last topic : "The thought of Being and waiting for the God", the following point is debated : the possibility of the happening of a divine god, beyond Christian or anti-christian reference, can only be thought in the Opening-up of Being. This god, the "last god" does not occur like a resolution coming from above, the God is not the new subject of an exterior Revelation. On the contrary, it belongs to the ever present transcendence of the Being and the diffusion of Ereignis.

What is emergent here, on two accounts at least, is the necessity to take up anew a diachronic study of Heidegger's writings. I would like to examine the structures of thinking that enables us to understand, to reconstruct the relation between Philosophy and Theology.

## II. FACTICITY AND TRANSCENDENCE

The diachronic approach is bound to start by considering Heidegger famous expression "Without this theological source, I would have never have taken the way of thought. Source means future".

Three comments can be made. First of all, it is well known that Heidegger did receive a fundamental training in Theology, the context and practice of which should be examined. Secondly, Heidegger uses speculative and crafted tools that he borrows from the theological tradition, this process of appropriation of Theology needs to be taken into account. Finally, it is to be noted that the link between Theology and thought is an active link : "Source means future".

In order to qualify the three different levels of interpretation, I shall now use three terms : rooting, debt and source.

**Rooting** is a good word to specify the peculiar relation that Heidegger has with the catholic world. This relation is complex, it refers to a variety of plays. I should mention the one which is best known. As a high school student, Heidegger discovers the specificity of ontological questioning through the reading of Franz Brentano's dissertation "On the manifolds meanings of Being according to Aristotle". This initial connection to Theology is not, as one might think at first sight, only a first exhibition of the conceptual and diagnostic data of Theology; it is overall a way to tell that the practice of historical thinking is an opening of the questioning of Philosophy and of ontology in particular.

**Debt.** The relation between Heidegger and Theology ca be understood on another level and can be defined in terms of debt. We would like to show that some of the main Heideggerien

schemes are not understandable unless they are, first of all, referred to Christian experience where they have been elaborated.

At the beginning of his lesson in the 1923 summer semester "The Hermeneutics of Facticity", Heidegger writes : "Young Luther has been my companion through my search. Aristotle, whom Luther hated, was my model. Kierkegaard span me on and Husserl gave me eyes to see". These lines, obviously written after mature reflection, condense in a few words the influence that these figures imposed on Heidegger in a definite way. The common link between them is the concept of facticity. At the beginning of 1930, as Otto Pöggeler, the first, insisted on, facticity is the central theme in Heidegger's reality, the one to which he returns again and again. This theme points to both areas (convergent in Heidegger's eyes) : the area of Protestant Theology and that of Husserl's phenomenology. I shall elaborate briefly the forms.

Through his weekly encounters with Bultmann, Heidegger reads Luther, within the Protestant tradition, and through Luther he reads Saint Paul, Saint John, Saint Augustin and Kierkegaard. For the first time, he is looking at the possibility of establishing a necessary correspondence between theological conceptualisation and the specific contents of the New Testament.

In Saint Augustin's work Heidegger analyses, first of all, the christian experience, in terms of attachment to life as facticity; "facticity" here does not only mean "factuality", that is to say : the contingency of objects of experience, but more deeply, facticity must be understood from Augustin's *facticia est anima*. This underlines the structure of the soul which does not find its origin in itself.

With Bultmann, Heidegger shares a theological approach of the transcendental constitution of man. It was already present in his early work on Duns Scot in 1917. It is for him the way it will construct his most prominent themes of temporality and finitude.

But later, while he is working on the existential forms from the facticity of Christian experience, he does finally abandon the theological resolution. From that moment on, facticity will become the better term to indicate the question of Being.

**Source.** This third level is the most difficult one because it implies a structural ambivalence in the relation between Philosophy and Theology. In his letter of of August 8th, 1928 which he sent to Elisabeth Blochmann, Heidegger tells how, in Marbourg, his work was always ambivalent (*dewusst zweiseitig*). This ambivalence consists in the fact that he is worrying (*beunruhigend*). This point is understandable in relation with the following words "I dismissed from Theology more than one student : nobody could say if it was worth it. But, if in this way young men have found their own freedom, I suppose it was for their good". (2) During the winter semester of 1927, in "*Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*", Heidegger elaborates the notion of "ontological difference" close to that of "theological difference". God versus Creature: the latter, in fact is only one side of the ontological difference, but, in itself, it invites to look towards the Being.

"The thesis (that *essentia* and *existentia* belong to every being) indicates the more general problem of the articulation of the Being between what it is and the way the Being has its own gesture".

How should we understand the verb "to indicate"? The answer is : the theological transcendence belongs to another transcendence, the transcendence of Being. This thought rings the end of the traditional pair Transcendence versus Immanence : "The world is [...] the actual transcendence [...]. So is the authentic ontological meaning of transcendence". (3)

### III. ANOTHER TRANSCENDENCE

Here is the link to the third topic : "The thinking of Being and the waiting for the God". Heidegger fights against the enclosure of the beings, whether it comes from the superior Being or from a self-instituted subjectivity. The question now arises : why? The precise reason is that he wants to respect the foundation which should never be forgotten : the irreducible history of Being.

This third topic is systematically developed after the turn (*die Kehre*). One must maintain the motive of the initial diffusion of Being if one wants to wait for the God. This is achieved by the use, crucial at that time, of two terms *Ereignis* and *Seyn*, the latter written in the ancient German spelling with a "y". Such is this other transcendence which is common to the Being and the God, such is their common inhabitation; the God is not the Being, but the God is at home in the transcendence of Being. We should not - according to Heidegger - sacrifice the God on the altar of finitude; on the other hand, we should not sacrifice the thought that thinks the retreat of Being on the altar of a faith and a Theology compelled by a religious Revelation.

Therefore, the "*last god*" is not a superior figure, a somewhat more believable Dionysos; for in this case, the god would be, once again, a metaphysical determination. Faith is already present, and Theology may come into presence only insofar as thinking is riveted to the retreat of Being.

It is a donation (*es gibt, das es gibt*) that determines the conditions of the waiting for the god ; if the god has to arrive ; and, thus, prior to that, if god has to be expected, then he should be thought within the donation itself.

### Notes

(1) Ph . CAPELLE, *Philosophie et théologie dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger*, Paris, Cerf, 1998

(2) M. HEIDEGGER - E. BLOCHMANN, *Briefwechsel 1918-1969*, Marbach am;Neckar,1989, p.26 ;

(3) Gesamtausgabe, V. Klostermann, t.24, pp.458-459