

## Reply to Jonkers

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It is impossible to read Peter Jonkers' reflection on *Postmodernity's Transcending* without picking up his sense of disappointment and bewilderment about the text. I want to make only a few remarks, perhaps reflecting my own disappointment at his assessment. In the first place he interprets it as a book arising out of faith. This is entirely to miss the central question in the text—which is, when we use the word 'theology', what do we mean by it? Inasmuch as it is written by one who is a believing Christian and who has faith, a driving question in the book is to enquire (p. 33) 'which god is at issue: the God of faith or the God of philosophy? This unanswered question persists in all postmodernity's explorations of God, no matter who undertakes them.' The book resolutely *never* addresses the question of what it would mean to undertake a theology arising out of faith, while attempting relentlessly to illustrate the disastrous consequences for philosophy arising from philosophy's ontotheological entanglements, and theology's illicit compact with philosophy. The consequences for this are, as the book says, that the believers who synthesised philosophy to the theological requirements of belief:

through a patient redescription of what they successively found in the ancient texts, and with the entirely pious end of conforming philosophy to a higher science – theology, but the theology not of thinking but of faith – they drove forward an interpretation of being they discovered already present in antiquity, and deprived philosophy of its genuine ground, the self-enquiry that prior to Aristotle and Plato the being of being human *is*, replacing this ground with God as the cause of all things. Even when philosophy will declare this god to be dead, philosophy overall remained and remains yet deprived of its ground. (p. 124)

Jonkers overlooks entirely that the book attempts to annul this very drive, first by illustrating it in its effects across the history of thinking itself, and secondly to show from where philosophy might recover its ground (in an adequate enquiry into the phenomenon of time).

So much contemporary theology and contemporary philosophy is concerned only with positive results, and so neglects entirely the unfolding of the nothing in being (declaring any concern with the nothing as such to be mere nihilism,

against the *positivum* of the God who is all too readily available to us in His radiant presence). Except that this very approach arises *out* of the very nihilism that ontotheology is (or theo-ontology, or however you construe the claim to have deduced and explicated the essence of the divine). This nihilism at the heart of metaphysics is the very nihilism that Kant employs and puts into service at the heart of his *philosophical* explication of the sublime. I construe Kant's analysis of sublime (or upliftment) 'as the reading-off from beings to being as such *is* a negating. Upliftment is an instrument of the nihilation of beings, and so, insofar as the gulf that he posits between the world of beings and the ideas is achieved through this nihilation, is a kind of annihilation of beings so that the ideas themselves can be "seen"' (p. 183). God and the gods are in flight from us, a state of affairs that *Postmodernity's Transcending* attempts to take entirely seriously.

We may indeed find ourselves in broad agreement with the account Jonkers gives of Heidegger's understanding of the flight of the gods. But underlying this there are some perplexing confusions, not least Jonkers' consistent employment of the term 'values' in relation to Heidegger's philosophy, despite Heidegger's excoriating critique of all *Wertphilosophie*, culminating in his devastating critique of values and valuations on his lecture course on Nietzsche of 1940 *Der europäische Nihilismus*.<sup>1</sup> Above all, Heidegger argues that 'however, Nietzsche throughout conceives of nihilism through valuative thinking'.<sup>2</sup> In a response to a book which centrally asks the question 'how did it come about that God came to be understood as highest value and the value most to be devalued?' may we not question that Jonkers regards values as self-evident philosophical categories, and makes no connection (as Nietzsche so eloquently had) between the *intrinsic* nihilism of valuative thinking and all of our subsequent use of value-language?

Which brings me to my final point. For *Postmodernity's Transcending* seeks to impose a most stringent discipline on its own use of language, in order to show *how* histories are both constructed and imposed on thinking – to show how they emerge, both accidentally and by design through what is said and unsaid – through the unfolding of what the Greeks called *λόγος* not only in its most immediate speaking, but also in its history. It is here that I find Jonkers' question concerning my translation of Kant's term *Inbegriff* most perplexing of all. It might possibly be true that my translation 'inner concept' does not translate *very well* the term *Inbegriff*, but Jonkers is simply wrong to say that it does not translate it 'at all'. The term *Inbegriff* has no easy cognate term in English. What my translation seeks to do is connect the term *Inbegriff* to Kant's frequent and technical use of the term *Begriff*, the concept. This is important in *Postmodernity's Transcending* because it illustrates an essential connection between two of Kant's most important works—the first critique, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and the third (with which *Postmodernity's*

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger understands Nietzsche to triumph in thinking through *essentially* that 'die Wertsetzung selbst im Willen zur Macht verwurzelt ist' ('valuation itself is rooted in the will to power'). Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche: der europäische Nihilismus* in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 48, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1986, p. 97 (cf. Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche II* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1997 [1961], vol. 6.2, p. 78).

<sup>2</sup> 'Nietzsche aber durchaus den Nihilismus vom Wertgedanken aus begreift.' Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche: der europäische Nihilismus*, vol. 48, p. 104 (cf. Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche II*, vol. 6.2, p. 84).

*Transcending* is intimately concerned), *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

The word *Begriff* comes from the German verb *greifen*, to grasp. The *Begriff* is therefore the ‘thing grasped’ by the mind (in the sense that we would also say this in English. A literal rendering of *Begriff* is not ‘the grasp’ but ‘the thing grasped’ (what the Greeks would have called the *νόημα*). Kant’s use of the term *Inbegriff*, both in the places I examine it from the Third Critique and elsewhere mean that this term is expressly connected to the sense of a central term of his metaphysics—it is clear that the *Inbegriff* has a relation to the *Begriff*.

In everyday German *Inbegriff* is the ‘epitome’ or ‘quintessence’ of something, the most perfect or purest embodiment of whatever it is the *Inbegriff* of. It is sometimes translated from German (exactly as Jonkers translates) as ‘sum total’ in respect to Kant (this is the English term Norman Kemp-Smith employs in Kant’s First Critique).<sup>3</sup> As a translation, it represents an interpretation. The translation of *Inbegriff* in this way ‘makes sense’ of Kant, it allows Kant to be ‘got into’ English: however, if it makes sense of Kant’s text in translation it does not necessarily make sense of what Kant wants to say: and here is the caveat that *Postmodernity’s Transcending* constantly sounds. For the book does not concern itself so much with what thinkers said and so thought, as what they spoke and thought of or about.<sup>4</sup> In the First Critique (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) Kant expressly clarifies the term *Begriff* in relation to the term *Inbegriff*, under the heading ‘Concerning the Transcendental Ideal’.<sup>5</sup> This clarification comes at the end of the section of the impossibility of proofs for God, where Kant replaces what he sees as the necessity for proofs with the critical elucidation of the transcendental ideal: there is, therefore an *explicit* connection in Kant’s use of the term *Inbegriff* with the very question of grounds as it relates both to Descartes’ assumption that the ground can be reached by a kind of proof, and Kant’s replacement of that proof with the transcendental deduction. Jonkers’ attempt to set Kant and Descartes at enmity on the question of the ‘ultimate foundation of truth’ (i.e. the *ground* of truth) with his suggestion that I have made a false claim about the connection between them, is therefore *exactly* posed in this question of the meaning of the term *Inbegriff*.

In the sections in the First Critique where Kant elucidates the meaning of the term *Begriff* with respect to the *Inbegriff* it becomes clear that every concept is a concept insofar as it has a ‘share’ (the German is *Verhältnis*) in the entirety of possibility of predication, which is ‘the *Inbegriff* of all predicates of things overall’.<sup>6</sup> The *Inbegriff* is in the same place described as ‘*Bedingung a priori*’ (a priori condition). Later it is clear that the *Inbegriff* is itself an idea—indeed, ‘the idea of the *Inbegriff* of all possibility’.<sup>7</sup> Further on what the *Inbegriff* attempts to name are successively *omnitudo realitatis*,<sup>8</sup> *ens realissimum*, *ens originarium* and

<sup>3</sup> Kemp Smith, N., *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, London, Macmillan, 1976 (1929).

<sup>4</sup> Here again we see the peculiarity of Jonkers’ approach. For he uses as evidence of my ‘erroneous’ thinking the fact that Kant explicitly disagreed with Descartes—as if this disagreement mattered at all. The question is rather on what their thinking was stood: the subjectivity of the subject.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A572/B600.

<sup>6</sup> ‘... jedes Ding noch im Verhältnis auf die gesamte Möglichkeit, als den Inbegriff aller Prädikate der Dinge überhaupt ...’ Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A572/B600.

<sup>7</sup> ‘[die] Idee von dem Inbegriffe aller Möglichkeit.’ Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A573/B601.

<sup>8</sup> Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A576/B604. ‘the ‘all’ of reality’

*ens summum*.<sup>9</sup> The very fact that with each explanation Kant supplies in German for the ‘alle Möglichkeit der Dinge’ (the first definition of *Inbegriff*) he adds a corresponding Latin one that betrays their Scholastic origin. Each was originally a term to describe the divine essence (exactly as Jonkers says that for Kant it is not). The *Inbegriff* is also described as the ‘Urbild’ and finally, Kant *retranslates* the term *Inbegriff* to betray its real meaning, saying ‘Vielmehr würde der Möglichkeit aller Dinge die höchste Realität als ein Grund und nichts als Inbegriff zum Grunde liegen’<sup>10</sup>. The ground *must* be the highest reality and the ground of all things, but this is precisely what *cannot* be demonstrated by a formal proof *even though it must be the case*: the problem here is how to demonstrate that the ground *as a conceptual possibility of the transcendental imagination corresponds to the ground of things ‘in themselves’*. This is what Kant, neither here in the First Critique, nor in the Third Critique, nor anywhere else, is ever finally able to solve.

It is clear therefore that, as the ‘epitome’ it is not the *sum total* in the sense of the entirety or greater whole, but could only be understood as the *sum* in the sense of the ‘most’, the exemplary. The *Inbegriff* is what is present in every *Begriff*. Insofar as *every concept is at the same time an idea, so the idea of the Inbegriff is itself the Idea of ideas*. The *Inbegriff* is therefore what *most* makes the concept determinable, and as this it is indeed, the *inner*-possibility of the possibility of the concept at all: it is what always appears in every concept. In this sense it functions exactly as the term ‘being’ functioned in Scholastic thought (and for the same reason). The *Inbegriff* is what makes the *Begriff*, the concept, a concept *at all*: it is the *undifferentiated* possibility in every *differentiated* particularity. It precisely *is* the inner unity of the ‘conceptness’ of every concept. It is for this reason that Kant clarifies the meaning of the *Begriff*, the concept, *through* the term *Inbegriff*. The *Inbegriff* shows how all the concepts of every thing relate to each other—it is only in this sense that it is the ‘sum’, as the possibility of their being-summed.

The explanation of *Inbegriff* we find at this point in the First Critique exactly corresponds to the statement in *Postmodernity’s Transcending* explaining the meaning of the *Inbegriff*: ‘The *Inbegriff* is the concept that makes every other concept available, the inner unity and exemplar of the concepts themselves. The ground of this unity is the understanding. The teleological character of the power of judgement is of assistance to theology, not because it is part of theology as such, but because it points towards a ground that is occupied over and beyond nature—the divine originator’ (p. 170). Hence why the term *Inbegriff* cannot *demonstrate*, but only *point toward* its supposed real grounding in God.

*Precisely* as this, it is the *objective guarantee of the concept’s capacity to represent what it is the concept of, as the transcendental ideal of the subjectivity of the conceptness of every concept*. Despite Jonkers’ cheery optimism that for Kant ‘the ultimate foundation of truth is not God, but the transcendental unity of apperception’ as the ground of all things, this really is inaccurate. As Heidegger himself pointed out,

<sup>9</sup> Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A578/B606. ‘most real being . . . originating being . . . highest being.’

<sup>10</sup> Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A579/B607; cf. A576/B604. ‘On the contrary the highest reality as the possibility of all things would lie at their basis as a ground and not as an *Inbegriff*.’ The point here is the conditional *würde*—i.e. this is what it *must* be, even though it cannot be demonstrated as such.

and I have discussed elsewhere, Kant was unable to resolve the unifying ground of God, man (subjective representation) and world, a question that continued to beset him even in the notebooks he prepared at the end of his life and that were published as the *Opus Postumum*.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, technically speaking, Kant's discussion of the *Inbegriff* remains ambiguous—is it for him founded in the transcendental unity of apperception, or in God, or world, or freedom, or in what precisely?

Now why is it so important to clarify this with such precision? Is it my pique, at being challenged by Jonkers because he claims my conclusions from my translation of *Inbegriff* are 'basically unfounded'? Pique of this kind is philosophically irrelevant. It is rather much more that he shows how the contemporary philosophy in whose name he says he wishes to speak so often fails adequately to understand the way in which language *thinks*. Which means that because he takes the average, everyday translation of *Inbegriff* which falls into his lap from a translation of 1929, by a translator who happens to need to get a text of Kant's into another language, he ends up *not being able to think what Kant thought of at all*, and so not even to be able to think through a connection between Kant and Descartes. Because Kant 'disagreed' with Descartes, there must therefore be no real connection between what they think. And yet here we see Kant attempting to resolve *the very same question* as Descartes. And here, once again, is postmodernity's fragmentation and devaluation, not just of theology, but of philosophy also.

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<sup>11</sup> See Hemming, L. P., *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, p. 155, note 58.

