



«Is Meister Eckhart’s Metaphysics an Onto-theo-logy»?

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Heidegger’s critique of the history of philosophy declares: every metaphysics is onto-theo-logy, i.e., the essence of metaphysics is onto-theo-logy¹. Three pages of Heidegger’s work quote texts from Eckhart’s metaphysics and comment on them². They seem to agree with the general thesis. Eckhart is not able to escape from the fate and essence of all metaphysics. The question remains whether a few remarks taken from Eckhart’s works suffice for characterizing his metaphysics as onto-theo-logical. We may consider these passages together with Heidegger. But the enquiry must not read the Heideggerian interpretation of Eckhart into the metaphysics of Eckhart. Therefore, the main part of the enquiry has to clarify the principal presupposition of Heidegger’s and Eckhart’s thought regarding metaphysics. We have to ask: why are human beings able to think metaphysically according to Heidegger and Eckhart? The distinction of the respective ways of thinking will enable us to verify or falsify Heidegger’s thesis and to compare the two thinkers in their approach to important metaphysical questions.

Heidegger’s interpretation of Eckhart’s metaphysics

Heidegger calls Eckhart a ‘Master of thinking’ and a wise man having spoken of God’s nothingness³. His respect for Eckhart expresses

¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York 1998, p. 287 (GA 9, p. 379). The abbreviation GA refers to the volumes of Heidegger’s collected works in German.

² M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, Klostermann, Frankfurt 2013, pp. 995-997.

³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures. Insight into That Which Is and Basic*

itself in a continuous study of his works. Heidegger considers Eckhart as a relative of the ‘first thinkers’, i.e., of early Greek thinkers such as Parmenides whom he values most⁴. When Eckhart writes: ‘The act to be is God’, and not: ‘God is the act to be’, Heidegger finds a speculative proposition in this reversal of subject and predicate (similar to Hegel). The phrase implies, that we understand God only through the unfolding of Being, which enables God to be God⁵. In other words: the unfolding of Being enables God *to appear as God for us*.

Heidegger himself denies the identity of God and the act to be, i.e., of God and that which he calls ‘the act to be.’ He would never try to think the essence of God through the act to be, or to think Being as essence and ground of God. Nevertheless, Heidegger understands the dimension of Being as manifestness of God and intellectual region within which we experience God⁶. In this sense, Being is still the trace of God and his language⁷. In Heidegger’s eyes, this presupposition of the dimension of Being distinguishes his philosophy from every metaphysics. He refers to Eckhart’s metaphysics under the title ‘Meta-

Principles of Thinking, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 2012, p. 14 (GA 79, p. 15); ID., *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, GA 16, Klostermann, Frankfurt 2000, p. 406. In the latter text, Heidegger mentions, that his critics begin to realize, that his identification of Being and nothing is not nihilism.

⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942-1948)*, GA 97, Klostermann, Frankfurt 2015, p. 436; M. HEIDEGGER – K. JASPERS, *Briefwechsel 1920-196*, herausgegeben von W. BIEMEL – H. SANER, Piper, München 1992, p. 182 (Letter 132 of August 12th, 1949). Regarding all of Heidegger’s references to Eckhart, cf. I. A. MOORE, «“[...] seit 1910 begleitet mich der Lese- und Lebemeister Eckehardt”: Materials on Heidegger’s Relation to Meister Eckhart», *Bulletin Heideggérien* 6 (2016), pp. 186-218. Heidegger develops his own philosophy of releasement allowing Being to presence through itself to the mind. Therefore, the commentators focus on the relation to Eckhart’s theology of releasement (cf. R. SCHÜRMAN, «Heidegger and Meister Eckhart on Releasement», *Research in Phenomenology* 3 [1973], pp. 95-119; F.-W. VON HERRMANN, *Wege ins Ereignis. Zu Heideggers »Beiträgen zur Philosophie«*, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994, pp. 371-386; D. MORAN, «Meister Eckhart in 20th-Century Philosophy», in J. HACKETT [ed.], *A Companion to Meister Eckhart*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 669-698; I. A. MOORE, *Eckhart, Heidegger, and the Imperative of Releasement*, SUNY Press, New York 2019).

⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *Four Seminars*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2003, p. 34 (GA 15, p. 325).

⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *Seminare*, GA 15, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1986, pp. 436-437.

⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 200-204 (GA 5, pp. 269-274); ID., *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York 1971, p. 205 (GA 12, p. 27); ID., *On the Way to Language*, Harper & Row, New York 1982, p. 196 (GA 12, p. 75).

physics and Christianity'⁸. The term 'Christianity' signifies the secular culture developing from Christian faith⁹. Thus, Eckhart's metaphysics appears as a cultural phenomenon characterizing onto-theo-logy due to the Christianization of philosophy¹⁰. The following texts of Eckhart's Latin works are quoted by Heidegger:

He (*sc.* God) is every being (*sc.* *ens*) and the whole existence (*sc.* *esse*) of all things¹¹.

Secondly, note that whatever is common insofar as it is common is God, and whatever is not common insofar as it is not common is not God, but is created¹².

Nothing created gives its own, nor the whole of itself, nor itself¹³.

Everything created is ugly because of nothingness and set apart from God, like night from day, darkness from light, nothingness from existence. (Here remark that nothing is as ugly as nothing itself)¹⁴.

Every created being smacks of the shadow of nothingness. In creatures that have something dark (i.e., nothingness) added to them¹⁵.

Existence is from God alone, and he alone is existence¹⁶.

⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik, der neuzeitlichen Wissenschaft und der modernen Technik*, GA 76, Klostermann, Frankfurt 2009, p. 1.

⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Holzwege*, GA 5, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1977, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰ Heidegger describes this Christianization of philosophy especially regarding Hegel's onto-theo-logy. Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, GA 32 Klostermann, Frankfurt 1997³, pp. 141-143, pp. 2-6; A. SELL, *Martin Heideggers Gang durch Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"* (Hegel-Studien Beiheft 39), Bouvier, Bonn 1998, pp. 136-143.

¹¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 995 (LW IV, n. 53, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 212). Eckhart's works are quoted from MEISTER ECKHART, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*. Herausgegeben von J. KOCH – J. QUINT et al., Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1936 sqq. (DW = German works, LW = Latin works). I refer also to the English translation in B. MCGINN (ed.), *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, Paulist Press, New York 1986; E. COLLEDGE, B. MCGINN (eds.), *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, Paulist Press, New York 1981. Other translations of Eckhart's writings are my own.

¹² M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 995 (LW IV, n. 53, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 213). Eckhart's text explains this universality of God as the universality of love excluding nothing from its affection, i.e., the universality or commonness of God differs from the universality of a concept.

¹³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW IV, n. 55, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 213).

¹⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW IV, n. 57, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 214).

¹⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW III, n. 20, n. 74, *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, p. 128, p. 149).

¹⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW IV, n. 23, *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 208).

From him, and through him, and in him all things are. *Romans* 11,36¹⁷.

Nothing is outside of God, just as there is not something that can be outside of existence¹⁸.

Heidegger comments on these words of Eckhart by explaining them onto-theo-logically. Being as the act to be (*Sein*) signifies God and being as that which is (*Seiendes*) refers to creatures. In other words: Eckhart represents the ontological difference or the distinction separating the act to be from that which is as difference between God and creature. In a certain sense, God «is» his creatures and the existence of all of his creatures. Theologically speaking, i.e., from the point of view of the metaphysics of faith underlined by the quotation of *Romans* 11,36, the act to be «is» that which is, and that which is exists only in the act to be, from the act to be, through the act to be. Thus, the act to be is the cause of that which is and, therefore, that which is most of all. The act to be is the highest in producing that which is¹⁹.

When we say, that God is the act to be itself, the term ‘act to be’ signifies that by which something is. The term ‘essence’, on the other hand, indicates what is. God is from himself and through himself. But what is the act to be? It is the cause of itself. The act to be in creatures is distinct from itself. Therefore, the phrase: ‘God is the act to be itself’, does not mean, that God is the act to be and nothing else. On the contrary, God is — insofar as the highest being of all beings or the cause of itself is — the creator in the creature. Insofar as he is being that is from itself, insofar he is his act to be and not composed²⁰.

At first sight, this commentary is justified. In the context of the Latin sermons studied by Heidegger, Eckhart identifies the form through which something is with God. His example is the whiteness by which something is white²¹. According to Eckhart’s interpretation of *Romans*

¹⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW IV, n. 20, cf. n. 29).

¹⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996 (LW IV, n. 222, I. A. MOORE, «[...] seit 1910 begleitet mich der Lese- und Lebemeister Eckehardt»), p. 210).

¹⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 996.

²⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zum Ereignis-Denken*, GA 73.2, p. 997.

²¹ LW IV, n. 20, n. 23. Many authors agree with Heidegger and describe Eckhart’s metaphysics as a kind of pantheism. Cf. K. ALBERT, *Meister Eckharts These vom Sein*, p. 75, p. 185, p. 245; V. LOSSKY, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, Vrin, Paris 1973, pp. 44-56, pp. 77-84, pp. 137-157, p. 195, pp. 298-312; A. QUERO SÁNCHEZ, «Sein als Absolutheit (*esse als abegeschidenheit*)», *Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch* 2 (2008), pp. 189-218,

11,36, God is the efficient cause from which all things are, the formal cause through which all things are or are formed, and the end or final cause in which all things are²². This sameness of efficient and formal cause leads to Heidegger's interpretation of God as *causa sui* or cause of himself. The creator is from himself. This does not mean, that the creator causes himself. But he is the cause of his own existence in the creature, which formally exists through God. By causing his creatures, the non-composite God causes himself to be in his composite creatures.

The creature's essence is distinct from its existence inasmuch as God or existence itself is distinct from the essence of the creature. Nevertheless, inasmuch as God is all things in the fullness of his existence, he contains all things and causes their essence, which exists only in him who alone is existence. In this sense, he is the common existence of all things whose essence is not their existence. Created things are nothing through themselves though they are through God. As we will see, this interpretation contains several characteristics of onto-theo-logy: 1. The ontological difference lies in the distinction between God and creature. 2. God is the cause of the creature and, therefore, the highest being identified with the act to be. 3. The structure of causality shows itself in a circular cause of itself inasmuch as God is the cause of his own existence in the creature. Only a deeper enquiry into Heidegger's and Eckhart's philosophies can verify or falsify this interpretation of a medieval metaphysics.

Heidegger's understanding of onto-theo-logy

Heidegger's history of Being and the corresponding description of metaphysics as onto-theo-logy belong to the works after his turn, when he does not primarily enquire into the relation of man to Being but into Being and its truth in relation to man²³. This change in his philosophy implies that:

here: pp. 202-213; C. FABRO, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin*, Publications universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1961, pp. 551-567.

²² LW IV, n. 29.

²³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zollikon Seminars. Protocols – Conversations – Letters*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2001, p. 184 (*Zollikoner Seminare. Protokolle – Zwiegespräche – Briefe*. Herausgegeben von Medard Boss, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994², p. 230); ID., *Basic Questions of Philosophy. Selected Problems of "Logic"*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1994, p. 181 (GA 45, p. 214): «On the contrary, man is here in question in [...] the most extensive respect [...] we are questioning man in his relation to Being, or, after the turn, we are questioning Being and its truth in relation to man». Regarding the turn cf. E. KETTERING, *Nähe. Das Denken Martin Heideggers*, Neske, Pfullingen 1987, pp. 323-332.

the 'Being' into which *Being and Time* inquired cannot remain something that the human subject posits. It is rather Being stamped as presence by its time-character that approaches Dasein. As a result, even in the initial steps of the question of Being in *Being and Time* thought is called upon to undergo a change whose movement corresponds with the turn²⁴.

Hence, Heidegger's later philosophy does not describe Being as a projection of the human mind. On the contrary, Being approaches thinking through itself and not because of a human projection. Therefore, thinking has to enquire into Being itself and not into human Dasein and its projection of Being²⁵. In this period of his philosophy, Heidegger's style of writing flees from a systematic presentation of his thought. For the sake of brevity, the present enquiry has to systematize his characterization of onto-theo-logy. Principally, Heidegger's history of Being does not focus on onto-theo-logy but on the oblivion of Being. Therefore, our first question has to ask:

What is the oblivion of Being?

Heidegger writes in 1962:

The oblivion of Being which is manifest as not thinking about the truth of Being can easily be interpreted and misunderstood as an omission of previous thinking [...] However, for the correct understanding it is a matter of realizing that this previous non-thinking is not an omission, but it is to be thought as the consequence of the self-concealment of Being. As the privation of Being, the concealment of Being belongs to the clearing of Being. The oblivion of Being which constitutes the essence of metaphysics [...] belongs to the essence of Being itself. Thus, there is put to the thinking of Being the task of thinking Being in such a way that oblivion essentially belongs to it²⁶.

²⁴ W. J. RICHARDSON, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Fordham University Press, New York 42003, p. XVIII (GA 11, p. 150).

²⁵ Despite the access to Being through the subjectivity of Dasein, Heidegger's philosophy prior to the turn enquires already into Being qua Being and intentional Being (M. HEIDEGGER, *History of the Concept of Time. Prolegomena*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1992, pp. 128-129 [GA 20, pp. 178-179]). But only his philosophy after the turn is able to understand the essence of the truth of Being as relation of Being to the mind.

²⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, Harper & Row, New York 1972, p. 29 (GA 14, p. 37).

Thus, Heidegger never said, that metaphysics forgot about Being, the act to be, or beings. The oblivion of Being is the oblivion of the truth of Being constituting the essence of metaphysics. The principal essence of metaphysics is the oblivion of Being and onto-theo-logy is the consequence of this oblivion. The truth of Being is «the Being of beings in its unconcealedness and concealment»²⁷. Hence, philosophy has to study how the real existence of beings is true for the mind or approaches the mind. Of course, Heidegger knows, that Aristotle speaks of the truth of things or beings. But Aristotle identifies this truth with the forms of things and especially with the synthesis of matter and form and the synthesis of substance and accidents as it becomes manifest in *per se* and *per accidens* predication²⁸. Thus, Aristotelian truth of things concerns their absolute existence and their composition in themselves. It is possible truth regarding the human mind. When Heidegger speaks of the truth of Being, he refers to the actual appearing of things relative to the mind. Unconcealment cannot be «unconcealment in itself [...] unconcealment is after all always unconcealment 'for someone'»²⁹. Therefore, Heidegger describes the event of the truth of Being or of unconcealment as follows:

The same is apprehension and that for the sake of which apprehension occurs. Apprehension occurs for the sake of Being. This [sc. *Being*] presences only as appearing, as coming forth into unconcealedness, when unconcealedness occurs, when there is disclosure [...]. Being presences, but because and insofar as it presences and appears, apprehension occurs necessarily together with appearing [...]. But if appearing belongs to Being as $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$, then man as a being must belong to this appearing [...]. And since apprehension — accepting apprehension of what shows itself — belongs to such appearing, it may be presumed that this is precisely what determines the essence of being-human³⁰.

²⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 79 (GA 14, p. 99).

²⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, Continuum, London, New York 2002, pp. 51-74 (GA 31, pp. 73-109).

²⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 334 (GA 9, p. 442).

³⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1987, pp. 139-140 (GA 40, pp. 147-148).

Metaphysics calls the accepting apprehension of what shows itself ‘simple apprehension’. Heidegger would protest against the identification of his philosophy with metaphysical thinking. But we have to distinguish the truth of Being appearing in apprehension from the truth of judgments, which conform to the actually appearing or apprehended essence of things. According to Heidegger, Being has an essence or ‘is’ its own essence or nature (Being as φύσις). However, the Heideggerian term ‘essence’ (sc. *Wesen*) signifies primarily active ‘presencing’ and not essence, though the ambiguous language of the German philosopher does not exclude the connotation of ‘whatness’ from presencing³¹. This means, that Being presences or appears through itself and not through a human representation (contrary to an essence in metaphysical simple apprehension). The relation of appearing to the mind or to apprehension belongs to the essence of Being. Human representations are only the way how man seeks to grasp the essence of things through concepts. But these concepts are empty as long as they lack their foundation in the presence called Being.

Human apprehension accepts the essence of Being as presencing through itself and does not represent it. This is not any activity of the human mind but its nature or essence, i.e., the human being naturally and necessarily apprehends the essence of Being³². The apprehension of Being is the essence of being-human. Man and Being naturally and mutually relate to each other or belong to each other. But the appearing of Being has the lead. Apprehension occurs necessarily together with the presencing of Being. This nature of thinking underlies all our representations.

If we forget the nature of thinking and do not apprehend Being any longer we live in the oblivion of Being. Heidegger characterizes the oblivion of Being as belonging to the essence of Being and not as a human failure. When we understand this oblivion fully, the «*oblivion of Being is oblivion to the difference between Being and being*»³³. In other words: Heidegger’s term «Being» signifies not only the truth of Being, but the ontological difference between Being and being. His philosophy maintains, that Being shows itself only as the Being of being.

³¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *The Event*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2013, pp. 228-229 (GA 71, pp. 264-265).

³² M. HEIDEGGER, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 84 (GA 40, pp. 89-90).

³³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 275 (GA 5, p. 364).

Further, Heidegger thinks the truth of Being as the condition of the possibility of the mutual relation of Being and thinking and of the appearing of beings to the mind³⁴. In this sense, Being withdraws itself by designing the appearance of beings: «‘To design’ [...] points to the contour, the gestalt, so to speak, the what-gestalt, which is proper to being as such. With regard to being, Being is that which shows, makes something visible without showing itself»³⁵. Hence, the truth of Being does not show itself though every being appears to us in its intelligible what-gestalt through the truth of Being. The human mind is limited by the inability to apprehend Being itself, or the truth of Being. Instead we apprehend limited beings in space and time as designed by the truth of Being. Inasmuch as the truth of the fullness of Being withdraws from being apprehended, it is concealment, i.e., the heart of truth lies in concealment³⁶.

This description of the apprehension of Being does not prevent Heidegger from calling Being or the truth of Being ‘that which comes first in thinking’³⁷. Being as «the destiny of truth, is the first law of thinking — not the rules of logic, which can become rules only on the basis of the law of Being»³⁸. But when we say so, we have to keep in mind, that Being itself withdraws from our mind by enabling beings to appear in their what-gestalt. Therefore, the human mind can only have a presentiment of Being³⁹.

However, this sketch of Being changes in 1973. Heidegger writes: «the non-trembling heart of ἀλήθεια (sc. *unconcealment*) is τὸ ἐόν it-

³⁴ «The clearing [...] grants the possible presencing of that presence itself [...] The quiet heart of the clearing is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is, presence and apprehension, first arises» (M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 68 [GA 14, p. 84]). Heidegger writes ‘possibility’ instead of condition of the possibility and criticizes this interpretation of 1964 (*Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14, Klostermann, Frankfurt 2007, p. 115).

³⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 36 (GA 14, p. 45). He also writes: «But this rise from unconcealment, as the entry into what is unconcealed, does not specifically come to the fore in the presence of what is present. It is part of presence to hold back these traits, and thus to let come out only that which is present. Even, and in the particular, the unconcealment in which this rise and entry takes place, remains concealed, in contrast to the unconcealed present things» (*What Is Called Thinking?*, Harper & Row, New York 1968, pp. 236-237 [GA 8, p. 240]). Cf. G. HARAND, «Gebrochene Stille. Zur Sprachphilosophie Martin Heideggers nach der Kehre», *Existenzia* 22 (2012), pp. 141-160, here: pp. 146-147.

³⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 71 (GA 14, p. 88).

³⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 279 (GA 9, p. 367).

³⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 276 (GA 9, p. 363).

³⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Leitgedanken zur Entstehung der Metaphysik*, GA 76, pp. 16-18.

self!»⁴⁰. Thus, Being itself is the heart of unconcealment or that which is revealed by unconcealment. Though unconcealment still designs the what-gestalt of all things, its heart is not concealment. On the contrary, Being itself manifests itself and is no longer the concealed source of everything. Though the truth of Being withdraws, it does not primarily withdraw for the sake of beings. It withdraws for the sake of Being itself or for the sake of the onefold containing in itself the hidden difference between the act to be and that which is. Only a «pure (non-sensuous) catching sight of»⁴¹ can apprehend Being or the essence of Being. Hence, Heidegger's late thought is open to an intellectual intuition of the essence of Being. The earlier writings speak only of transcendental imagination apprehending this or that being in its what-gestalt under the horizon of the withdrawing truth of Being, which is limited by time.

When we enquire into Being as source of every what-gestalt in apprehension, the necessary answer given by Heidegger maintains: «Ἀλήθεια is the essence of the true: the truth. It presences in everything that presences and is the essence of every 'essence'».⁴² We have to remember, that the Heideggerian term 'essence' primarily signifies 'presencing to a mind or relative to a mind' without excluding the connotation of 'whatness.' When Heidegger enquires into Being in itself or that which is revealed by the truth of Being, his commentaries on Hölderlin speak of 'omnipresence' and of the 'actuality of all actual things' (*Wirklichkeit alles Wirklichen*)⁴³. Further, Heidegger calls Being 'the relation of all relations'⁴⁴. All these names point to the all-embrac-

⁴⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, *Four Seminars*, p. 80 (GA 15, p. 398); cf. R. MAYER, «Presence Is Present through Itself: Being as Phenomenon in Thomas Aquinas and Martin Heidegger», *Divus Thomas* 117 (2014), pp. 116-212, here: pp. 155-156. Many interpreters of Heidegger think that this change in Heidegger's own thinking concerns only his interpretation of Parmenides. Cf. O. PÖGGELER, «Einleitung: Hölderlin, Hegel und Heidegger im amerikanisch-deutschen Gespräch», in: C. JAMME – K. HARRIES (eds.), *Kunst, Politik, Technik: Martin Heidegger*, Fink, München 1992, pp. 7-42, here: p. 38, R. CAPOBIANCO, *Engaging Heidegger*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2010, p. 26; B.O. BASSLER, «The Birthplace of Thinking: Heidegger's Late Thoughts on Tautology», *Heidegger Studies* 17 (2001), pp. 117-133.

⁴¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Four Seminars*, pp. 96-97 (GA 15, p. 406).

⁴² M. HEIDEGGER, *Parmenides*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1998, p. 163 (GA 54, p. 242).

⁴³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Humanity Books, Amherst, NY 2000, pp. 81-82, p. 86, p. 135 (GA 4, pp. 58-59, p. 64, p. 112). The English translation speaks of the 'reality of everything real' and loses the sense of actuality signified by the term 'Wirklichkeit'.

⁴⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *On the Way to Language*, p. 135 (GA 12, p. 256); cf. D. THOMÄ, «Die

ing plenitude of Being, which is not God. Being is the 'letting-presence of everything present'. Even the highest God in the Greek world appears or presences to the mind through Being. But he appears as the one governing any kind of destiny⁴⁵. Being, i.e., the truth of Being, and not God, is the first law of the mind. However, the relation to the mind called 'truth of Being' does not prevent Being from actualizing all actual things. Many times, Heidegger identifies the truth of Being with the plenitude of Being.

This plenitude of Being does not only relate to the human mind by manifesting itself and other things. It contains also the relation of the mind to Being: «The relation of Da-sein to Beyng pertains intrinsically to the essential occurrence of Beyng itself, which could also be conveyed by saying that Beyng needs Da-sein and does not at all essentially occur without this event of appropriation»⁴⁶. In other words: thinking or the relation of Dasein to Being is also contained in the actuality of all actual things. If there were no mind or no thinking belonging to the whole of actuality, the presence of all presences would neither contain the relation to the mind nor the relation of the mind to Being.

späten Texte über Sprache, Dichtung und Kunst. Im »Haus des Seins«: eine Ortsbesichtigung», in Id. (ed.): *Heidegger-Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Metzler, Stuttgart 2003, pp. 306-325, here: p. 315.

⁴⁵ «In the first place the Ἔν, the Λόγος, the destiny of everything fateful, is not in its innermost essence ready to appear under the name 'Zeus', i.e., to appear as Zeus [...] Is it only a manner of speaking when Heraclitus says first that the Ἔν does not admit the naming in question, or does the priority of denial have its ground in the matter itself? For Ἔν Πάντα, as Λόγος, is the letting-presence of everything present. The Ἔν, however, is not itself one present being among others. It is in its way unique. Zeus, for his part, is not simply someone present among others. He is the highest of present beings. Thus Zeus is designated an exceptional way in presencing; he is allotted this special designation [...] Zeus is not himself the Ἔν, although — as lightning-bolt — he accomplishes by way of governing the dispensations of destiny [...] the Ἔν does *not* properly admit of being named Zeus, and of being thereby degraded to the level of existing as one being present among others — even if the 'among' has the character of 'above all other present beings'. On the other hand [...] the Ἔν does admit of being named Zeus. How? [...] If the Ἔν is not apprehended as being by itself the Λόγος, if it appears rather as the Πάντα, *then* and only then does the totality of present beings show itself under the direction of the highest present being as one totality under this One. The totality of present beings is under its highest [being] the Ἔν as Zeus. The Ἔν itself, however, as Ἔν Πάντα, is the Λόγος, the laying that gathers [...] the gathering of destiny into presence» (M. HEIDEGGER, *Early Greek Thinking*, Harper & Row, New York 1984 pp. 73-74 [GA 7, pp. 228-229]).

⁴⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 2012, p. 200 (GA 65, p. 254); cf. C. STRUBE: *Das Mysterium der Moderne: Heideggers Stellung zur gewandelten Seins- und Gottesfrage*, Fink, München 1994, p. 115.

If we remember, that Being designs the what-gestalt of every being, this means: every whatness derives from Being and is known when we are able to understand this limitation of Being designed by Being. Heidegger notes, that the abstraction of concepts is guided by the apprehension of Being and the understanding of sameness when we try to understand things in their essence⁴⁷.

Heidegger's thinking binds Being to the human nature without making it dependent on the human nature. The whole of Being, which relates to the human mind, does not depend on something contained within the whole of Being. This implies, that Being alone relates to the mind through itself. This or that being subsists in itself without relating to the mind. Only the truth of Being enables beings to appear relative to the mind⁴⁸. Further, the human being necessarily thinks metaphysically inasmuch as we think the essence of being⁴⁹. However, the oblivion of Being deforms the true metaphysics grounded on the understanding of the ontological difference, i.e., Heidegger considers the ontological difference as ground or condition of the possibility of a true metaphysics⁵⁰. He writes:

Western-European thinking in keeping with the guiding question τί τὸ ὄν, what is being in its Being?, proceeds from being to Being [...] thinking transcends being in the direction of its Being, not in order to leave behind and abandon being, but so that by this ascent, the transcendence, it may represent being in that which it is *qua* being [...]. Thinking in the sense of the question τί τὸ ὄν; what is

⁴⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 130-131 (*Zollikoner Seminare*, pp. 170-172).

⁴⁸ «Aristotle is not able of comprehending, no less than anyone before or after him, the proper essence and Being of that which makes up this *between* — between αἰσθητόν as such and αἰσθησις as such — and which in itself brings out the very wonder that, although related to self-subsisting being, it does not through this relation take their self-subsistence away, but rather precisely makes it possible for someone who relates to it to secure this self-subsistence in the truth» (M. HEIDEGGER, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* Θ 1-3. *On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1995, p. 173 [GA 33, p. 202]).

⁴⁹ «Thus confined to what is metaphysical, man is caught in the difference of being and Being, which he never experiences [...] Metaphysics belongs to the nature of man» (M. HEIDEGGER, *The End of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1973, p. 87 [GA 7, pp. 71-72]).

⁵⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, *Four Seminars*, p. 24, p. 57 (GA 15, p. 310, p. 361); ID., *Nietzsche. Volumes Three and Four*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York 1991, p. 154 in Volume Four (GA 6.2, p. 186); ID., *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 224 (GA 8, p. 228).

being in respect of its Being?, thus takes a peculiar turn under the name 'metaphysics.' The thematic sphere of Western metaphysics is indicated by μέθεξις, the participation of being in Being; so that the question is now how the participating being can be determined in terms of Being. This sphere of metaphysics is grounded in what μετοχή, in what the unique participle ἐόν designates with a single word: the twofold of being and Being [...]. The twofold of being and Being must first lie before us openly, be taken to heart and there kept safely, before it can be represented and dealt with in the sense of the participation of the one, i.e., of being, in the other, i.e., in Being⁵¹.

On the one hand, this passage speaks of the deformed essence of metaphysics characterized by the oblivion of Being. Without being grounded in the ontological difference or μετοχή Western metaphysics speaks of the participation or μέθεξις of being in Being. Being is the metaphysical name for God as the highest cause. A correct development of metaphysics would build upon the ontological difference or μετοχή called Being or a distinctive duality. «In keeping with that dual nature, a being presences in Being, and Being presences as Being of a being. There does not exist another twofoldness that can compare with this»⁵². We never know Being in itself because Being shows itself always in relation to beings. Therefore, Heidegger seeks to 'till the ground for metaphysics' in the ontological difference, though he himself refuses to think metaphysically⁵³. True metaphysics has to consider being or 'that which is' in its participation in the act to be. In other words: every being, when considered qua being or in its act to be, must already be manifest as participating in the act to be. Unless the ontological difference or original unity of the act to be and being through participation pervades our understanding of being or 'that which is', we cannot think metaphysically. Hence, metaphysics seeks to transcend

⁵¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *What Is Called Thinking?*, pp. 222-223 (GA 8, pp. 226-227).

⁵² M. HEIDEGGER, *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 221 (GA 8, p. 225); cf. ID., *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 259; ID., *Heraklit. 1. Der Anfang abendländischen Denkens. 2. Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1994³, pp. 52-59, pp. 72-85 (where Heidegger calls Being the word of all words in relation to the participle 'being').

⁵³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 279 (GA 9, p. 367); ID., *On Time and Being*, p. 24 (GA 14, p. 30).

this or that being in a twofold way. It enquires both into the existence of all existing things and into the cause of the existence of all existing things. This enquiry is impossible unless the unique participle or μετοχή ‘being’ contains the participation of being in the act to be and manifests it to the mind. The unity of being and the act to be precedes their distinction or distinct appearance.

The term ‘ontological difference’ does not only signify, that beings are and, that the act to be itself is not. It implies, that Being alone is onto-logical or the truth of Being manifesting itself to the mind. This or that being belongs to the realm of real or ontic existence without actual relation to the mind. Therefore, Heidegger clarifies: «Viewed from the ontic horizon the act to be is precisely not some being; viewed from the categories it *is* not [...]. One can name it an origin, assuming that all ontic-causal overtones are excluded: it is the event of Being as condition for the arrival of beings: the act to be lets beings presence»⁵⁴. Heidegger describes the truth of Being as origin, which enables beings to presence to the mind. Therefore, he seeks to exclude ontic causality as distinct from ontological causality. On the other hand, the act to be is not, i.e., it is not a subsisting reality. We know only of beings which are and are manifest through Being: «The human being is rather ‘thrown’ by Being itself into the truth of Being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of Being, in order that being might appear as the being it is in the light of Being»⁵⁵. Hence, metaphysics is not possible without the appearing of beings in the light of Being.

Thus, Heidegger’s principal critique of metaphysics clarifies, that — by enquiring into the real existence of beings or into being qua being — metaphysics fails to understand the act to be as such. The existence of real beings is always some kind of presence at hand or the real existence of things in themselves represented through concepts or judgments. Hence, metaphysics excludes the sphere of Being relative to the mind or the sphere of the truth of Being from its consideration. As long as this sphere does not show itself, Being as such remains veiled as dimension of the God.

By representing Being, metaphysics moves in the sphere of consciousness without realizing, that we cannot understand Being unless

⁵⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *Four Seminars*, pp. 58-59 (GA 15, p. 363).

⁵⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 252 (GA 9, p. 330).

it shows itself to us prior to any conscious representation: «The existential essence of the human being is the reason why the human being can represent being as such, and why he can have a consciousness of that which is represented [...] consciousness does not itself create the openness of being, nor does it give to man the openness for being»⁵⁶. Hence, Heidegger integrates the sphere of consciousness into Being and into the truth of Being. Consciousness relates to Being due to the relation of Being to consciousness. What does this mean? The term consciousness implies thinking. Somebody is conscious of or present to himself through his own thoughts. In a certain sense, thinking itself is manifest to thinking or appears to itself. Hence, thinking is one of those «beings», which are manifest through the truth of Being. However, thinking or consciousness shows itself as that unique being to which the truth of Being appears and which relates to the truth of Being or to the beings manifested in the light of the truth of Being.

In this sense, Heidegger's philosophy criticizes the modern theory of subjectivity or self-consciousness. This theory presupposes, that consciousness is the only thing appearing to itself and the only place where something can appear⁵⁷. Accordingly, things appear only as objects of consciousness and not as they are. The modern theory creates an unbridgeable chasm between the sphere of self-consciousness and the real existence of things or things in themselves. Heidegger's consideration of Being qua Being or of the ontological difference as such includes self-consciousness within the sphere of Being by grounding thinking in the truth of Being. Thus, beings are able to appear to consciousness as they are and consciousness is able to relate to things inasmuch as it is one of the things appearing within the sphere of Being. In other words: appearing or the truth of Being belongs primarily to Being and not to consciousness. Nevertheless, the appearing of Being is an appearing to consciousness.

Obviously, the truth of Being is not a being existing among other beings. Nevertheless, the plenitude of Being belongs into the truth of Being as appearing through it, and the truth of Being belongs into the plenitude of Being as one of its modes. Further, the term 'ontologi-

⁵⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 284 (GA 9, p. 375).

⁵⁷ E. HUSSERL, *Erste Philosophie. Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, in ID., *Gesammelte Schriften 6*, Felix Meiner, Hamburg 1992, pp. 188-189.

cal difference' does not only qualify the difference between beings and their existence at hand. On the contrary, it refers especially to the difference between the truth of Being and the existence of beings. Due to the oblivion of this difference the history of metaphysics tends to represent the act to be as another being because everything represented appears as a being. As long as the ontological difference remains forgotten, metaphysics cannot really distinguish between the act to be and something, which is by the act to be. Further, no science can study its own essence as long as the ontological difference is not evident as source of the understanding of essences. For instance, how should mathematics calculate the essence of mathematics? How should historiography understand the essence of historiography by considering things past as past? How should metaphysics apprehend the essence of metaphysics by enquiring into the real existence of things among which metaphysics is not found?⁵⁸

This sketch of the oblivion of Being clarifies the last part of the term onto-theo-logy. Onto-theo-*logy* is the *Logos* of being and of God. But the *Logos* or judgment of metaphysics dwells in the oblivion of Being though forgotten Being challenges the mind to reply to it. What does this imply? Basically, the truth of Being reveals the essence of Being and everything partaking in existence in its existence. Further, the essence of Being is the principle from which every other essence derives and through which every other essence is manifest in apprehension. If things are not truly manifest in their existence and their essence, because the truth of Being is forgotten, something else has to replace Being as first principle revealing the existence and essence of things. In the history of Greek metaphysics, the judgment or *Logos* manifests things in their existence and their essential structure indicated through definitions. In other words: the *Logos* or judgment produces the actual truth or intelligibility of Being. Heidegger repeats Aristotle's words: predication manifests being⁵⁹.

But the *Logos* is not the original manifestation of things. The *Logos* is true by conforming to things in their existence and essence.

⁵⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *What Is Called Thinking?*, pp. 32-33 (GA 8, pp. 35-36); ID., *Four Seminars*, pp. 21-25 (GA 15, pp. 305-311).

⁵⁹ Cf. for instance *Metaphysica* IX 2, 1046 b 17-15, M. HEIDEGGER, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* Θ 1-3. *On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis 1995, p. 3, pp. 112-116 (GA 33, p. 5, pp. 132-136).

Hence, if the existence of things is not actually manifest prior to the Logos, the latter cannot conform to anything and becomes the original manifestation of existence. In other words: human existential judgments dominate Being instead of being grounded in the truth of Being⁶⁰. This domination concerns also the essential and accidental aspects of Being, which become manifest through the composition and division of judgments. Heidegger declares, therefore, that metaphysical thinking is basically logic⁶¹. Thinking begins to project the synthesis of its judgments into things because it is not measured by the apprehension of the ontological difference, i.e., not measured by the participation of something in the act to be in all its different substantial and accidental modes. Only a thinking, which does not live in the oblivion of Being, unfolds the apprehended participation of beings in the act to be through its different judgments. Only a thinking grounded in the self-manifestation of Being, i.e., of the participation of being in Being, can conform its judgments to beings in their Being. Otherwise truth as conformity of mind and being is impossible.

Especially the Platonic schools of dialectical thinking identify the structure of thinking with the structure of Being, thus projecting the rules of thinking into real things. Even Aristotelian metaphysics determines the modes of being through the modes of predication and defines substance logically when the Stagirite writes: substance is the last subject of predication⁶². But substance is that, which has the act to be. And it is accidental for substances, that human beings consider them as last subjects of predication. We cannot define substances through their accidental existence. In general, Heidegger declares therefore: metaphysics is the truth of a certain age⁶³, replacing the truth of Being through the truth of its judgments, which are not measured by the forgotten truth of Being. In other words: the truth of judgments remains ungrounded in all the different ages dominated by metaphysics and its later counterpart

⁶⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, *Die Geschichte des Seyns. 1. Die Geschichte des Seyns. 2. Kotivón. Aus der Geschichte des Seyns*, GA 69, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1998, p. 10.

⁶¹ «Metaphysics responds to Being as Λόγος, and is accordingly in its basic characteristics everywhere logic» (M. HEIDEGGER, *Identity and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, Chicag 2002, pp. 70-71 [GA, 11, p. 76]).

⁶² *Metaphysica* V 8.

⁶³ M. HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York 1977, pp. 115-116 (GA 5, p. 75)

positivism. This is the first result of Heidegger's enquiry into the history of metaphysics whose essence is the oblivion of the truth of Being. In a second step, we have to consider the further onto-theo-logical structures of metaphysics relating to the oblivion of the difference between the act to be and that which is.

*Onto-theo-logy is the essence of metaphysics due to the oblivion of Being*⁶⁴

Heidegger seeks to understand the basic characteristics of metaphysics by an analysis of the historically first science considering being qua being written by Aristotle:

Metaphysics states what being is as being. It offers a λόγος (predication) about the ὄν (being). The later title 'ontology' characterizes its essence, provided of course, that we understand it in accordance with its proper significance and not through its narrow scholastic meaning. Metaphysics moves in the sphere of the ὄν ἢ ὄν. Its representing concerns being as being. In this manner, metaphysics always represents being as such in its totality; it represents the beingness of being (the οὐσία of the ὄν). But metaphysics represents the beingness of being in a twofold manner: in the first place, the totality of being as such with an eye to their most universal traits (ὄν καθόλου, κοινόν); but at the same time also the totality of being as such in the sense of the highest and therefore divine being (ὄν καθόλου, ἀκρότατον, θεῖον). In the metaphysics of Aristotle, the unconcealedness of being as such has specifically developed in this twofold manner (cf. Met. Γ, E, K).

Because it represents being qua being, metaphysics is, in a twofold and yet unitary manner, the truth of being in its universality and in the highest being. According to its essence, metaphysics is at the same time both ontology in the narrower sense, and theology. This ontotheological essence of philosophy proper [...] must indeed be grounded in the way in which the ὄν opens up in it, namely as

⁶⁴ Cf. I. THOMSON, «Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's Destruktion of Metaphysics», *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8 (2000), pp. 297-327; ID., *Ontotheology*, in D. DAHLSTROM (ed.), *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, pp. 106-132; F. JARAN: «L'onto-théologie dans l'oeuvre de Martin Heidegger. Récit d'une confrontation avec la pensée occidentale», *Philosophie* 91 (2006), pp. 37-62.

ὄν. Thus the theological character of ontology is not merely due to the fact that Greek metaphysics was later taken up and transformed by the ecclesiastic theology of Christianity. Rather it is due to the manner in which being as being has revealed itself from early on⁶⁵.

Primarily, metaphysics offers a λόγος (predication) about being or manifests the truth of beings in its universality. In this sense, it is the actual truth of things. Due to the forgotten ontological difference it is the essence of historical metaphysics to represent being qua being or being in its act to be. Historical metaphysics cannot do otherwise. According to Aristotle, the act to be is the form or οὐσία of things. Heidegger translates οὐσία as 'beingness' of beings resulting from the consideration of being qua being. The existence and actuality of material things lies in their form or οὐσία. The whole beingness of things in the universe lies in their respective οὐσία. Nothing would be if οὐσία were not. When Aristotle asks the question: τί τὸ ὄν, «what is being?», his answer is: οὐσία. The whatness or essence of being lies in beingness as it becomes actually manifest through predication. The corresponding science is ontology. But metaphysics does not only consider being in general or in its beingness. It also enquires into the causes of being qua being for the sake of finding the highest or divine beings:

Then the phrase 'to think Being without being' was discussed [...] this phrase is the abbreviated formulation of: 'to think Being without regard to grounding Being in being.' 'To think Being without being' thus does not mean, that the relation to being is inessential to Being, that we should disregard this relation. Rather, it means, that Being is not to be thought in the manner of metaphysics. The term 'grounding Being in being' does not only — though first of all — signify the theological moment of metaphysics, which consists in the fact, that the *summum ens* as the *causa sui* accomplishes the grounding of all being as such [...] But above all it signifies the metaphysical coinage of the ontological difference according to which Being is thought and conceived for the sake of being, so that Being, regardless of being the ground, is subjugated to being⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, pp. 287-288 (GA 9, pp. 378-379).

⁶⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 33 (GA 14, p. 41).

Heidegger confronts us with another difficulty of metaphysics due to the oblivion of Being or of that which comes first in thinking. Being as first in thinking is the measure of any truth in human thinking. Even the truth of the gods or the highest beings of the universe reveals itself through Being. Because of the oblivion of Being, Aristotelian metaphysics knows the gods only as causes of the perennial generation of things, i.e., the gods or prime movers explain the never-ending generation of things causally and are the highest truth of things. But this highest truth derives from the truth of the things through which and for the sake of which we cognize the gods. In this sense, the divine ground is subjugated to the grounded beings inasmuch as it stands under their manifestness or intelligibility. As long as thinking does not distinguish between that which is first or highest in thinking and that which is first or highest in the universe of beings, man cannot avoid certain confusions in his philosophy. The missing distinction between the orders of being and understanding leads to the gods as highest principles even though we derive their existence from the existence of other things in our way of thinking.

These gods are an explanation of the world and cannot show themselves through Being as trace of the God. The gods appear only as movers of things. But they are not visible in the holiness or sacredness of their essence due to the oblivion of Being as first principle of the apprehension of essences⁶⁷. The sacred is Being itself. Heidegger reduces the sacred or holy to the wholeness of Being. The song of the daring poets «celebrates the unbrokenness of the sphere of Being [...]. What is whole beckons and calls to the holy. The holy binds the divine. The divine brings the God closer»⁶⁸. This means, that human beings have an initial understanding of the sacred through the wholeness or perfection of Being as presence of all presences⁶⁹. This sphere of Being removes the hidden essence of God from everything else and enables him to appear through Being as his trace.

⁶⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *Pathmarks*, p. 267 (GA 9, p. 351); ID., *Identity and Difference*, pp. 71-72 (GA 11, p. 77); ID., *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 202 (GA 5, p. 272); cf. R. THURNHER, *Dio come evento. Tentativo di individuazione delle asserzioni heideggeriane in merito al problema di Dio*, in H. OTT – G. PENZO (eds.), *Heidegger e la teologia. Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento l'8-9 febbraio 1990*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1995, pp. 163-179, here: pp. 167-179; E. KETTERING, «NÄHE als Raum der Erfahrung des Heiligen», in G. PÖLTNER (ed.), *Auf der Spur des Heiligen. Heideggers Beitrag zur Gottesfrage*, Böhlau, Wien, Köln 1991, pp. 9-22.

⁶⁸ M. HEIDEGGER, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 240 (GA 5, p. 319).

⁶⁹ Heidegger identifies Hölderlin's nature with the sacred or holy and calls it the actuality of all actual things, which is present in everything. Thus, the sacred or holy «keeps everything together in the undamaged immediateness of its 'firm law'» (M. HEIDEGGER, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 89, cf. pp. 81-82, pp. 86-87, p. 135 [GA 4, p. 67, cf. pp. 58-59, pp. 64-65, p. 112).

A further difficulty lies in the term 'causa sui' or 'suumum ens as causa sui'. Obviously, Aristotle denies, that anything could be the cause of itself when he speaks of a first and unmoved mover⁷⁰. Nevertheless, he invents a metaphysics, which calls the gods 'beings' and causes of being qua being, i.e., he includes the gods within the universal concept of being. This formulation leads necessarily to the problem, that beings, which belong to the whole of being, cause the whole of being. In this sense, being becomes a self-causing circle. Later philosophers, for instance Leibniz, define God explicitly as cause of himself regarding the interior cause.⁷¹ Thus, the Aristotelian description of metaphysics influences later thinkers and their ability to consider being qua being.

Ultimately, the logic behind the theological element of metaphysics is a causal grounding of beings in Being. The highest cause or Being grounds everything else in its generation and corruption, in its remaining intelligibility, in what it is and how it is, especially in its existence⁷². This logic is designed by the Logos or judgment, which produces intelligibility through its logical form. Inasmuch as this logical form relies on causality, the cause-effect-relation is the primordial intelligibility in metaphysics. The God who enters metaphysics through the law of causality and through the understanding of Being as presence at hand is ultimately a divinization of causality⁷³. What does this mean? Heidegger writes:

Thus, where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of the cause-effect-correlation, even God can, for representational thinking, lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can sink to the level of a cause, of *causa efficiens*. He then becomes, even in theology, the god of the philosophers, namely, of those who define the unconcealed

⁷⁰ *Metaphysica* XII 7.

⁷¹ Leibniz describes God's essence as ground (*ratio*) of his existence in his early works. Hence, only that is understood through itself, which is its own cause (*causa sui*) and is being from itself (*ens a se*, cf. S. BENDER, *Leibniz' Metaphysik der Modalität*, de Gruyter, Berlin, Boston 2016, pp. 106-107; M. HEIDEGGER, *Geschichte der Philosophie von Thomas von Aquin bis Kant*, GA 23, Klostermann, Frankfurt, 2006, p. 187). Leibniz' twenty-four propositions regarding the principle of reason (*Grund*) maintain, that reasons move the intellect of the first being and ground of the universe (cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *The End of Philosophy*, pp. 49-54 [GA 6.2, pp. 414-416]).

⁷² M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 56 (GA 14, pp. 69-70).

⁷³ Cf. H. HÜBNER, «Seynsgeschichtliches und theologisches Denken. Kritische und un-kritische Anmerkungen zu "Die Überwindung der Metaphysik"», *Heidegger Studies* 18 (2002), pp. 59-87, here: pp. 75-76.

in terms of the causality of making, without ever considering the provenance of the essence of this causality⁷⁴.

Heidegger repeats: when we define Being or the unconcealed in terms of making and causality, e. g., as that which is first created by God, then everything else appears in the light or intelligibility of the cause-effect-correlation. The consequence of this representational thinking is, that we do not understand the essence of causality through the truth of Being, i.e., we do not know the essence of causality, which becomes the principal intelligibility of everything. But we also do not understand the hiddenness and remoteness of God in his holiness. God is the highest efficient cause in the philosophical calculation, which does not understand causality in its essence. This kind of metaphysics lives in the oblivion of the ontological difference, i.e., it does not understand being as participation in the act to be. The consequence is, that the representations of the act to be and of beings in their duality shape the difference between the act to be and beings. Hence, God or the act to be becomes a part of the ontological difference in some theologies, i.e., the difference relates the divine act to be or cause to beings as effect. The difference itself is interpreted in a causal way.

Though the Aristotelian logic grounds all its conclusions in the definition of the essence of things, the definitions do not derive from Being and, therefore, remain ungrounded. Instead, the term 'form' derives from the production of artificial things. Accordingly, Heidegger considers the production of artificial things as explanation of form or Being by Aristotle, i.e., Being is explained instead of being apprehended in its essence⁷⁵. In the same sense, medieval theology explains Being through creation and does not apprehend its essence⁷⁶.

Thus, the critique of onto-theo-logy maintains: 1. This science enquires into the universal beingness of beings or into the essence of beings. 2. Onto-theo-logy grounds the existence of beings in a highest or divine cause. 3. Logic dominates this way of thinking. The logic of onto-theo-logy presupposes, that we know Being or the highest

⁷⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 26 (GA 7, p. 27).

⁷⁵ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 46 (GA 14, p. 55).

⁷⁶ M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 46 (GA 14, p. 55).

cause through beings whose existence is an effect or is something made. Therefore, these beings necessarily have a maker. The question remains why the existence of beings appears as made. Some dialectical theologies or philosophies presuppose the definition of ex-sistence as 'standing outside of its cause.' Then, all the proofs of God's existence built on this definition are null and void⁷⁷. They repeat only the presupposed definition of existence.

A short glance at Heidegger's interpretation of Plato's parable of the sun clarifies this way of metaphysical thinking in the pre-metaphysical era. According to Plato, the sun is the likeness of the highest idea of the good. All things have their existence from the good, which reigns also over the ideas. Plato seems to say, that all beings partake in the idea of being because of the idea of the good. However, the good does not only enable all things to partake in existence. The good joins all the ideas to the intellect through the yoke of being and truth. The intellect knows primarily being and its truth. But inasmuch as all the other ideas partake in remaining being and truth, they are also knowable⁷⁸.

Thus, Plato has no respect for the primacy of being and truth. The idea of the good reigns everything through its causality. It is not sufficient to apprehend the truth of being. We have to ground it in a higher cause, which is the truth above and beyond truth and being⁷⁹. Thus, the reasoning process based on the principle of causality stands above the simple apprehension of the truth of Being, which has fallen into oblivion. The intelligibility of causality replaces the forgotten truth of Being. We have to see whether this description of onto-theo-logy does justice to the writings of Meister Eckhart.

⁷⁷ M. HEIDEGGER, *The End of Philosophy*, pp. 11-18 (GA 6.2, pp. 375-382).

⁷⁸ *Politeia*, 504 c – 509 b.

⁷⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, GA 34, Klostermann, Frankfurt, 1997², p. 113; cf. R. MAYER, «Heidegger und Platon. Die Ideen als Wahrheit des Seins», *Existenzia* 18 (2008), pp. 21-49, here: pp. 42-46.

The metaphysics of Meister Eckhart⁸⁰

According to Heidegger, the first characteristic of metaphysics is the oblivion of the truth of Being, i.e., of the relation of the plenitude of Being to the mind, which makes Being or the ontological difference the first known. Thus, we have to ask a twofold question: is the plenitude of being the first known in Eckhart's metaphysics? If so, does the plenitude of being relate to the mind through itself? The answer to this question determines whether or not we have to enquire into the other characteristics of onto-theo-logy in Eckhart's metaphysics. How does Eckhart characterize the truth of Being?

In general, Eckhart refers the truth and falsity of every knowledge to the habit of principles. The author of these naturally known principles and seed of all the sciences is God. In other words: it is the human nature to know the first principles⁸¹. They are cognized through themselves⁸². These principles in practical reason are called synderesis⁸³. The German sermons identify the synderesis with the spark of reason or the original understanding of good and evil⁸⁴. Thus, Eckhart indicates, that the habit of principles refers to the transcendentals, i.e., to being, one, true, good, and to the principles resulting from them, for instance, non-contradiction or doing good and avoiding evil. These principles structure his written work⁸⁵. Hence, 'being' or 'that which is' belongs to the principles naturally understood. It is even the principle of all principles inasmuch as it falls first in human apprehension⁸⁶.

⁸⁰ Cf. R. MAYER, «The Knowability of Divine Being according to Meister Eckhart's Principal Thesis: 'The Act to Be Is God'», *Alpha Omega* 20 (2017), pp. 509-583.

⁸¹ «Semen autem scientiarum habitus est principiorum, quae naturaliter nota sunt omnibus, per quae habet et potest iudicare homo de veritate et falsitate, quantum ad intellectum speculativum, et inter bonum et malum, quantum ad intellectum practicum. Lumen ergo rationis in nobis, quod est participatio divini et supremi luminis, semen est tam virtutum quam scientiarum, de qua exponi potest illud: 'multi dicunt: quis ostendit nobis bona?' et respondet Psalmus: 'signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, domine'. Hoc lumen semper manet et eius auctor est deus» (LW I, *Liber parabolarum Genesis*, n. 200).

⁸² LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 280.

⁸³ LW I, *Liber parabolarum Genesis*, n. 199.

⁸⁴ DW I, *Sermon* 20 a, pp. 332, 3 - 333, 5; *Sermon* 20 b, p. 348, 1-12.

⁸⁵ J.A. AERTSEN, «Der Systematiker Eckhart», in: A. SPEER – L. WEGENER et al. (eds.), *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt*, [Miscellanea Mediaevalia 32], Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York 2005, pp. 189-230, here: pp. 193-195.

⁸⁶ LW II, *Expositio libri Exodi*, n. 169.

The spark of reason is God's image and leads to a cognition where «all things are one, all things together, all and all united in all and all»⁸⁷. Ultimately, the soul seeks a knowledge of God in the unknowable desert beyond the spark⁸⁸. The spark itself 'resists all creatures'⁸⁹ by inclining the mind to the universal and absolute good, so that it cannot rest in the creatures' participated goodness.

The name 'being' or 'that which is' signifies the act to be⁹⁰, i.e., our understanding of being naturally refers to the difference between being and the act to be. We call something a being because of its act to be in which it partakes. This implies, that this or that being has its act to be⁹¹. The concrete signification of a perfection, e. g., 'being', or the 'just one', refers to the abstract perfection, i.e., to the act to be and to justice. But these abstract perfections are in the concrete as participated. This implies, that the participating subject is imperfect and nude through itself⁹². Further, the abstract act to be is that through which a thing or being is. In the same sense, the essence is that what a thing is⁹³.

When Heidegger quotes Eckhart, he refers only to texts appearing to describe the divine act to be as formal cause of beings. But a deeper research clarifies, that Eckhart understands both the act to be and the essence as created principles of all creatures. Only in God they are identical, because he is not created⁹⁴. Hence, Eckhart distinguishes between the formal act to be of things or their own existence, and the virtual act to be of things who is God. Things have an intellectual existence in him⁹⁵. Therefore, Eckhart calls God sometimes the formal cause of things as indicated by the texts quoted by Heidegger. But this formal cause is extrinsic inasmuch as the thing's own perfections conform to

⁸⁷ DW III, *Sermon 76*, p. 317, 1-2; cf. B. MCGINN (ed.), *Meister Eckhart. Teacher and Preacher*, p. 328.

⁸⁸ DW II, *Sermon 48*, pp. 419, 1 - 421, 3; cf. E. COLLEDGE – B. MCGINN (eds.), *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, p. 198.

⁸⁹ DW I, *Sermon 20 a*, p. 333, 1-2; *Sermon 20 b*, p. 348, 12; DW II, *Sermon 48*, p. 420, 1.

⁹⁰ «Ens solum esse significat» (LW I, *Prologus in opus propositionum*, n. 2).

⁹¹ LW I, *Prologus in opus propositionum*, n. 23.

⁹² LW III, n. 14, n. 63.

⁹³ LW I, *Liber paraboliarum Genesis*, n. 34.

⁹⁴ LW I, *Liber paraboliarum Genesis*, n. 34.

⁹⁵ LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 77, n. 83, LW II, *Expositio libri Exodi*, n. 121, LW III, nn. 44-45, n. 337.

their idea in God⁹⁶. Nevertheless, God is in things and not outside of them inasmuch as he causes what is innermost in them, their act to be⁹⁷.

These remarks demonstrate that Eckhart thinks being or that which is as participation in the act to be. The difference between being and the act to be thought by Eckhart does not immediately refer to the difference between creature and God as Heidegger thinks. Primarily, a thing shows itself as participating in its own act to be and *is denominated by its own form and not by its account or idea in God*⁹⁸. In other words: God is not the formal cause of things in the strict sense. But inasmuch as the thing is imperfect and nude without its participated perfections, the participation in the act to be points immediately to an extrinsic source of the act to be. Hence, metaphysics is able to ask: how does the extrinsic source of the act to be relate to beings in their act to be? Eckhart answers as follows:

[J]ust as the whole universe and the one act to be of the universe itself is first intended by the first cause, but every part and its act to be secondarily, so they [the parts] receive the act to be from the cause of the universe by mediation of the one act to be itself of the universe, in itself, through itself, and for the sake of itself, and equally necessarily, because in the one there is no inequality [...] For the singular beings, though they are unequal among themselves, and more or less perfect, receive, draw, and collect their act to be under the account of the one act to be, which falls first and through itself under the causality and the glance of the first cause of every act to be [...] Thus, because they [the singular beings] proceed and are and stand in the act to be and consequently under the first cause, which cause is the act to be, on account of something one and in something one, it follows that they are also under the care of the same first cause⁹⁹.

Obviously, God primarily intends one thing when he creates: the act to be of the universe, which he brings forth in every being. In a certain sense, the act to be of the universe, which — similar to the

⁹⁶ LW II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae*, n. 72, cf. Aquinas's *Super I Sententiarum* d8 q1 a2 ad2.

⁹⁷ LW III, n. 34.

⁹⁸ LW II, *Expositio libri Exodi*, n. 121.

⁹⁹ LW II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae*, n. 72.

universe — does not subsist, ‘mediates’ between God and the singular creatures or beings. God produces the one act to be of the universe similar to the sun shining its light upon our world. Nevertheless, each and every being receives its own act to be in the efflux of being from the divine sun. Unequal beings, which are more or less perfect, or share more or less in the act to be, draw their specific existence from this one act to be of the universe. The example of the sunlight reveals a similar mystery: all the colors are contained in white light, so that each and every color reflects only that light, which corresponds to its essence. In other words: the one act to be of the universe is the one account or aspect under which God considers and produces the whole universe. Therefore, God is the cause of the act to be of things, even of being inasmuch as it is being¹⁰⁰.

The act to be of the universe contains all the differences of being¹⁰¹. No mode or difference of the act to be may be missing in the act to be¹⁰². Though the cause of being qua being brings about only one effect, i.e., the remaining existence of the universe, all the different and changing creatures are contained in this one effect as different from each other. All the creatures in their respective essences are modes of one and the same act to be and derive from it through the differences of being. Which name does Eckhart give to the act to be of the universe? Though some passages speak of God as actuality of everything and even of forms¹⁰³, the name «formal actuality of every form and essence universally»¹⁰⁴ seems to indicate the formal existence of things emanating from God. Thus, «God's nature, act to be, and life subsists in communicating itself and in giving itself totally»¹⁰⁵. Subsisting in itself and communicating itself to everything else is one and the same thing for God's act to be. But the communicated act to be is received in things subsisting through their own or formal act to be in different ways, i.e., the communicated act to be does not subsist or exist. It is that by which a creature is or subsists in accord with the ontological difference.

¹⁰⁰ LW II, *Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici*, n. 48; cf. LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* I, n. 10.

¹⁰¹ LW IV, n. 287, n. 279.

¹⁰² LW I, *Prologus in opus propositionum*, n. 15.

¹⁰³ LW II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae*, n. 189; LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* I, n. 3.

¹⁰⁴ LW I, *Prologus in opus propositionum*, n. 14.

¹⁰⁵ LW IV, n. 55.

This first description of being manifests the difference between being and the act to be as participation. Further, all the modes and differences of being are contained in the act to be, even the act of understanding¹⁰⁶. But does this mean, that being 'is' also its own relation to human apprehension? Eckhart approaches the question metaphysically and considers being as it descends from God in its plenitude:

The whole plenitude of being is divided into real being outside of the soul, belonging to making and creation, and also into being in the soul or from the soul, belonging to doctrine and cognition. But the first cause and principle of everything is the act to be itself: both real existence outside of the soul [...] and cognitive being in the soul [...] descend and proceed from him [...]. Therefore, he (*sc.* the Lord) says: [...] I am he who is, I am the act to be itself, from which every existence is, every mode of being, either in the soul, and in this way (*sc.* he is) teacher, or outside in things, and in this way (*sc.* he is) Lord¹⁰⁷.

Hence, the one plenitude of being descending from God divides into two modes of being, i.e., into the real existence of things outside of the soul and into cognitive existence in the soul. The absolute existence of things outside of the soul is their actuality. Cognitive existence in the soul, on the other hand, is not absolute. Eckhart describes the species, which are the principles of sensual and intellectual activity, as beings in the soul¹⁰⁸. We know the real things whose likeness the species are through the species. Hence, if the species in the soul had real existence, we would see the species itself and not the real thing¹⁰⁹. Therefore, Eckhart attributes a spiritual or intellectual existence to the species¹¹⁰. This cognitive existence in the soul enables the species to represent a thing to the mind without appearing itself, i.e., the species withdraws itself from the mind for the sake of immediately representing reality or things as they are. Hence, the cognitive existence of the species relates the real thing to the mind by manifesting it to the mind.

¹⁰⁶ LW III, n. 63.

¹⁰⁷ LW III, n. 540.

¹⁰⁸ LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* II, nn. 4-5.

¹⁰⁹ LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* I, n. 7.

¹¹⁰ LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 25, *Liber parabolarum Genesis*, n. 202, n. 206.

Eckhart describes the phenomenon of perception in the Aristotelian tradition: «the visible in act and sight in act are one»¹¹¹. Hence, the sensible and the sense are one and the same act because the likeness or species of the thing actually represents the thing to sight and actualizes the sense of sight, enabling it to see¹¹². Thus, the appearing of the visible thing to sight and the act of seeing are one and exist relative to each other. Nevertheless, the priority lies in the thing's appearing: «the visible in act, inasmuch as it is an object, throws itself as whole object towards sight (*sc. se totum, in quantum obiectum, obicit visui*)»¹¹³. Hence, the appearing through the species, which has spiritual existence, happens relative to the cognitive power, and is possible through the spiritual mode of existence. Though the mode of real existence is distinct from the mode of spiritual existence, both modes of existence belong to the one plenitude of being. Having considered being relative to the mind as mode of the plenitude of being, we may look at the text speaking of being as first known:

Further, 'that which first falls in the mind,' according to Avicenna, and universally in apprehension, 'is being.' Therefore, also, the first philosopher treating of the first beings and the first principles of things presupposes being. And hence it [being] itself is and is called his subject because it is subjected and presupposed to everything, even to the first cognition and apprehension¹¹⁴.

That which falls universally or in every apprehension, because it is naturally and necessarily known, is being. Being is presupposed or prior to every apprehension, even prior to the first cognition. Hence, apprehension cannot represent 'being' to itself. Otherwise it would not respect that, which is prior to every apprehension. But being falling in apprehension is not only presupposed to our first cognition, it is presupposed to everything. Nothing can be or exist without the plenitude of being through which God creates and actualizes all things. Nothing can be understood without the plenitude of being through which God

¹¹¹ LW III, n. 505.

¹¹² LW III, n. 194.

¹¹³ LW III, n. 505.

¹¹⁴ LW II, *Expositio libri Exodi*, n. 169.

teaches every mind¹¹⁵. This is the presupposition of metaphysics or first philosophy or the condition of the possibility of metaphysics. Unless one and the same plenitude of being actualizes all things and is the first principle of the mind's apprehension of whatnesses, there is no metaphysics. In other words: universal being also actualizes the mind in the order of cognitive existence or as first actual object. Eckhart's metaphysics of cognition does not say that the cognition of being in the mind reduplicates real being outside of the mind. On the contrary, the reality of things outside the mind is present to the mind through the species in the mind. According to this metaphysics, the plenitude of being has to be present to the mind through itself inasmuch as it contains the cognitive or spiritual mode of being. There is no intelligible species presenting being to the mind. Eckhart says so explicitly in the following text:

The sense of man, especially sight, not having and repudiating color by nature cognizes color, enjoys color, and is receptive of all numerically and specifically distinct colors [...]. We see the same regarding the capacities of the soul. The more a capacity is separate [sc. from matter], the more [objects] it may receive [...] to the extent, that the intellect having nothing has the whole of being as object, having the same act to be with the object that is being¹¹⁶.

These words cannot be understood without reference to Eckhart's doctrine of cognition. He presupposes the principle, that the cognitive or receptive capacity as such receives its whole existence from the object as object¹¹⁷. This does not mean, that the capacity as accident in the soul exists through its object. The capacity exists naturally by inhering in the soul. But in its actual operation relative to the object it receives its whole existence or activity from the object. In this sense, the actual intellect and its actually intelligible object are one and have one and the same actuality. The intellect receives its existence or actuality in knowing from the object, which generates its likeness in the intellect. If we remove 'being seen' from the object we also remove the act of seeing from sight. Inasmuch as appearing and the corresponding cognition are relative to each other, they begin and cease to be with one another¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ Cf. LW III, n. 540 quoted above.

¹¹⁶ LW III, n. 247.

¹¹⁷ LW III, n. 107, n. 109, n. 469, n. 682.

¹¹⁸ LW III, n. 107.

Thus, presupposing that the actual intellect receives its actuality from the actually intelligible object, Eckhart writes in the above-quoted text: «the intellect having nothing (sc. having no object) has the whole of being as object, having the same act to be with the object that is being». The identity in act of intellect and being is possible inasmuch as being contains every actuality, even actual intelligibility or cognitive being as the relation of being to the mind. The intellect can only receive cognitive being from its object, which is being. Real or natural existence cannot be received in the intellect though it is manifest through cognitive being. In this sense, Eckhart calls the act to be the 'light of truth and cognoscibility'¹¹⁹. The whole plenitude of being is manifest through it.

Recapitulating we may say: the plenitude of being is the metaphysical presupposition of any being and any cognition. No natural thing is without the act to be as actuality of all forms and essences. Even the act of thinking is included in the plenitude of being. However, Eckhart extends this actuality to the actual object of the mind, i.e., to the object as object in its actual relation to the mind. Hence, there is no object for the mind without the plenitude of being. The lack of an object would entail, that the mind does not think anything because the intellect in act is the intelligible (object) in act and receives its whole actuality from the intelligible in act. Hence, Eckhart reduces the actuality of all things and of all actually intelligible objects to the actuality of all forms and essences. The order of real being and the order of spiritual or cognitive being belong to the one plenitude of being. In a certain sense, Eckhart mentions already the oblivion of Being when he comments on Sirach as follows:

He says: 'elucidating', i.e., 'to bring to light outside', as if it did not shine within, but remains concealed till it becomes outside and is manifest [...]. Again, light and life or living are the act to be itself and are one act to be within the act to be, as is manifest in the Book of Causes. Therefore, shining and living are concealed in the act to be and under the act to be, as if they were hidden from the nature and property of shining till they are produced and become outside and, thus, shine [...]. In this way, whiteness in itself is neither white

¹¹⁹ LW II, *Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici*, n. 23.

nor does it whiten something, but it is that by which something is whitened. Nevertheless, whiteness is within the act to be, but ‘whitening’ remains hidden in the act to be, though having become outside it whitens¹²⁰.

Eckhart presupposes the ontological difference also in the realm of natural being. This means whiteness is not white, but it is that by which something is white. The act to be is not, but it is that by which something is and limits the act to be. The act to be contains every actuality, for instance, living and shining. But the human mind does not understand living and shining as long as it considers the act to be only under the account of the act to be or in itself. We have to experience living and shining as such and as modes of being. Then we will realize, that living and shining are acts hidden within the actuality of all acts or within the act to be. This implies, that shining itself is hidden from the nature of shining — or from becoming manifest to the human mind — till we consider the nature of being in something shining, i.e., in something actually intelligible for the mind. As long as metaphysics does not consider the act to be in something actually intelligible, it dwells in the oblivion of Being.

Does Meister Eckhart’s metaphysics think onto-theo-logically?

Heidegger’s secondary account of onto-theo-logy says: metaphysics grounds the whole of beings in the act to be itself. Further, it enquires into the general beingness of all beings. Though the actuality of all acts described by Eckhart is not a universal account or general beingness, but a singularity, he appears to think onto-theo-logically. However, Heidegger’s primary account of metaphysics characterizes onto-theo-logy as the oblivion of the truth of Being or the ontological difference. Therefore, true metaphysics grounds in the ontological difference and unfolds it by thinking the transcendence of the act to be beyond all beings. This transcendence is the source of any essence and of the cognition of essences. Thus, the above description of Eckhart’s metaphysics demonstrates, that he does not think onto-theo-logically, because he grounds first philosophy in being as the ontological differ-

¹²⁰ LW II, *Sermones et Lectiones super Ecclesiastici*, n. 70.

ence and includes the truth or cognoscibility of Being within the plenitude of being or actuality of every form and essence¹²¹. Nevertheless, we still have to clarify some consequences of Eckhart's metaphysics in comparison to Heidegger's thought.

The grounding of the truth of thinking in the truth of Being

At first sight, Eckhart seems to repeat the Aristotelian definition of truth:

Truth is born from that which is in things outside. Hence, the cognition signified by the proposition is true, when I conceive, apprehend, and say of that which is, that it is. But when I apprehend and say of that which is not, that it is, my apprehension and proposition is false. And the letter of the philosopher speaks in this sense. Accordingly, I proceed in this way: truth proceeds and is born from the act to be of things; for that which is said, is true from that which is, and things stand in truth as they stand in entity, as the same philosopher says elsewhere, and the same are the principles of being and of knowing. But the spirit, namely God [...] is the cause of all existence. Hence, he is the cause of all truth and doctrine¹²².

Every science is taught and learned from and through its principles. But it is manifest, that the first principles are co-created with the soul by the spirit. Therefore, the Spirit God himself teaches man every truth and science, according to the word of the psalm: 'who teaches man science'¹²³.

According to Aristotle, truth means to say of that which is, that it is. This traditional 'definition' seems to be unquestionable. But how can we measure our representations by things? The real thing as such or as existing in itself is not present to me or known. Only the real thing actually known is present to me through a representation and can be compared to my judgment about this thing. Does this mean: I have to compare my representation of the thing to another representation as Kant suggests?¹²⁴

¹²¹ I.A. MOORE, «The Problem of Ontotheology in Eckhart's Latin Writings», *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22 (2018), pp. 315-342, does not discuss Being as the truth of Being in his concept of onto-theo-logy. Due to this difference in the description of onto-theo-logy he finds a residue of onto-theo-logical thinking in Eckhart.

¹²² LW III, n. 619.

¹²³ LW III, n. 662.

¹²⁴ M. HEIDEGGER, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, pp. 14-19 (GA 45, pp. 14-20)

The Kantian problem finds no solution within Aristotelian philosophy. Obviously, Aristotle compares a judgment to the thing in itself without realizing, that this thing cannot be the measure for his thought unless it is actually manifest. Though Eckhart does not know of the Kantian problem, he suggests a grounding of the Aristotelian truth in a higher principle. Inasmuch as the principles of being and knowing are the same, God, the principle of the whole act to be must also be the principle of every truth and knowledge. Eckhart's solution for this problem is evident from his metaphysics. The whole of being includes also being in the soul or cognitive being by which God teaches. But the plenitude of being is not only manifest to the mind. The mind has also the first principles or conceptions corresponding to the plenitude of being, i.e., we have also a concept of being and of the principle of non-contradiction. These principles are naturally known and co-created with the soul.

How does this presupposition influence our understanding of truth? Each and every being qua being is actually manifest to the mind in apprehension through the plenitude of being, which falls first and universally in the mind as presupposition of any cognition. The proposition, which is a manifest being in the soul¹²⁵, corresponding to the apprehension of being may be compared to being itself inasmuch as being is manifest in apprehension without any representation. Further, the presence of beings through being itself is not a human representation but prior to every cognition and representation. Hence, Eckhart grounds the truth of every proposition in the irrepresentable plenitude of being. The understanding of truth does not compare two representations to each other. It compares a judgment to the self-manifestation of the plenitude of being and of every limited being appearing through the plenitude of being as a being.

But the plenitude of being is not only the ultimate measure for every natural truth. According to Eckhart, it is also the origin of our apprehension of the essences of things through abstraction. In this sense, the object and dwelling of the intellect is pure Being or essence in itself abstracting from chance or accidental being. When the intellect cognizes the truth of an essence it speaks its intellectual word signifying the object. But as long as the intellect has not reached the truth of the

¹²⁵ LW II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae*, nn. 296-297.

essence in its ground, it seeks the truth of the essence and waits for the understanding of the essence without a word. In this state, the intellect cannot express, that 'this is this' and 'it is thus and not some other thing'. This state may last for a year or more to learn a natural truth, i.e., to negate that which something is not in its essence¹²⁶. Thus, the essence is known by identifying it with itself or its genus (this is this) and by distinguishing it from other things (through its specific difference). Being is the first principle guiding this process. As Eckhart had said: all the differences and modes of being are found within being. Hence, being is able to present things as different to us, i.e., they appear as different modes of one and the same plenitude of being and we have to reduce the modes of being to being itself in order to understand them.

No explanation of being and of God

Inasmuch as being first falls in apprehension and is known through itself in its essence, Eckhart cannot explain being through creation. The unchangeable essence of being is apprehended and not explained. Inasmuch as being is the first principle of understanding, there is no principle above it. Every other human knowledge reduces to it. The first principle of understanding differs from the first cause of the universe. These two principles belong to different orders. That which first falls in the mind and is the principle of human understanding (and the formal cause of all things), is not God or the principle of everything. Divine intelligibility exceeds the human mind¹²⁷.

In this sense, being as ontological difference enables us to reduce being to a cause of being without explaining being through a higher principle in understanding. Nobody can explain a first principle because there is no principle prior to it. Nevertheless, the unfolding of being through participation demonstrates, that being qua being depends on a higher and unknown cause, i.e., upon the cause of the plenitude of being. The distinction between principles in the order of knowing and

¹²⁶ DW IV, 1, Sermon 104 A, lines 295-319, LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 232; cf. R. J. MAYER, «Von der Kraft des Wortes. Thomas von Aquin und Meister Eckhart zur Frage: Wie und von woher empfängt die menschliche Vernunft ihr Wort?», in W. HOYER (ed.), *Gott loben, segnen, verkündigen. 75 Jahre Dominikanerprovinz des hl. Albert in Süddeutschland und Österreich*, Herder, Freiburg 2014, pp. 67-119, here: pp. 96-98.

¹²⁷ DW IV, 1, Sermon 104 A, lines 319-341; cf. R.J. MAYER, «Von der Kraft des Wortes», p. 105.

being makes an end to the confusion of metaphysics within which Plato treated the good as a principle of knowing to which the mind reduces all knowledge and all being. But the God who remains unknown in his essence is not a principle of knowing though he is known as principle of everything which is.

On the one hand, the principle of causality or participation manifests, that there is a cause of being qua being. On the other hand, being as principle of the truth of essences does not allow us to apprehend the divine essence though it forces us to seek an understanding of the unknowable divine essence. The intellect cannot attain the ground of the supernatural truth who is God. Our understanding remains in the state of searching regarding the divine essence¹²⁸. Nevertheless, we would not have a true understanding of being if we did not learn through being, that it is participated being. And we would not understand anything of God, if we did not learn through being, that he is the cause of all being. When a singular subsisting being contains the whole perfection of the universe in himself, and God — in accord with revelation — far exceeds the perfection of the universe, then he is beyond all human comprehension.

However, Eckhart approaches God especially through the spark of reason. This means at first, that the spark in the first principles is the measure of any intelligibility, especially being as the object of the intellect is this measure. The experience of God through being as principle of cognition shows, that our understanding relates to God as the eye of a bat refers to the sun¹²⁹. His intelligibility transcends anything, which human beings can understand. God is, therefore, the hidden act to be¹³⁰, not a principle understood by the mind. The plenitude of being is not only awe-inspiring. Being as the good is the synderesis guiding all our actions by the insight into goodness and perfection, revealing the truth of our actions or their untruth, revealing God as the hidden one who sees us from the point of view of his perfection, which is immovable purity and unity of spirit according to the image of the spark.¹³¹ Thus, the spark indicates a goodness and purity far removed from this world.

¹²⁸ DW IV, 1, Sermon 104 A, lines 319-341.

¹²⁹ LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 41.

¹³⁰ LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 300.

¹³¹ DW V, *Traktat 3: Von abegescheidenheit*, p. 412.

And the unknown God is still far removed from the spark. In this sense, metaphysics still knows of God's holiness and does not subjugate God to the creatures through which he is known, especially it does not subjugate God to the act to be. Eckhart writes:

According to Damascene prayer is 'the intellect's ascent to God.' Hence, the intellect in itself does not touch upon God, unless it ascends. But ascent is to something higher. Hence, it has to transcend not only imaginable things, but also intelligible things. Further, as the intellect resolves into the act to be, it also has to transcend this. For the act to be is not the cause of the act to be, as fire is not the cause of fire, but something far higher to which it has to ascend.¹³²

Though prayer is not the action taught by metaphysics, metaphysics may teach, that the cause of the act to be is far above the act to be. The ascent to God has to leave behind Being inasmuch as it is created. Eckhart's understanding of analogy includes a negation of creaturely perfections regarding God. Inasmuch as we know being through creatures, we have to negate this mode of being in our speaking of God:

I assume, that our imagination is defective in this case; for our knowledge differs from God's knowledge, because God's knowledge is the cause of things and our knowledge is caused by things. And therefore, because our knowledge depends on being by which it is caused, being itself depends on God's knowledge for the same reason; and therefore, whatever is in God, is above the act to be and wholly is understanding.

I show from this, that neither being nor act to be is in God, because nothing is formally [sc. both] in the cause and in the caused, if the cause is a true [sc. analogous] cause. But God is the cause of all existence. Hence, formally speaking existence is not in God [...] And therefore, because God is either the principle of existence itself or of being, God is not being or the existence of creatures [...] And therefore, because existence belongs to creatures, it is not in God unless as in a cause, and there it is not formally [...] and therefore, existence is not in God but the purity of existence¹³³.

¹³² LW IV, n. 247.

¹³³ LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* I, nn. 8-9. Regarding analogous naming cf. LW II, *Ex-*

Thus, if we speak formally of existence as created existence, this kind of existence is not in God unless it is in him as in its cause¹³⁴. As long as our knowledge of being is caused by creatures, it is measured by them. Hence, we understand being as it is found in creatures and not in God. This step of thinking is important inasmuch as it connects the experience of perfections to their concept. Our understanding signifies perfections as it experiences them through the things of this world. Therefore, we cannot apply these conceptions directly to God. We do not even know how they apply to God. This means, that we do not formally cognize the divine essence through our conceptions, i.e., we lack God's form as cognized and know him only through his effects¹³⁵.

The Platonic dialectic or onto-theo-logy, which, for instance, seeks to demonstrate God's existence through a concept of his essence, is, therefore, not Eckhart's way of thinking. The derivation of knowledge from sensual experience cannot demonstrate through concepts, which are empty and without experience regarding God. A Platonist could try to prove God's existence by arguing: God's essence is his existence. Therefore, he necessarily exists. But Eckhart would object and say: you do not know God's essence. Therefore, your proof of God's existence is null and void.

Nevertheless, philosophical thinking may enquire into the mode of being or essence of God. Therefore, Eckhart considers God as intellect or understanding, i.e., God is intellect through his essence. This implies, that the act to be in him is similar to the existence of beings in the soul. We have to remember, that a species withdraws from being seen itself for the sake of representing the thing whose likeness it is. This withdrawal is possible due to intellectual or spiritual existence. Hence, God is spiritual existence through and through, even though this spiritual existence is his nature and reality seen through itself¹³⁶.

positio libri Exodi, n. 78; R. MAYER, «The Knowability of Divine Being according to Meister Eckhart's Principal Thesis: 'The Act to Be Is God'», pp. 561-567.

¹³⁴ Heidegger speaks formally of Being or the truth of Being. Therefore, he has to deny, that Being is God.

¹³⁵ LW V, *Sermo die beati Augustini Parisius habitus*, n. 4, n. 11.

¹³⁶ LW I, *Liber parabolarum Genesis*, nn. 214-215; LW V, *Quaestio Parisiensis* I, n. 7; cfr. R. J. MAYER, «Meister Eckharts erste *Quaestio Parisiensis* oder: Wie kann Gottes Vernehmen das *fundamentum* seines Seins sein?», *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54 (2007), pp. 430-463 (compare the English version: «Meister Eckhart's First Parisi-

Divine understanding is an existence, which is wholly perspicuous and transparent, pure manifestness. But the reality of God still far exceeds this description of divine existence.

This implies, that God is not *a being* causing being qua being, so that being qua being becomes a self-causing circle. Only being by essence may cause participated being as such, so that they belong to different orders of being. Further, God cannot create another subsisting understanding inasmuch as existence and understanding in creatures are distinct¹³⁷. The pure spiritual existence as such cannot be a creature. Hence, it belongs to another order of being and may be the origin of this world full of natural beings.

Eckhart and Heidegger

Though Eckhart and Heidegger differ in their pursuit of metaphysics, both thinkers are able to express their thoughts in a new language. In this way, they seek to withdraw the thoughts they convey from any immediate access. Despite their differences, they share many ideas in common. One of them is the hiddenness of Being underneath time. Eckhart describes it more or less as the hiddenness of the spark of reason under images and represented concepts¹³⁸. Nevertheless, he sees being also as covered by time and writes:

If someone possessed the art and the power to draw time and everything, which has ever happened in time in six thousand years and what will happen till the end, into a present now, that would be 'the plenitude of time'. This is the now of eternity, in which the soul cognizes all things in God anew and fresh and present [...] The soul, in which God is to be born [...] must rid itself of time and [...] must remain in the contemplation of the riches of God [...] there the soul cognizes all things and cognizes them in perfection.¹³⁹

When the soul leaves time aside, it is able to consider the plenitude of being containing all things and their differences. Till 1973, Heidegger

an Question or: How Can God's Understanding Be the *fundamentum* of His Existence?» At: <https://sites.google.com/site/aycardusproject/translations>.

¹³⁷ LW IV, n. 301.

¹³⁸ LW I, *Expositio libri Genesis*, n. 301.

¹³⁹ DW II, *Sermon* 38.

ger was convinced, that the soul cannot leave behind time. But then he spoke of a non-sensuous seeing of being itself. His previous philosophy asks for this pure vision of Being without reaching it. Nevertheless, similar to Eckhart¹⁴⁰, this philosophy identifies the first day of creation or light with Being. In this sense, Heidegger notes:

All we need is the plain, sudden, unforgettable and hence forever new look into something which we — even though it is familiar to us — do not even try to know, let alone understand in a fitting manner. This unknown-familiar something [...] is to all present and absent beings as that first break of dawn with which the changing cycle of day and night first begins to be possible: it is the earliest and most ancient at once [...] It is what brings all present and absent beings each into their own, from where they show themselves in what they are, and where they abide according to their kind¹⁴¹.

In a hidden way, the German philosopher confirms, that Being is the created light called day in the first chapter of Genesis. This day is the principle from where things show themselves in what they are. But it is also the principle bringing all things into their own essence. Inasmuch as God calls light or day into existence, Heidegger does not refuse thinking of the Creator. But he refuses defining Being through being created. Being is the intelligible space within which the divinity shows itself. It is even the trace leading to God or his language. But Being does not enable us to understand God in his essence. Heidegger clarifies poetically, that we live in the presence of an unknown God:

for Hölderlin God, as the one who he is, is unknown and it is just as *this Unknown One* that he is the measure for the poet [...] For something that man measures himself by must after all impart itself, must appear. But if it appears, it is known. The God, however, is unknown, and he is the measure nonetheless. Not only this, but the God who remains unknown, must by showing *himself* as the one he is, appear as the one who remains unknown. God's *manifestness* — not only he himself — is mysterious¹⁴².

¹⁴⁰ LW III, nn. 151-152, cf. LW II, *Expositio libri Sapientiae*, nn. 38-40.

¹⁴¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *On the Way to Language*, p. 127 (GA 12, p. 246).

¹⁴² M. HEIDEGGER, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 220-221 (GA 7, p. 201).

Whereas Eckhart writes a metaphysics demonstrating God as the first cause of the universe by starting from the plenitude of being as first principle behind every thing and every thought, Heidegger speaks phenomenologically of the same plenitude of being and refuses calling God 'Being'¹⁴³. Though he is wrong in his judgment about the total oblivion of the truth of Being in the history of metaphysics, i.e., the metaphysics of Eckhart proves him wrong, it is not easy to find other philosophies overcoming the oblivion of Being. But only a philosophy dwelling in the manifestness of being as first principle and measure of any kind of intelligibility in the human mind will respect the hiddenness and holiness of God. Both Eckhart and Heidegger remind us of God's hidden majesty, which no human being has ever seen.

When we reflect on Heidegger's critique of onto-theo-logy, we have to remember, that the term 'ontotheology' was coined by Immanuel Kant¹⁴⁴. Kantian ontotheology describes the God determined by the logical conclusion of the ontological argument, which presupposes the definition of God as essence of all essences and derives the existence of God from this presupposition. Kant seeks to balance this procedure by limiting thinking, i.e., judging, to sensual appearances. Hence, metaphysics as science of the suprasensible is impossible. But Kantian thinking lives in the oblivion of the ontological difference in simple apprehension because he identifies thinking and judging.

Heidegger's poetic philosophy, on the other hand, speaks of God. Accordingly, God appears through Being as his language. Further, Heidegger calls the ontological difference the condition of the possibility of metaphysics. This difference is seen in accepting apprehension and every human judgment depends on the apprehension of being participating in the act to be. Thus, Heidegger leads thinking back into the dimension of the apprehension of essences. The limit of thinking lies in the apprehension of Being, which withdraws the divine essence from being known. But by accepting this limit of human thinking in apprehension we still may think metaphysically about the existence of the unknown God through our judgments. Being and this world reveal the existence of the unknown God.

¹⁴³ M. HEIDEGGER, *Seminare*, GA 15, p. 436.

¹⁴⁴ I. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 660; cf. O. BOULNOIS, «Heidegger, l'ontothéologie et les structures médiévales de la métaphysique», *Le Philosophoire* 9 (1999), pp. 27-55, here: p. 30.

Thus, Heidegger binds human apprehension to the difference under the sensual limits of space and time. He seems to agree with the Kantian critique, that concepts without sensual appearances are empty. But he does not describe concepts as functions of judgment. Concepts are given in apprehension. If the apprehended essence of things and especially of Being points to something transcending the sensual appearance of things, this experience of transcendence is the basis for judgments regarding those things, which cannot be experienced immediately through the senses.

The onto-theo-logical difference

Neither Heidegger nor Eckhart speak of an onto-theo-logical difference. But Heidegger distinguishes the God appearing as cause of that which partakes in Being from the God appearing in his hidden essence or divinity. God as appearing cause is subjugated to the intelligibility of his effects. God showing himself from within the dimension of the divinity surpasses everything in his unknowable holiness. In a similar sense, Eckhart distinguishes God and Godhead or divinity as follows:

Yet again I will say what I never said before: God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth [...] God *becomes* when all creatures say ‘God’ — then God comes to be [...] If anyone asked me, ‘Brother Eckhart, when did you leave your house?’ then I was in there. That is how all creatures speak of God. And why do they not speak of the Godhead? Everything that is in the Godhead is one, and of that there is nothing to be said. God works, the Godhead does no work [...] God and Godhead are distinguished by working and not working.¹⁴⁵

Usually Eckhart signifies the divine essence or Godhead by the name ‘God.’ In this sense, God is eternally God and is named Lord from the point of view of time, i.e., he is Lord by having creatures or relative to his creatures¹⁴⁶. The above sermon distinguishes between God inas-

¹⁴⁵ Sermon 56, in: *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. M. O’Connell Walshe (ed.), The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2009, pp. 293-294 (= DW IV, 2, Sermon 109, ll. 34-35, ll. 56-64).

¹⁴⁶ LW I, *Liber parabolarum Genesis*, n. 109.

much as he is manifest or spoken by his works and God in his hidden essence or in in himself. Scripture signifies the hidden or inexpressible essence of God by the tetragrammaton. The holiness of this name reveals God's essence as holy secret¹⁴⁷. What does this mean?

On the one hand, even the name 'God' signifying the hidden God-head is taken from God's works¹⁴⁸. God *becomes* the God for us *when* his creatures reveal him, i.e., from the point of view of time. God is eternally in the house of his hidden essence. But his creatures say: When did you leave your house to create us? Thus, God is understood to create when his creatures are. The action appears to be temporal even though it is his eternal essence.

Further, the creatures cannot reveal the unity of all created perfections in the divine essence. This remark is most important. Even though the term 'being' signifies the actuality of all forms and essences, we cannot know the unity of all perfections in God. 'Being' is the first principle of simple apprehension from which every created essence derives formally. Though God appears as a being among other beings when we speak of him, he is the unique and all-encompassing origin of his creation. The human mind seeks to know his essence or God in himself, i.e., it is not content with knowing God as origin or relative to us. The first principle of apprehension reveals only the essence of creatures partaking in the act to be. Thus, it denies the knowability of God's essence and reveals, that God's essence is a holy secret far above everything we can know in its essence. The onto-theo-logical differ-

¹⁴⁷ LW II, *Expositio libri Exodi*, n. 146, n. 149.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 13, a. 8: «Because therefore God is not known to us in His nature, but is made known to us from His operations or effects, we name Him from these, as said above; hence this name 'God' is a name of operation so far as relates to the source of its meaning. For this name is imposed from His universal providence over all things; since all who speak of God intend to name God as exercising providence over all [...] But taken from this operation, this name 'God' is imposed to signify the divine nature». And I q13 a8 ad2: «We can name a thing according to the knowledge we have of its nature from its properties and effects. Hence because we can know what stone is in itself from its property, this name 'stone' signifies the nature of the stone itself; for it signifies the definition of stone, by which we know what it is, for the account which the name signifies is the definition [...] Now from the divine effects we cannot know the divine nature in itself, so as to know what it is; but only by way of eminence, and by way of causality, and of negation as stated above. Thus the name 'God' signifies the divine nature, for this name was imposed to signify something existing above all things, the principle of all things and removed from all things; for those who name God intend to signify all this».

ence exists between the name God referring to God as origin revealed by his creatures and the hidden and holy divine essence or plenitude of being signified by the same name. As long as 'being' or the ontological difference is forgotten as fountain of all words or definitions signifying essences, philosophy and theology cannot realize the onto-theo-logical difference. Hence, they are in danger of treating God like a temporal creature because he appears as cause under the intelligibility of his effects and not as ineffable divine essence.