

God out of Place?

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MARCEL SAROT

MICHAEL SCOTT

MAARTEN WISSE



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God out of Place?

*A Symposium on L.P. Hemming's
Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*

edited by

YVES DE MAESENEER

Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium



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Preface

'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?'
(Acts 1:11)

How to speak about transcendence today? How to represent the transcendent in a context in which God seems to have no place anymore? No philosopher of religion or theologian can avoid this fundamental question. And not a few of them end up being paralysed by its enormous weight. However, do we really understand what is at stake in this all too familiar question?

In his *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God* (London: SCM Press, and Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005) Laurence Paul Hemming seeks to lay bare the foundations from which this kind of questioning arises. His endeavour involves an investigation into the topic of the sublime, using this term to unlock the question of the place of God, or, better, the displacement of God. The book could be considered as a philosophical genealogy of the concept of the aesthetic sublime. At the same time it is an exploration of the nature and limits of theological thinking. Hemming confronts the reader with the God and gods to be found in the writings of Protagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. Throughout this exciting journey Hemming provocatively suggests that contemporary attempts to speak of God often are unknowingly out of place. Much theology and philosophy turn out to remain built upon modern presuppositions about subjectivity and transcendence which rule out a genuine approach of God from the very outset.

God out of Place? is to be read as a first response to the challenges Hemming raises: it contains the proceedings of a book symposium, on the 12th of October 2004, organised by the Research Group Theology in a Postmodern Context at the Faculty of Theology, Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). On this occasion Hemming presented the manuscript of the book, which arose from an extended period as guest professor and research fellow in Leuven (2002–2004), to critical responses by experts from different backgrounds. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, USA) situates Hemming's book within postmodern thinking, especially pointing to the writings of Maurice Blanchot. Further Hart constructively elaborates on the theological consequences of Hemming's perspective: a genuine understanding of

transcendence and the rediscovery of what it means to speak '*coram Deo*'. Stuart Elden (Durham, UK) reads Hemming in the light of Heidegger's view on 'place' and the impact of the modern mathematical paradigm on our understanding of the world. At the end, Elden raises the question of the political, which he finds underdeveloped in Hemming's approach. Being a scholar in the History of Modern Philosophy, Peter Jonkers (Utrecht, The Netherlands) disagrees with Hemming's negative assessment of Kant. After a re-reading of Heidegger, Jonkers suggests an alternative position, defending the lasting merits of modern thinking on the question of transcendence. Yves De Maeseneer (Leuven) confronts Hemming's analysis of modern aesthetics in terms of the (re)production of a strong self with Adorno's interpretation of the sublime, which, on the contrary, emphasises the self-destructive. In a final remark De Maeseneer raises the suspicion whether Hemming's philosophical radicalism is not surreptitiously underpinned by a theological refuge into the realm of liturgy. For the purpose of these proceedings Joeri Schrijvers (Leuven) gives an extensive and erudite introduction to Hemming's book, adding critical remarks stemming from his own research in the field of theology and phenomenology. Every contribution is followed by a reply by Hemming. The text '*A Singular Question*', which consists in the opening paper Hemming presented at the symposium itself, is to be taken as a reply to both Hart and Elden.

The contributions to *God out of Place?* are not merely commentaries or reactions to Hemming's *Postmodernity's Transcending*, but offer essays of contemporary thinkers dealing with the question of transcendence in their own right, reflecting on the places of God, self and world. And they elicit in their turn often vivid and sharp replies from Hemming.

In conclusion, we would like to express our gratefulness to Lieven Boeve, whose initiative it was, as co-ordinator of the Research Group Theology in a Postmodern Context, to organise this book symposium, and to all the research fellows active in this Research Group (for more information, see <http://www.theo.kuleuven.be/ogtpc/>). Further we thank wholeheartedly Laurence Paul Hemming and all the contributors to the book for the fine spirit of cooperation, and Marcel Sarot, Michael Scott and Maarten Wisse, editors of the *Ars Disputandi* Supplement Series, for their critical feedback and excellent editing of this volume.

Manchester, October 2005

Yves De Maeseneer

Being moved by God?

Introducing L.P. Hemming's Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God

JOERI SCHRIJVERS

Catholic University of Leuven

Philosophy has never been, and never will be, *in medias res*. Central to philosophy's endeavour is its relation to its proper history. Stepping out of metaphysics, therefore, is at the same time entering into metaphysics' most intimate questions. It is this that in postmodernity, for the most part, is forgotten. Postmodernity is, and I think Laurence Paul Hemming will gladly agree, a time of *recycling*. It proceeds from citation to citation, it knows only citations of citations, and forgets in the process, that the task of thinking is mine, *jemeinig* each time anew, and therefore, that to think is, time and again, addressed by an appeal to 'think more thoughtfully'.¹ Postmodernity, in spite of 'the end of grand narratives', is a narration of narratives, it narrates at will, writes its own history, and jumps, deliberately or not – it matters little – into the deep end. Could we be mistaken about the depth of these postmodern waters? Have we forgotten what it is to move in the waters of being? To be immersed in it as if in a flood and flux?

And so I find myself for the difficult, not to say somewhat inappropriate, task of summarising Hemming's complex and audacious book *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*. Difficult, in that the book's scope is wide and is in dialogue with a variety of authors, some of whom are not all that familiar to me. Somewhat inappropriate, in that a summary, in its attempt to extract some essential themes, inevitably highlights some themes at the expense of others. So I proceed with caution, and urge the reader to do the same—a caution more than once begged by the author himself. For in a preparatory warning, he tells us his book is not a history, rather it is what these authors, from Heraclitus to Derrida and Žižek, think of that is at issue (cf. p. 206 and *passim*). So what exactly are they thinking of? They are thinking of transcendence, or, in Heidegger's words, the riddle of the movement of the being of being-human. And Hemming asks: who or what is doing the transcending? For the sake of whom? And transcending to where

¹ Cf. L.P. Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2002), p. 185. References to *Postmodernity's Transcending* are taken up in the text.

exactly? *Postmodernity's transcending*, then, turns out to be a transcending, not for the sake of transcendence or even the Transcendent, but simply a transcending for transcending's sake—no matter who performs it, and even less 'to where' the transcending takes place. According to Hemming, however, this 'transcending', always and already presupposes a devalued and devaluated God.

Therefore, Hemming wants to trace this movement of *devaluing God* back to its origins, and it is clear that Heidegger has served here as a guidepost. Light (hope?) comes from Protagoras, Parmenides and Heraclitus; darkness from Plato, the Platonists and Aristotle. The history of metaphysics shows us that metaphysics is historical and that it therefore takes on different postures in the course of time. But ontotheology traverses them all, and Hemming will show both how this came about relatively soon in the history of philosophy and, more importantly, why it still persists in the era we call postmodernity. Ontotheology occurs both when God is tied to being and when being(s) are understood with reference to divinity. These two 'conditions' are disposed *in a particular way*, and Hemming will show how, and in what ways, they came about.

1.1 LONGINUS' ON THE SUBLIME

But to tie God to being is a possibility for philosophy not less important and not less precarious than it is for theology: metaphysical in intention from the very outset, it presupposes that God and being are differently placed or take on different places. God (or being) is the 'beyond', the 'over there'. Hemming's critique of contemporary attempts to retrieve God as the 'wholly Other' already shines forth from the first chapters of his book. In the chapter entitled 'Rhetor and Rhetoric', Hemming discusses one of the earliest extant treatises to take up the topic of the sublime, Longinus' 'On the Sublime'. According to Hemming, we find Longinus standing at a crossroads: the sublime, or 'upliftment' as Hemming translates it, concerns the furthest reach, the limit to what can be attained to by human beings (pp. 39–42). This limit is not attained solely by thinking, but it is, as something involuntary which cannot be surpassed, primarily the disposal of the 'experience' (pathos) of that which befalls me. 'Pathos', then, is what gives rise to upliftment, it is, as Heidegger pointed out, the *content* of the fact of finding oneself already in the world.

Upliftment itself, however, is beyond pathos, and it discloses thinking's activity as that which is able to reach out to a 'new understanding' (p. 47) through precisely the 'already' of the occurring of the world. Thinking is concerned with the 'already' of finding oneself in a world. Note that for Hemming this 'already' does not cause the change and pathos, 'rather it is the *effect* of the change or alteration which is unfolded through the pathos – it is what the change or alteration is striving to get ahead to, in its occurring with me' (p. 48). It lies in the future as a possibility that is mine each time anew, i.e. which the self has to disclose time and again. As such this openness to world occurs, according to Longinus, in speech: the upliftment of the rhetor discloses to his audience, if he or she is up to the task, the 'already' as what the thing really *is*, the being of the being, whilst at the same time making the rhetor fully present as what he himself really

is (pp. 48–50). Being-already-in-the-world is disclosed in speaking, and speaking tries to make sense of the fact of being already in a particular world, of the fact that being human is in a fundamental sense ‘belonging to the word’—as that being that ‘has’, better: is held in speech (p. 57).

Longinus thus stands at a crossroads. Hemming is quick to point out to his readers that Longinus’ text (and that which it treats *of*) differs considerably from the interpretation Nicolas Boileau gave of it in 1674, resting firmly on the subjectivity of the subject that, by then, came to dominate philosophy. Whereas for Longinus’ rhetor it mattered to bring the audience *up to* God or the gods in and through his speaking, the speaking *in* being *of* being, for Descartes and for us postmodernists, the divine is taken for granted as the cause that no longer lies ahead of us as that which we try to get ahead to through speech, but rather as that which has to be disclosed simply as already lying present in whatever is said (p. 57). The rhetor is concerned with *presencing*, the experience of coming to be (p. 10), what it is to be (p. 239) and of bringing to presence beings in their being.² The transcending at issue in sublimity and upliftment, however, has often been understood through transcendence and *presence*, and this is why the rhetor’s upliftment as ‘presencing’ has been covered over, and why for instance Boileau is not able to ‘hear’ it anymore. No longer will speaking (or thinking, which is very much saying the same) be able to reach newness and otherness from out of a particular gathering of what has been said – the already of ‘already being in the world’ – speaking comes to be preoccupied solely with what has *itself* ‘already’ been said (prior to my being in the world), and with what is already present in visibility. The allusion here is to what Laurence Hemming will later call ‘the cleft in being’ (p. 80 *et passim*).

1.2 PLATO AND THE CLEFT IN BEING

What is this ‘cleft in being’? As such, it is a particular way of understanding being and accounts for the origin of metaphysics. Mind that it still persists in the negative theologies that try to speak of the ‘beyond’, God, as ‘the absolutely ‘over there’ to our being here in the world (p. 59) which is why these theologies, as Hemming beautifully points out, ‘simply perform a reversal in ontotheology’s compass’ (p. 62). To understand this cleft in being, Hemming in Chapter 4 ‘The Truth of Sublimity’ again resorts to Heidegger, since ‘Heidegger says [...] that if we say “being”, then it means this: “being of beings”’ (p. 64). Being is named already in its difference with beings; we come across, encounter beings always out of the twofold (“Zweifalt”), the between of being and beings.³ Hence Hemming’s constant assertion that ‘two’ is more original than ‘one’: it is impossible *for us*,

² One should note and ponder here both that Longinus, as the rhetor of the text, ‘attempts to perform that of which [he] speaks’ (p. 37; also p. 50) and Hemming’s assertion that he is seeking, precisely because he is *not* writing a history or narrative – perhaps only ‘genealogy of a very odd kind’ (p. 239) ‘to achieve rhetorically [...] to perform what I at the same time describe – to let us through this writing into the truth of what is at issue’ (p. 85).

³ Helpful are also Heidegger’s remarks in *Zeit und Sein*, where he states that we do not say of being (as we do of beings) that ‘being is. . .’, rather we say ‘there is being’ (*es gibt Sein*). See M. Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, transl. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 4–5.

as human beings, to speak of *a* chair without considering *this* particular chair in its relation to the manifold of existing chairs. Just as a chair appears out of the horizon of existing chairs, so beings, as already present and visible, appear out of the twofold of being and beings, within the horizon of being. Being unfolds as the already-there in our encounter with beings. In this sense, the twofold of being and beings is what allows beings to come into being, the presencing of this or that being.

With Plato however a particular understanding of this twofold arises, which was to determine the whole history of metaphysics. Indeed, how is it that being in its unfolding in beings can be thought? For Plato this difference is worked out on the basis of the pair rest-change: rest and change are held together as being opposed to each other and thus as standing in direct opposition: two is not one, rest is entirely different from change, eternity is of a different order than temporality etc. Yet something *is* resting, and when it changes we say that it *is* changing into something else. Change and rest are therefore opposed although they both participate in being: being is what they have in common (*koinon*). Here are the germs of the dualism that dominated Western philosophy (in particular 'eternal' being *versus* temporal being): it is Plato who engenders the understanding that this pair rest-change are irresolvable to each other and that they cannot ever exist together. However, this entails a fundamental shift in the understanding of being that Parmenides entertained: being now becomes opposed to non-being.

For Parmenides the twofold was worked out through the interplay between concealment and unconcealment, and unconcealment (the appearance of any particular thing) retained a reference not only to that out of which it is wrought (the beings from whence it came), but also to the *nothing* of its having-been-concealed-and-so-not extant, concealment as such, so that in every appearing there always is something that appears *in* non-appearing. In Plato, however, this non-appearing is dismissed and abandoned altogether, and the thing itself which does appear is at the same time reduced to the realm of (mere) appearances, of the image, to 'that which really should not be and really *is* not either'.⁴ What Plato (and all subsequent metaphysics) retain is merely the predominance of presence, which then alone explains what is present: the movement of presencing, of the appearing in being of a being both as coming into presence – that which appears – *and* as that which reserves in its presence the appearing of that which does not appear, is forgotten (although the forgottenness is always ambiguous: in the *Seinsvergessenheit*, the 'forgettingness-of-being', both the objective and the subjective genitives must always be heard).⁵ Being will be opposed to becoming,

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried & R. Polt (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 196.

⁵ It is in this sense that for Parmenides as for Heidegger, 'a phenomenology of the unapparent' is *not* a contradictory statement. Phenomenology, in this sense, is concerned with what the French now call 'l'apparaître de l'apparaître' or what Hemming calls 'the experience of experiencing' (p. 78). For the reader more familiar with *Being and Time*, it will be good to recall that Heidegger does not *oppose* 'Eigentlichkeit' and 'Uneigentlichkeit' – in a dialectical fashion – as unconcealment over against concealment. The first is not, and can never be, a permanent state of *Dasein*, since being proper with respect to, for instance, the chair necessarily entails that one is improper toward the other beings in the room. To be sure, the inauthenticity of 'the They' is a concealment, but it is a concealment that does not notice its own concealment. On the contrary, it regards to be this comportment toward

and becoming will be the place where being is disclosed falsely. What is most real is that which is stable in its presence (and pure presence is now 'over there' in the divine realm, of which this realm is the mere *shadow*); everything actually extant and present before *us* is reduced to mere appearances, images, semblance, stuff momentarily occurring out of the flux that movement is made of.

To return to the example of the chair: when a chair appears, only one half of the appearing of what appears, the presence of the chair, is retained. But the presence or essence of this particular chair is, in Platonism, only possible on the basis of the idea of the chair: the chair(s) one encounters in being are a mere appearance over and against the 'more being-ful' 'idea' of the chair: though the different existing chairs are subject to change, in and through this change the idea 'chair' remains present and common to all. We see here how Plato works his way up from the two to the one: from the diversity of beings to the one idea, from the manifold of ideas to the idea of the Good and finally to *chora*, entirely distinct from all becoming. All this will affect the thinking of the divine thoroughly: no longer is the divine that which is encountered and disclosed in the speaking of beings as that which withholds itself in *this particular* speaking of being (and so of beings), now the divine is the most being-ful, that can never, strictly speaking, 'appear' along with the appearance of particular beings. The divine, for Plato and for everyone who comes after him, for us in postmodernity included, is worked out from the appearance of particular beings, but *only* to suspend the latter in favour of the former.⁶ The twofold of being and beings no longer belongs together, there appears a cleft: God and being are chained to each other and both are thought as the 'beyond' of beings; God is no longer to be encountered in being. Their originary belonging is lost; the divine is construed as and made accessible in a striving and a longing for . . .

Only now, the 'sublime' or upliftment – the transcending of the human being – becomes a technical means to attain to what is most being-ful. Upliftment reaches out to the utmost, to the being of beings which is now, in Plato and Aristotle, defined as the place where the divine is to be found. Transcending, now, is not anymore the fact of encountering beings from out of being-already-in-the-world, it has become a transcending *to . . .*, to that place 'beyond being(s)' where transcendence, the divine, is, and *can* be, seated.

1.3 ARISTOTLE AND PHENOMENOLOGY

For the Greeks and the Mediævals this place was self-evidently divine. Therefore, chapters 5 and 6, respectively on 'the Soul of Sublimity' (Aristotle) and on '*Analogia Entis*' (Aquinas), can best be read together. Hemming wants to examine how

beings as the only way to relate to being-in-the world: 'idle talk [. . .] develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer', M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie – E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) p. 213. 'Eigentlichkeit', then, as a particular way of disclosing being(s), discloses the more original truth that Heidegger sought to recover, *aletheia*, namely that, in speaking of the event of being, 'the being of Dasein can be concealing and unconcealing', both *at once*. (Cf. also the reference to Aristotle, *Being and Time*, p. 268).

⁶ So, for instance, from the manifold of chairs to the idea of the chair, but only to discover that this idea grounds, justifies and 'is' *without* the appearance of a particular chair.

Aristotle and Aquinas 'prepare the ground for the way in which upliftment, the sublime, and God come to be thought in postmodernity' (p. 81). The sublime comes to be thought as representation, and the means by which representation traverses the cleft in being, is supposed to be the imagination. The faculty of imagination is now considered able to bridge the rift to that 'wholly other' place that, in Plato, is named 'chora'.

What Plato called '*chora*', Hemming argues, Aristotle came to think of as '*hule*' or 'matter' (p. 74): everything that (materially) is, is insofar it relates to its proper place. *Hule* accounts for the movement of beings: it determines both what a being actually is, and what it potentially can become. Just as Plato tried to resolve the question why something 'might appear to be one thing and another at the same time', so Aristotle queries how it is possible that the senses at one time see a chair and at another, for instance, an ordinary piece of wood. What is common to these, is that they both require a particular place in order to appear. Place (Aristotle's *topos*) accounts for the manner in which the unity of the cosmos is distributed all the way through its parts (p. 88). Place determines the whole of being, and at the same time is what allows beings to exhibit their being in the most particular and visible way, what determines a being as this or that being. Place as such is that *on the basis of which* we transcend (as the containing limit, and so—and insofar as it is 'place as such' that is under consideration, the outermost of the cosmos)⁷ from out of our encounter with beings as '*ousia*', as that which is stable in its presence, which persists in and through the various instantiations of the one substance (substrate, *hypokeimenon*). Experiencing being as '*ousia*' means that one is lifted out of the different appearances of, for instance, a chair, to the being of these beings as that which is common to and underlies these different appearances. Whereas for us the different shapes of a being seems to entail the difference in essence of these particular beings, for the Greeks a chair can appear as a chair or as an ordinary piece of wood, i.e. can hold in one place a multiplicity of forms, on the basis of that which, in these different appearances, remains the same. The essence of being as such is that it itself is without movement, it is what already has to be there for some changeable thing to appear in this or that way. Aristotle professed that thought arrives at the being of beings by means of the '*phantasia*', which Hemming forcefully refuses to translate as 'imagination'. '*Phantasia*' refers to the capacity for presenting, the faculty of presence *in* its presenting (i.e. not in 'what' is presented). The difference with what we have come to call imagination and Aristotle's '*phantasia*' is that the faculty of imagination, as the faculty of representation and its potential breakdown, has lost this 'fundamental connection with presence and place' (p. 98): no longer does the *phantasia* have a reference to place and world, now the 'imagination' deals in mere images, whether they are 'real' (belong in some place) or not. *Phantasia* as the means that allows seeing what something *is*, is robbed of the condition it found in the self-showing of a being in a particular place which being as *ousia* still presupposed. That the idea has become a mere image means: it can be held noetically independent of what it

⁷ Note that the Greek understanding of limit ('*peras*') does not mean 'end', but rather that through which something can appear. In this sense, it is close to the phenomenological understanding of 'horizon'. Or, as Hemming says, it is that which, in containing place, 'is not itself *in* place, and so has no 'where' (p. 108).

is the appearance of (p. 100).

According to Hemming, Aristotle (and here is where Aristotle differs from Plato) works out the upliftment phenomenologically: it is the soul or intellect that attains to the being of beings as one and the same *ousia*, though only from out of what is taken in by the senses, from out of the different appearances (*aesthesis*). For Aristotle, this upliftment is thought on the basis of his teleological understanding of the cosmos: as much as beings naturally exhibit their most perfect form, so the soul aspires to attain to that which is most being-ful in it. The telos of thinking is self-thinking: the soul strives to be identical with what it considers to be, if only in the mind, the being of beings. The soul, potentially all things, is attuned to being as the already of beings, to being(s) as a whole, 'to the already-is where the particular soul seeks identity in its particularity with the being of the kind of thing that it is' (p. 93). The soul is potentially all things means that it constantly has to get ahead to being (think of the Heideggerian '*Seinkönnen*'). However, in Greek ontology, this getting ahead to being, discovers being as that which already-is, as the stability of everything present. Being is that which already has to be for a being to appear in the manner that it appears. Aristotle thus covers over the futural aspect of being-already-in-the-world in favour of the past: the solution he proposes occurs by 'placing as the end of every working out of the causes and the unity of the world, the 'end' of every end (telos), a point of atemporality: from a reaching forth (through the future) to an atemporal (ever-same) point of completion; from the past (what I already know) to an atemporal (ever-same) point of completion' (p. 92). The end-point of upliftment is (for Aristotle) a-temporal. This point – without death and without movement – is in turn that to which the soul aspires in thinking and contemplation: the soul is in some sense all things when it has become 'god-like', that is when it has come into its being as being actually all things.

Things turn in chapter 6. It is not that Hemming wants to show that Aristotle thought metaphysically, it is that Aristotle *has been read* (and so interpreted) metaphysically that is at issue. Hemming shows how a reading that is unmistakably present in Aristotle will prevail in the centuries to come, a reading that for instance surfaces in the constant translation of '*phantasia*' as 'imagination', in the primacy that it accords to vision and the visual over and against the speaking that originally was the task of the rhetor, in the self-proclaimed triumph of reason that it is able to attain to the creator-God of Christianity precisely on the basis of the thought of Aristotle. Aristotle's divinity, and one must note that Hemming immediately adds 'if such a thing were possible' (p. 120), has been interpreted as the Christian God which, in turn, is understood as '*causa prima*', as the *first* entity of the chain of beings. To explain how this came about, Hemming will in Chapter 7, 'Counting up to One is Sublime', point to what I will call here the intrusion of *mathesis* in philosophy and theology.

Aristotle (in the sense of how he was interpreted as much as in what he himself says or supposedly thinks) prepared the ground for the devaluation of God, a devaluing that moves from attributing divinity to the being of beings to understanding God as 'being-like (i.e. through entitas), or has the attribute of beingness' (p. 156). It is this movement that will explain why God and being are both conceived of in an ontotheological manner, as a constant and to a certain

extent inevitable, ‘fusion of faith and philosophy’ (p. 172). Hemming’s reading of Aquinas is somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand, it shows how Aquinas was at pains not to succumb to this analogical reading of God and being, but, on the other, it leaves us in the dark as to what extent Aquinas himself perhaps failed to do so. I will come back to this below, but let it be indicated that Aquinas is portrayed as indicating (although not initiating) ‘a profound (philosophical) devaluation of God’ (p. 148). However, this reading of Aquinas is immediately cautioned: Aquinas seems to devalue God to the extent ‘that [Aquinas] is read *as a philosopher*’ (p. 150).

1.4 AQUINAS AND THEOLOGY

It is Aquinas’ *Auseinandersetzung* with Aristotle that concerns Hemming in the chapter on ‘*Analogia entis*’. Aquinas is said to reverse Aristotle. Although the Christian view on the cosmos preserves the Greek understanding of being as set apart in two places, in that the cleft in being is now conceived of as the cleft between the human (‘ens creatum’) and the divine (‘ens increatum’), the manner of their belonging together is entirely different (p. 115), and resolved through the strictly theological question of sin: whereas Aristotle worked out the question of the divine on the basis of a phenomenological understanding of the being of the being-human, Aquinas will emphasize that whatever is worked out in this way is unable to attain to God in God’s self. Only God knows God’s self.

Whereas for Aristotle the working out of the causes of the cosmos was the passageway through to the being of beings understood as divine, Aquinas will precisely disbar this route from the human to God. However, it is not that knowledge of God is unavailable to human beings, rather is it that the cleft between human beings and God cannot be crossed by human reason or striving alone. Aquinas, according to Hemming, is speaking as a theologian here, ‘being faithful to an insight of Scripture’ (p. 117): ‘divine union is in no sense in consequence of some kind of summit of contemplation in thought, but is rather by the graceful gift of God’ (p. 118). In the confrontation between Christianity and Greek thought, the transformation that Aquinas and others effect ‘will deprive 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’ (p. 124). Aquinas for instance is particularly reluctant towards the ability of the mind to know with certainty substances (*ousia*) by means of the senses. For Aquinas, it is exactly the difference between the Creator and creatures that is preserved in this way: ‘for now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror’ (1 Cor 13, 12) comes to mean, exactly the opposite of Aristotle, that the role of the senses – from out of which, for Aristotle, the upliftment as the passageway into the being of beings was effected – is altered in the sense that this knowledge, when it comes to matters divine, is always provisional and inadequate (Cf. p. 123). The being of beings, even understood as *ousia*, cannot be adequately known.⁸ However, this view can only arise on the basis of a particular understanding of (the being of) God: God as the Creator conceived of as the *prima causa* and *causa efficiens* of the universe.

⁸ Compare with what is said of the rhetor, pp. 52–53.

For Aristotle the working out of the causes is primarily passive in its import: the soul's attainment to the being of beings is a function of the soul. As such, its enactment is involuntary, and in consequence of being-in-the-world. For Aquinas, the only significant cause, the *causa efficiens* of the God conceived of as *ipsum esse subsistens*, is active: it chooses that substances are what they are because God has chosen them to be in this way. 'The effect is devastating', in that, 'for Aquinas . . . everything now has a purpose because God could have chosen that it be other than it is' (p. 120). For Aristotle, the being of beings was a future task to be attained to; for Aquinas however, only God has a full passageway into the being of beings. This passageway is now, though not unavailable to human beings, no longer within the scope of the created being: it will be given in revelation, in grace, in faith.

All this has important consequences. Though for Aristotle 'God' is atemporal and eternal, the upliftment toward divinity via the being of beings takes place through the 'aesthesia' of discovering myself already among beings, that is in the timing of time: it is 'for me a future task' (p. 121). For Aquinas God is no less atemporal, but the enquiry into the being of beings can now only discover this being – whether it is my own being or that of another being – as it *was* intended *already to have been* by the mind of God. The doctrine of the '*analogia entis*', although perhaps not authored by Aquinas, is read back into him by his successors, and is intended to bridge this rift between what now came to be understood as the distinction between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural' or uncreated order. However, Hemming will in Chapter 7 forcefully demonstrate that the question of analogy starts too late, in that it takes for granted a certain understanding of beings that is fundamentally at odds with a genuine phenomenological investigation of what it means to be. The question of *analogia entis* comes too late, since it thinks the being of beings from the outset with reference to divinity, and at the same time interprets God in terms of a discourse on being. Therefore, analogy is onto-theo-logical in its very core.

God will come to be interpreted and read *mathematically*: the *First* in a series, a succession and chain of being. The prime instance of being, in which the hierarchy and manifold of beings in a single pure act is, indeed, actualised. All in all, and nothing to differentiate beings qualitatively. From beings to beings, and nothing more. 'Natura non facit saltus' Leibniz will tell us, and indeed it jumps not even into being nor, perhaps, to God. It prays and kneels for the *First* Cause which, of course, *shines*: for 'without light it is impossible to see' (Aristotle). One 'sees', Hemming will argue, both the beginning and the end of this series, the one as *causa efficiens* and the other as *causa finalis*. The Highest Being, the *alpha* and *omega* of the series. But only *a* being it is! *Ananke stenai* – awkwardly absent from Hemming's text – a 'God of the gaps'.⁹ The gap, the cleft, is between becoming, which is to say: being, and time.

⁹ See Levinas' comments on *ananke stenai*, in his *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University press, 2002), p. 199 n. 21 'the immemorial past is intolerable for thought. Thus there is an exigency to stop: *anagkè stenai*', and esp. p. 158, where the singular appeal of the Other is, as it were, multiplied: now the appeal is both towards the Other's other (the third party) and towards myself, 'approached as an other by the others'. This movement is, at least in the French, depicted as 'un arrêt', a stop. See Levinas, *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 191 and p. 201.

1.5 MODERNITY AND MATHESIS: DESCARTES, KANT, AND HEGEL

What we see happening in the Middle Ages is, according to Hemming, the constant alignment of Aristotle's divinity to an understanding of this divinity with regard to causation. Insofar as Aquinas entertained 'a weak understanding of analogy', he nevertheless has been read 'as making the place assigned to God – this place with no where – accessible and determinable' (p. 136), that is, as adhering to *analogia entis*.¹⁰ Whereas Aristotle never entertained the view that the cosmos is caused by the divine, since indeed for the Greeks the universe was without beginning or end, Aristotle's works have nevertheless been understood by a certain interpretation, and privileging of that interpretation, of either the efficient or the final cause. In both understandings a certain willing or choosing is at issue: in the first, it is God who wills the being of beings to be in this or that way (as we have seen emerging in Aquinas); in the second, it is the world of becoming which desires (and desires to conform itself to) divinity.¹¹

The consequence of all this is that the futural understanding of being, which to some extent was still present in Aristotle, will be replaced by an understanding from out of what already-has-been. Nothing is without reason (Leibniz), since every being we encounter will find the reason of its being in God who, as artificer, has already chosen how this being is or should be. The being of the being will be thought by understanding it to be grounded in God, and is given already in advance of our encountering it (or ourselves), as 'what already *was* and *has given* me to be' (p. 150).¹² Our encountering of beings, on the other hand, is no longer an involuntary striving toward the being of beings, 'now everything I encounter is already there because it was intended to be there by someone other than me, elsewhere. No longer, therefore, does my own experience perform and effect the cleft between being and beings, *now* my experience confirms and brings to light a cleft that *itself is already there, already in place whether I am or not* (p. 149).'¹³

Hemming holds that 'from now on the being of beings can no longer be worked out phenomenologically as Aristotle does (albeit metaphysically), because what being is and how it is understood is answered in advance of the specific manifestation and appearance of individual beings' (p. 157). Hemming takes up a distance here from Aristotle, and yet further, as will be clear later, from Descartes. The distance taken from Aristotle is obvious: Aristotle made his way from here to eternity. The fact of already being *in* being as a being is resolved (or: *Aufgehoben*) through the eternal being-already of the life of the cosmos (cf.

¹⁰ And indeed it is a place for which a high value is set (p. 136). For the discussion in full, see pp. 125–136.

¹¹ For the full account, see pp. 111–115. See also *Heidegger's Atheism*, pp. 145–149.

¹² It is worth noting that this understanding will pervade modern science as well. Even in evolutionary theory, thus long after the Medieval understanding of the cosmos had been abandoned, everything that is, is only insofar (and because) it exhibits a particular function. For a critique of such an understanding, see: J. Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹³ Here, according to Hemming, are the contours of the contemporary obsession with morality: 'when... *techne* comes to predominate as the means by which the divine activity is understood, then I am like to the divine will only insofar as I am a producer of artefacts – of which virtue, or the moral in general is one kind of thing produced' (p. 149): if you must choose, do so in an ethical way.

pp. 158–159; 92 and esp. 149).¹⁴ It started, however, phenomenologically, as a self-enquiry into ‘the soul’, able to speak and think about the being of beings, or as Aristotle put it ‘to become all things’, from out of ‘the portion or allotment of a lifespan of a living being’ (p. 157), from out of the specific appearances of beings; it lost the speaking of the being of beings when it substituted ‘eternity, or more strictly speaking sempiternity, for futurity’ (p. 160).¹⁵ These particular beings are thus not to be confused with non-being, with mere appearances, since Plato and Aristotle already *presupposed* that the temporal was not capable of the atemporal that thought was to be lifted up to. To conceive of the atemporal, the temporal was, *and must be*, denied.¹⁶

Or else where did the upliftment come from? In a note that seems to have belonged in the text, Hemming announces what in particular this self-enquiry entails. At the same time he indicates his distance from Descartes: ‘it is not an enquiry in the self as the centre as both object and subject of every thought, rather the opposite: although it is in every case *mine*, this enquiry does not have the self in view as an already-given (the *cogito*), but understands the genuine self as a continual coming-in-to-be that is lit up and encountered *through* discovering myself already to be among beings’ (p. 157). The reference to the *cogito* is thus not accidental: according to Hemming the *cogito* simply perpetuates the primacy of the past which Descartes received from his predecessors (pp. 158 ff). The *cogito* is the establishment of the self prior to everything the self knows, it is ‘the most radical reversal in the history of philosophy’, and perhaps is so only because we take its truth for granted: The *cogito* is the self of the human being conceived of as ‘that I *am* before anything I know *is*’. What is common to human beings is not their particular encountering of beings in consequence of being already in a world, but the fact that they are all able to *produce* themselves as *cogito*, itself understood as resulting from a decision, a conscious and willed occupying of the centre undertaken by the subjectivity of the subject.

The Aristotelian ‘*phantasia*’ lost, therefore, its fundamental connection with presence and place, that is, its connection to other beings (p. 161). No longer is the self brought forth from out of the fundamental unity of the world, a unity which allowed for the different appearances of beings to be nevertheless unified in the thinking of their being as a one and single substance, the self is now bereft from this originary belonging together of self and world and arises, as in a *creatio continua*, out of the void between the interior and the exterior world. *Phantasia* comes to be thought as imagination, and imagination in turn as production and representation. Hence we can understand Descartes’ proof of the material world on the basis of the essence of geometrical figures. Precisely, these are the things which exist independently of any mind perceiving them and they appear to be able to be represented adequately. In fact, the clear and distinct ideas exist

¹⁴ And one might read Hemming here as potentially sneering at Michel Henry’s emphasis on ‘Life’ (La Vie).

¹⁵ On sempiternity, see also Hemming’s article ‘Are we still in time to know God? Apocalyptic, Sempiternity, and the Purposes of Experience’, in Lieven Boeve, Yves de Maeseneer & Stijn Van den Bossche (eds.), *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2005), pp. 159–175.

¹⁶ Without it, one is unable either to differentiate ‘being’ into two places or to understand ‘two’ as differentially placed.

independently of the mind insofar it solely requires the activity of the mind to think it. Thinking now enacts a pure mental ‘seeing’, devoid of any empirical manifestation of a being. It is not how a piece of wax shows itself to the senses that matters, it is how the wax is represented in and through imagination that is at issue: the passageway to the being of beings (through aesthesis, and the senses) is closed off in favour of a mathematical understanding of the world which task is to represent the things adequately. The essence of the wax cannot be seen or for instance smelled,¹⁷ it can only be thought: the world becomes a standing-reserve of finite substances, and God, as the infinite substance, will come to be understood precisely on the basis of thinking as mental representation.

The unity of the world falls apart in three unbridgeable entities, i.e. the finite substance of *cogito*, the infinite substance of God, and the world as a collection of substances¹⁸ which, however, are all thought in the *same*, essentially non-phenomenological, manner. It is, perhaps, time for an example. I take the example from Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, because it relates so beautifully to what Hemming has to say. ‘In [...] technological terms, we declare possible the object that is thoroughly calculated and studied, for which, in addition, ‘feasibility’ studies guarantee that it can be produced at an industrial cost compatible with prevailing market conditions. The manifestation of the technological object radically precedes, that is, always gets the upper hand chronologically over whatever intuitive fulfilment might be, that is to say, over the product itself. *Possibility* here means a full, or at least imaginable, intelligibility, a sufficient foreseeability, and a calculation. In this way, we come upon the metaphysical definition of existence as a mere complement of essence. The theoretical and chronological pre-eminence of the ‘concept’ of the product allows us to know at the outset and in advance the characteristics of what comes at the end of the chain of production. The product confirms – at best – the ‘concept’, and this without any surprise’.¹⁹

Indeed, Descartes inaugurated ‘the possibility for the imaginary as such to constitute the basis for everything subsequently demonstrated as existent’, for instance, in ‘imagining a geometric figure like a triangle, for me to know that it is a triangle means that it is defined in advance of my imagining it’ (p. 165). The ontological argument proceeds in the same way: it is only when one has already defined the essence of God in terms of being, that this God will be thought as existing in the manner of a separate being: for when something is perfect, it is necessary that it also exists . . .

However, Hemming immediately adds that this ontotheological understanding which we see arise in Descartes (and which is prolonged, as Chapter 8 attempts to show, by way of Hegel and Kant) is inspired by a *passive* intuiting of what is

¹⁷ Hemming mentions ‘recalling a smell’ on p. 152. Note that Heidegger, at the very outset of *Einführung in der Metaphysik* where he tries to understand why exactly being has become the most general and empty ‘concept’, mentions – in stark opposition to this understanding – the recalling of the smell of a room. See Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 36.

¹⁸ This corresponds to the first two of definitions of ‘world’ that Heidegger provides in *Being and Time*, p. 93.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, transl. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 172 and pp. 223–225. In my citation, I take these two passages together.

already there, in that the truth of the self encounters the truth of beings as already established by God (pp. 166–167). What is common to human beings, that is, what human beings can know to be true, is already grounded and justified by God. The self produces the *cogito* through a negation of the exterior world, only to discover this self as something purposively intended by God as its temporally prior and originary ground: ‘God is [...] established interiorly to the mind, so that it is the very basis on which the self-certainty of the subject confirms its indubitability’ (p. 175). The being of God is what gives rise to both the self as *cogito* and the ‘external’ world. ‘God’ functions as the Archimedean point on which the unity of being (and knowledge of this unity) rests. Kant, of course, rehearses the Cartesian understanding, and exploits the rift between the phenomenal and noumenal realm in an even more mathematical way.

For Kant, the sublime is the means by which the faculty of imagination moves from sensuous experience to the noumenal realm of the ideas of reason. Contrary to many contemporary attempts to privilege the dynamical sublime as the ‘the breakdown of representation’, Hemming proclaims that, in Kant, it is precisely the mathematical sublime that lays the basis for and makes possible the dynamic sublime, and so precedes it. To be sure, the sublime is that which cannot be contained in the form of a representation. However, Hemming argues, the dynamical sublime is derived from the mathematical: because of the demands of Newtonian physics and the corresponding limitlessness of the cosmos, the infinite can be represented only mathematically (for instance, as a *progress ad infinitum*). The essence of a being, understood mathematically, is what is distributed in all points of the cosmos to make it intelligible: much as *ousia* for the Greeks was the presence of being in all beings, so for Descartes and Kant it is the universally intelligible structure of beings as substance that underlies the appearance of particular beings.

What the sublime discloses is thus not a particular sublime appearance (e.g. a mountain) but the (in)capacity of the mind to represent adequately *what* it is disclosive of: the ‘*is*’ in general (p. 181) of being, equated with God, which extends all through the cosmos. But, surely, in this way the mind again takes pre-eminence over what in particular it encounters: it is not to the abyss of representation toward which Kant is pointing to, but rather to the triumph of reason as existing independently of ‘nature’. Hemming argues: ‘Far from being the ‘crisis’ or ‘abyss’ of representation, the sublime is the means by which the unrepresentable infinite *is* represented. It is what Kant will call the undetermined concept of the supersensible, which is the determination of the concept of it—as ‘determined’ through being *undetermined*. In short, the ground of all representation is itself unrepresentable, and can be grasped – and so represented – *as* the infinitely unrepresentable’ (pp. 183–184).

It is in this manner that Kant still adheres to the vigorous devaluation of empirical manifestation so abundantly present in metaphysics: the contemplation of the sublime object *confirms* subjectivity in its triumphal reason. The upliftment of the sublime is attained in the passageway through to the ideas of reason. These ideas, however, are represented to a subject in opposition to, and as the negation of, beings and the world. And so this negation again amounts to an affirmation: the ground (God and being distributed through all the cosmos’ parts) of representation is itself unrepresentable, but is nonetheless grasped *as* unrepresentable,

i.e. the negation of everything representable. God is affirmed in and through the interiority of a subject, whose interiority stands in stark contrast with what it is now called the 'external' world. This external world, however, is no longer finite and so determined by the presence and place of particular beings, but is understood in line with the flourishing physics of the time: the world has become space, and all points in space are equal, as the points of a line, even to the point of disappearing in the series the line unfolds. The unity of being is no longer something to be attained to through the already of being-in-the-world, it is attained in the negation of beings, amounting to the everlasting already lying present of being (equated with God).

Being as *ousia* is transposed to God: God has *already* named, given, and exposed the being of beings in their essence. And this 'God', as a result of the negation of the so-called 'exterior' world, necessarily dwells 'beyond the mere exteriority of the world' (p. 193). The phenomenon of the future, thought by the Greeks as the disclosing of being in speaking as that which is not said but needs to be said, amounts to seeking that which already has been said or thought by someone, i.e. God. For example, that I represent the chair in the same way as you do, is guaranteed by God who has caused the least of things to exist. If a particular chair exists it does so on the basis of his essence (*substantia*) which is known to God only. Therefore, when I represent a chair truly, and you do as well, this will attain to the truth and essence of this chair if in conformity with the essence God intended it to be.²⁰

At the end of the chapter, Hemming forces a remarkable rapprochement between the Kantian sublime (*Erhabene*) or upliftment and the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Exactly as 'Kant's description of upliftment, as a movement by means of a kind of negation from the appearances to the understanding', Hegel's *Aufhebung* 'is not simply a taking-away [...] but a taking away by lifting-off' (p. 189). In so doing, Hegel *horizontalizes* transcendence and transforms the Kantian *kairos* of upliftment into a continuing 'proceeding ahead of itself in infinite succession' (p. 191). Transcending, it is true, will be returned to the temporality of the being of being human itself, but this will only pave the way for history understood as ascent, as a continuing upliftment (p. 186). It will not be long before Nietzsche explores and exposes the volitional aspect in all this.

1.6 NIETZSCHE, POSTMODERNITY AND US

In chapter 9, 'Devaluing God', finally the meaning of the title of the book begins to light up. Nietzsche, after Heidegger perhaps Hemming's greatest influence, is treated in full.²¹ Nietzsche's experience of the death of God is now, in postmodernity, this chapter will tell us, inevitably ours. Nietzsche's securing of the self

²⁰ Theologically speaking, Hemming is indicating here that creation may not be confused with causation nor must it be confused with a *creatio continua*, which, of course, states that God sustains the universe at every point of time, also very much affected by the intrusion of *mathesis* in philosophy.

²¹ Note, however, that while Hemming only cites Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, confirmation for his portrayal of Nietzsche's critique of the subject can be found in the more 'canonical' works (insofar this is not a *contradictio in terminis*) as well. Consider F. Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in *Werke III*, K. Schlechta (Hrsg.), (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ullstein: 1976), pp. 579–580, 'Es gibt noch harmlose

on the basis of the will to power, as is well-known, is sought through a rigorous opposition to both Descartes and Hegel. Philosophy should not occupy itself with the certainty and evidence of being and mental representations, it ought to value the body as the place of becoming. If however the ego is wrested from out of the body, it will be affected by the permanent flux in which the body is continuously immersed.

In Nietzsche, we see 'the abolition of the unity of substance' (p. 203). This means, for Nietzsche (and indeed Hemming will show how both are related), both the thought that there is one single subject that underlies all mental representations that are presented to it (rather: that it presents to itself),²² and the thought that substances (the being of beings) are one (whether this unity is projected unto a 'Hinterwelt' of Ideas or proceeds to its consummation in the course of history) are denied. In its stead, we are left in a world with conflicting drives to power, and a plurality of perspectives and images on that which was, prior to Nietzsche, conceived as 'the real'. Whereas Descartes posited the subject in face of the external world, and in so doing identified the subject as *locus theologicus*, Nietzsche attempts to press the subject back into this de-divinised world (pp. 205–207).

Now human beings find themselves in a world without a *Hinterwelt* to transcend to, and the seat of eternal being is substituted for the everlastingness of a will to transcend. The will to power is grounded in the body as that which underlies all possible representations but which, as immersed in the flood of becoming, is itself unrepresentable. Along with Heidegger, Hemming will note that Nietzsche's will to power is the revaluation of substance in and as the will to power, and so as the 'permanence of presencing' (p. 205). Here, therefore, we understand why Heidegger can portray Nietzsche as an inversion of Platonism: the permanence of

Selbst-Beobachter welche glauben dass es 'unmittelbare Gewissheiten' gibt, zum Beispiel 'Ich denke' [...] wenn ich den Vorgang zerlege, der in der Satz 'ich denke' ausgedrückt ist, so bekomme ich ein Reihe von verwegnen Behauptungen, deren Begründung schwer, vielleicht unmöglich is, – zum Beispiel – dass *ich* es bin, der denkt, dass überhaupt ein Etwas sein muss, das denkt, dass Denken eine Tätigkeit und Wirkung ist, welches als Ursache gedacht wird, dass es ein 'Ich' gibt [...] Genüg, jenes 'ich denke', setzt voraus, dass ich meinen augenblicklichen Zustand mit andern Zuständen, die ich an mir kenne, *vergleiche*, om so festzusetzen, was er ist: wegen dieser Rückbeziehung auf andersweitiges 'Wissen' hat er für mich jedenfalls keine unmittelbare Gewissheit'. And so thinking will be compared to willing, doing etc. But to identify something *as* thinking, I need first to compare it to, and then deny that thinking is (also) a willing or doing.

²² It is worth recalling that the phenomenological movement, insofar it substitutes mental representations for the appearing of appearances, has not always been able to avoid the positing of a one, single transcendental ego which underlies the plurality of lived experiences and therefore is common to all empirical human beings. Although from the very outset phenomenology has shown the historical and temporal character of consciousness's intentionality (as opposed to the Cartesian *cogito* which postulated an a-temporal and ever-same openness toward the 'external' world), it fell to Husserl to return the flux of consciousness to an originary but a-temporal point of departure in the 'Ur-regio' of the transcendental subject. It is from Husserl and Descartes, of course, that Sartre takes his cue, and this is why *Being and Nothingness* will remain thoroughly situated in the subject-object scheme. The destruction of the subject-object distinction, which one sees emerging in Nietzsche, is in this sense an attack on the 'theoretical schizophrenia' (Marion) of the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental subject. It is, however, not clear to me whether one can have the one without the other, whether therefore one can emphasise the empirical subject (which, in one sense, is what Heidegger is doing) without at the same time presupposing (if only through the mirroring that negation is) its transcendental version. The *cogito* may not be able to understand the art of disappearing completely, and it is this, perhaps, which Hemming's account underestimates. I'll come back to this below.

presence is replaced in favour of a permanence of *presencing*, in that transcending is now the persistent force to place and replace representations in an indefinite manner: the subject's art of representing slowly but surely takes the place of the 'techne' of causation that corresponded to the God of metaphysics. Transcending is now an upliftment without a where, the constant negation of beings in favour of, well, *nothing*.²³

In the nihilism that Nietzsche announces, transcending *persists* in transcending for transcending's sake: the 'crisis' of representation pertains to the very activity of representing (p. 213), since this activity has lost the means to differentiate qualitatively between images – mental representations – and the real. It is the endless conflation of these two, occurring, therefore, in a multitude of ways, that necessitates the thought that every image is as real as another or that everything is (merely) interpretation: there is no 'real' world is the same as saying that the world has become an image, a mere appearance – that which I represent for myself is not necessarily the same as you desire to represent it – and, vice versa, that every image represents another world.²⁴ Nihilism is not that everything is of the same worth, it is that everything appears to a subject that is driven to e-valueate all beings in the manner it feels appropriate.

1.7 GOD AND THE GODS: PROTAGORAS AND PARMENIDES

Chapter 10, 'Transcending Postmodernity', offers an insightful reading of Protagoras' 'man is the measure of all things' on the basis of the book's enquiry into the history of philosophy. Recall that the intrusion of *mathesis* in philosophy necessitated the turn to God as the prior and indeed first cause of beings. In this way, the encountering of beings by human beings – both as encountering them since we are *already* in being and, when encountering beings, finding that they are *already* there – is satisfactory explained by the prior causality of God (p. 229). It is *because* God has created and given beings to be in this or that way that our search for truth will disclose the being of beings as true if and only if it corresponds to essence of the being as God intended it to be. That you and I speak of the same being is guaranteed by the fact that the being of this being is grounded in the being of God (who has chosen and so produced the *ens creatum* in this or that way).

When subjectivity came to be thought as the measure of all things, this understanding of prior causality is transposed to the subject itself. It is now the mental representation of the thing by a subject that justifies the unity of being,

²³ Consider Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in *Werke* II, K. Schlechta (Hrsg.), (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Ullstein: 1976), pp. 233–234, 'Man bedarf noch einer Kritik des Begriffs "Zweck" [§ 360, Zwei Arten Ursache, die man verwechselt].

²⁴ The bankruptcy of representation leads us to the ever-persisting of the transcendent *but* as unrepresentable. It is in this sense that Hemming elucidates the contemporary abundance of 'concepts' as, *beyond, autrement, sans, hyper-, Jenseits, meta-, without*. Perhaps the most clear example is the somewhat disappointing conclusion of Marion, *La science toujours recherchée et toujours manquante*, in J.-M. Narbonne & L. Langlois (eds.), *La métaphysique. Son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), pp. 13–36, p. 33 where Marion insists in reserving the 'trans' of transcendence, as, precisely, the operation of transgression, so as to make "overcoming metaphysics" sound like a pleonasm'.

in that you and I speak of the same chair – a being – when, having reduced this particular chair or any other being to its being (as for instance *substantia, res extensa*), represent this being in the same way (but only *because* underlying our respective representations, stands one and the same universal – eternal? – *cogito*). The subject or the *cogito* takes for granted that the being of a being has already been established (by the God who it finds *already present* in its very transcendental make-up). It is Nietzsche who exposes this metaphysical scheme, and who explores, as if in a blind rage, the shortcomings of it: the highest being – how again did we all call it? – is a production of the subject, a fiction without which one, perhaps, cannot live. Everything that the subject can encounter is what is present for a subject (and so represented by it), but this presentation is restricted to that which the subject *already* knows or has learned, so that the representation of a being conforms itself to that which we, from out of our past learning, can imagine of it. It is in this sense that the representation(s) of a subject are limited to that which it, even only ‘in the mind’, can ‘see’ in advance. It is this that Hemming calls ‘preparatory looking’ and what Marion, as noted earlier, so correctly underlines in his understanding of the technological object.²⁵

Is there, however, another possible way of understanding the relation of human beings to being? One that does not have recourse to ‘God’ too easily and too quickly? One that does not reduce human beings to a mere object of God the artificer? Or, again, one that does not reduce (or value) God as the artefact of human beings? It is to such an understanding that Hemming points in this last chapter through reconsidering Protagoras’ perhaps all too well-known aphorisms. Hemming returns to Parmenides’ understanding of being I have noted earlier, and elucidates it by way of a reading of Protagoras’ Greek version – Protagoras is, let it be noted, a predecessor of Plato – that instructs us about that which escapes the capacity for preparatory envisaging (p. 219 f.).

More familiar than the Greek is this: what withholds²⁶ itself from preparatory looking is being itself, but also ‘the brief life of the being of man’, finitude, as *compared to* the being of the gods. It is the gods’ being that is withheld from human beings’ preparatory looking, precisely because their life is both what already precedes and what always runs ahead of the being of man. The hiddenness of the gods is that which both precedes man and also what runs ahead of him (p. 220). This hiddenness *in* being is the ‘wherein’, or we might say: the proper place of the gods. Concealment is the concealing of this place of *unessence* (e.g. p. 219) through the distraction of human beings by that which fills or occupies (whether or not adequately) and so covers over precisely this lighting-up of hiddenness: the things that are present – beings –, the unconcealed in its mere unconcealedness.

It is important to understand how this understanding of being differs from the primacy of prior causation—the *arche* as ‘la perfection déjà réalisée’ (Merleau-

²⁵ The reader should be reminded that it is precisely this understanding, which is so closely related to Plato’s anamnesis and Socrates’ maieutics, that has set Levinas’ thinking of transcendence in motion, see E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, transl. A. Lingis (Duquesne: Duquesne University Press: 2002), p. 180, ‘[Ethical] teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutics. . .’.

²⁶ This is: what appears in not-appearing, but not as non-being, as that which ‘really should not be’, as mere appearance or image.

Ponty). This primacy rests upon our tendency to regard time as *a* being, as ‘that what can be counted and counted upon as always the same in each different moment’ (p. 223). It is this understanding of time as a sequence of *nows*,²⁷ which sprang from Aristotle, that underlies the subjectivity of the subject in modernity: ‘ich denke muss alle Vorstellungen begleiten’ (Kant) at every point in time indeed! What is hidden in and through such an understanding is that there seems to be a sort of encountering of beings for which no preparatory looking suffices, for which no prior I (or God) is necessary. It is, as Heidegger noted, as if we are too much acquainted to the thought that for everything that comes into presence, something, i.e. the subject, must arrange beforehand a region (or ‘is’ this region) within which an object can appear for it. Hemming notes, however, that this “letting into unconcealment” is not a “condition in general”, but the way being *is* – eventuates itself, which at the same time opens us up to ourselves’ (p. 229).

In accordance with his earlier suggestion that the rhetor can utter the way a being really is (see *infra*), Hemming here takes his stance against the nowadays prevailing relativism. It is worth pointing to an earlier, rather straightforward, passage: ‘this is not relativism, although in postmodernity the appeal to the “constructed” or “socially” constructed appears to make it so – because everything appears through the will, “we” believe ourselves to be the ones doing the willing. Rather this is our own being bound to history, our boundedness to the unfolding of being, not just as temporal, but as having its own history. It is as historical beings that we unfold. *We* [...] do not construct [...]: historical being “constructs” *us*’ (p. 162). There is, as such, no prior subjective openness of the subject necessary for being to eventuate itself. It is, however, in and from out of this eventuating of being that human beings appear. ‘The preoccupation for men with the open region of the unconcealed is marked by his restrictedness to it, that it is always *his*, always mine, and at the same time he, *I*, am not the one alone for whom the region is open, and my self is *itself* an event of unconcealing and coming to be: I am not transparent to myself in every way and at every moment – I have a past, a “from whence”, and a future, a “whither to” from out of which I fall; and I occur already together with and from out of being among others’ (p. 230). This clearing of being is thus not the consequence of human beings’ openness (as subjects) toward it, nor is it caused, from past immemorial, by God, it is ‘there’ both for me – in that every appearing is always my appearing – and *at the same time* for itself as that which runs ahead of and precedes me. It is this ambiguity that Aristotle resolved by ‘reconciling the unity of the self with the *whole* of the open region’, by the merging of the outermost reach of upliftment and the divine (p. 230).

However, this ambiguity points to an entirely other understanding of time and eternity than that which Aristotle and, afterwards, metaphysics entertained: the ‘already’ of being is not the metaphysical and sempiternal ‘always’, but the before and after of human being’s finitude encountered from out of the fact that I cannot not be the span between my birth and my death of which, however, following Heidegger in this regard, only ‘the pure “that it is” shows itself. But the “whence” and the “whither” remain in darkness’.²⁸ The unity of the being

²⁷ Compare Heidegger’s critique of the ‘vulgar’ understanding of time in *Being and Time*.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 173.

of beings (if there is any) 'is not the unity of everything present, but the hidden unity of the manifold concealment from out of which the manifold unfolds and unconceals itself' (p. 230). This unity pertains to unessence, not as that which is opposed to essence, but 'as that which is prior and subsequent to presence – what allows presence to be present: presencing' (p. 231); what allows how something comes to be seen as 'for itself', in its very singularity. It is this unity (Greek '*hen*', singularity or unity, as qualitatively different from everything else), that metaphysics, as the history of upliftment, only succeeded in attaining to by means of the *negation* of everything it encounters (be it the world as in Descartes, or particular beings as in Plato).²⁹ And so Hemming, in his own account of 'overcoming' metaphysics, wants to trace the singularity of the human being from out of the particular beings it encounters, the very place where being unfolds itself. This would be 'a genuine futural being', a 'constant transformation of the self [. . .] which therefore is *as* temporalising but not as a drive [or] driven will into the future, but as what, undergoing change as an ever-renewal in the moment whereby whatever renews emerges from being itself, discovers itself without at first recognizing itself. The self is *not* the self-same [the metaphysical 'always', JS], and yet it persists as the self' (p. 224).

1.8 CONCLUSION AND CRITICAL REMARKS

There is much to say about this book. Certainly it is difficult to read and at times very hard to understand. Certainly some authors are given less credit than they might have deserved – I am thinking of the rather harsh mentions of Derrida. And certainly there are authors who might deserve greater discussion. But, in any case, what we have here is a book that displays a thoughtfulness which seems to be rather rare in postmodern intellectual circles and society. After *Heidegger's Atheism*, Hemming has written a beautiful book, within which one will find a whirlwind of ideas, a flood of intriguing questions and intricate questioning. The reader is engaged by a powerful performance, and is thrown back upon him- or herself haunted by an, in these days, perhaps unheard of commendation.

For, as much as Longinus was, we too are standing at a crossroads, 'caught between the poles of ontotheology' (p. 237). If God is not chained to being (and

²⁹ Again, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 40, 'Transcendence is not negativity'. For negation and its (im)possibility in contemporary philosophy, see H. Bergson, *Evolution créatrice. Creative Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), p. 278. For Levinas' discussion of this passage, see E. Levinas, *L'intrigue de l'infini. Textes revues et présentés par M.-A. Lescourret* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), pp. 111–113. Marion criticises Bergson's account in *Being Given*, p. 338 n. 97. See, of course, also Husserl's thought experiment of the annihilation of the world, E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie. Erstes Buch* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), pp. 103–106. All these authors seem to agree that a total negation is not possible, in that it always yields to some kind of presence (or affirmation). For Husserl as for Descartes, it leads to the immemorial presence of the ego, for the early Levinas to the less than generous presence of being as '*il y a*', for Marion to the privilege of givenness (which is already affirmed when denying it), for the later Levinas it leads to the 'presence' of otherness (since denying the primacy of the Other, is only possible on the basis of a the prior affirmation), for Sartre negation is the very activity of consciousness as for Hegel it was the motor of the ascent and of the process of history. For Heidegger, finally, the nothing and angst again yields the possibility of a proper comportment to the world. I will come back to these parallels below.

vice versa), then ‘there is no longer any upliftment to divinity exercised as the end, the very terminus, of our experience and our understanding’ (p. 239). God as the wholly other, and as the end and aim of transcending, Hemming has argued, ‘is mere crying in the wind’ (p. 241): such a transcendence will only encounter an absence, the absence of the transcendent. Perhaps Hemming’s most valuable accomplishment is his insight that many contemporary attempts to think God as the beyond of being merely fall in the metaphysical trap of the negation of immanence in favour of transcendence. As the ancients, reaching from out of the world of becoming and mere appearances unto the world of eternal being and/or divinity, so our contemporaries feel the need, first, to portray the immanence of being-in-the-world as ‘an egg in its shell’³⁰ only then to find a transcendence wholly other than being. In this way, one passes over the need to think what it is to transcend from out of a particular world, what is to be, and, most importantly, how one might encounter God in and through our being-in-the-world. The cleft in being, if there is one, is not between God and beings, but rather between being and beings, so that the appearance of God needs to be thought as a ‘*surprise in being*, coming into being from out of the hiddenness of the future [. . .] in order to surprise us’ (p. 242, emphasis mine).

God is not chained to being, means: God is not a being, nor is God being, but nevertheless God has God’s own to be, which he is free to blow wherever he wills: ‘is not the greatest surprise that God *can* do this because God is not in our grasp?’ (p. 244). The encounter between God and man is for Hemming the encounter between two freedoms.³¹ For us as beings however, the difference between being and beings means that God, if he reveals himself, he will appear in being, through a being and as a being: Jesus Christ. Thinking out of and after – at the crossroads – of metaphysics implies that one takes leave of a certain set of prejudices: ‘that the gods appear within being does not mean that the gods are bound to being, or are only immanent to it. Nor does it mean that the gods are not other than mortal beings are’ (p. 242).

Yet there are some reserves to be made here. Those steeped in Heideggerian thought, will find the same rather rare mentioning of *Mit-sein* as one finds in the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*. This is a well-known debate, and I will not enter into it here, although it perhaps still needs to be decided whether or not Heidegger has or has not an ethics, and also whether or not Levinas does or does not have an ontology. For now, suffice it to say that a ‘fundamental – ontological – connection with other beings’ perhaps does not take into account the presence of other human beings in the way it ought to do, for the simple reason that encountering a human being is something other than the encountering of a chair. And yet there might be an ethical stance hidden in the book’s shocking portrayal of the figure of Brontosaurus. Brontosaurus figures as the solipsistic subject that was the effect of

³⁰ E. Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant* (Paris: Vrin, 1998 [1947]), p. 120, ‘comme un oeuf dans sa coquille’. Although Levinas does not mention so explicitly, the phrase is taken from Tsjechow’s *Duel*. Oddly enough, Heidegger criticizes the Husserlian portrayal of consciousness as ‘Schnecke in ihrem Haus’, see Heidegger, *Prolegomena des Zeitbegriffs*, GA 20, P. Jaeger (ed.) (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1979), p. 223.

³¹ Compare Hemming, *Heidegger’s Atheism*, p. 257: ‘both the freedom of God’s appearing and my own freedom with regard to God’.

this 'genealogy of a very odd kind'. The subjectivity of the subject has lost this fundamental ontological connection to other beings and its fate, therefore, is to try to produce such a connection time and again.

Hence the efforts of contemporary thinkers to substitute the subject for an intersubjective encounter. Hemming, however, would point to the fact that such efforts already start from out of the metaphysical obsessions with the presence of being rather than its presencing. The being of beings is something spoken of, and presents itself in the speech of the rhetors. Therefore, one must understand the gathering and speaking of the rhetor as a sort of *proper* speaking – a proper speaking of the connection between being and logos – a proper being-together with his audience, conversation partners or, in this case, readers.

Furthermore, substituting the metaphysical always for a 'genuine futural being' might raise more questions than it solves. Indeed, it could lead to the quasi-eschatology that deconstructionists are proposing. It is not clear, however, whether such accounts escape the horizontalizing of transcendence one sees emerging in Hegel and Marx for instance.³² Playing with an Aristotelian example, Hemming indeed suggests that the 'arche' of God perhaps does not lie in the past, but in the future: 'in fact, an origin can lie ahead of us as if, for instance, we were travelling up a river to seek out its 'arche' or source (p. 141), it might even be 'the opposite to the source of the river [here taken in its causal sense, JS] (perhaps more like the water in it)' (p. 148).³³ This is problematic, in that, as Marion has suggested, it merely postpones the question of God (or of truth) to a later point in time. So, and it is here that I disagree with Hemming, submitting the question of being to the eventuating of being itself seems to disregard the question that *is* the human being. First, that a rhetor can speak of being/beings 'as what it really is' seems to neglect the Heideggerian/Aristotelian adage 'that being can be spoken of in a manifold of ways'.³⁴ For all its hermeneutical insights, *Devaluing God* overestimates, perhaps, the so-called unity of being: that you and I speak of the same chair (or any other being) in the same way, now or at some given point of time, should, perhaps, not be presupposed. This does not necessarily imply relativism, it entails simply that the question of pluralism is perhaps not being taken into account in the way it should be.³⁵

One does not 'kill Parmenides', to mention one of Levinas' metaphors, simply by pointing to the futurity of being. One should think the difference between being

³² It is Marion who has raised this question, see *Being Given*, pp. 294–296, p. 295: 'Difference differs by its withdrawal (Heidegger), its lapse (Levinas), or its delay (Derrida) – but do these come from temporality or should they be thought in and through themselves? If they stem from temporality, for which they merely invert the primacy of the present, wouldn't they once again be inscribed in the most metaphysical conception of presence?'. It is, in other words, not sure whether evoking the *continuing* and *persistent* withdrawal of being can avoid the 'substantialization' of precisely this withdrawal.

³³ Compare with pp. 103–104.

³⁴ For instance, Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 91–97.

³⁵ Nor is it, as does Levinas, by pointing to creation as the fundamental connection between the other and me, since Levinas' account of creation seems to resolve, yet again, the professed irreducibility and non-commonality between the Other and me. What the other and I have in common is, according to Levinas, perhaps not that we both are finite (see *Otherwise than Being*, p. 83), it is that we both are created beings and therefore connected as liturgical and 'theological' beings. However, it is, if one wants to 'overcome' metaphysics (understood as the unity of being and truth), not sure whether beings – or you and I as human beings – *should* have something in common. Indeed, is truth one?

and beings (or between the other and I) therefore, not as something that can be attained (be it through futural being) or that can be grasped as unattainable, but simply as 'beyond' our grasp. This would be, however, the opposite of 'how not to speak' (Derrida): it would disclose the universality of our speaking and of our being simply in our speaking of this being, i.e. a chair, which we encounter. Truth would reside in our speaking to one another as singular beings. Without *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. Without any *Aufhebung* to a one and simple synthesis. And without hope, lest that we speak to one another.

Second, what precisely is the status of the human being when it appears as the mere epiphenomenon of the eventuating of being? Are we not left with the horrific picture of the human being that Marion has given us, that is, the human being as a witness that 'lights up as on a control panel at the very instant when and each time the information he should render phenomenal [. . .] arrives to him from a transistor by electric impulse without any initiative or delay'.³⁶ Are we not dealing, as Derrida once criticized Levinas for, with some sort of empiricism here? Is the human being a mere transparent screen on which being testifies to itself—as if being is not bothered, i.e. unmoved, by the way with which being is depicted in and through human beings? As much as Levinas' complaint that in metaphysical thinking God seems to be the only extant theologian, one might suggest that in Hemming's account being is its own philosopher.³⁷

Thirdly, a 'genuine phenomenological account' of the human being is not the confirmation of the empirical being of the being human. Moreover, the phenomenological reduction does not operate, and Husserl is quite clear on this, by way of a *negation* of the 'natürliche Einstellung'.³⁸ Reduction in phenomenology means that one takes one's distances (of, for instance, the existence of a being) only to 'see' the being more clearly. Let's give an example: it is very well possible – it is, in fact, what one hears from out of the natural attitude or Heidegger's 'Das Man', taken as rumour or 'public opinion' – that one condemns soccer for its hooliganism. However, a phenomenological attitude will say that the existence of hooliganism will in no way whatsoever affect the being ('Wesen') of soccer. It is not *because* of hooliganism that one ought to condemn soccer, it is that the being of soccer is not seen clearly when approaching it solely by means of the existence of hooliganism. Therefore, one brackets the existence of hooliganism to see the 'Wesen' of soccer, i.e. as sports. This bracketing is therefore not a denial of hooliganism, it is a freeing up of space to see soccer as soccer (or, of course, anything else).

The point is that to bracket something in this way, one needs to presuppose some instance that performs the reduction. The reduction is indeed performed by an empirical ego, but is valid if and only if the ego that performs it can presuppose that another human being will perform it in the same way. That he or she will do so, however, is only to be verified in speaking to one another. Hence the importance of what, admittedly, has been wrongfully called 'intersubjectivity'.

³⁶ Marion, *Being Given*, pp. 217–218.

³⁷ Levinas, *Transcendence et intelligibilité. Suivi d'un entretien* (Genève, Labor et Fides, 1996), p. 25. Levinas is following here a saying of Pierre Aubenque.

³⁸ See Husserl, *Ideen I*, pp. 56–65. The phenomenological reduction is therefore neither an affirmation nor a negation, but a suspension of judgement.

What Levinas was pointing to is precisely that the phenomenological reduction is not between *one* ego and an *alter* ego (as countable mathematically), but that the very performance of this reduction is somehow 'à l'insu', i.e. without me perceiving or knowing that it is *already* affected by other human beings. Again, this 'already' is not the metaphysical always, it is a reflection on being-already-in-the-world-with others. Therefore, phenomenologically speaking, one can do without negation and without *Aufhebung* (as the synthesis or the symbolism performed by a solipsistic subject), but not without a *cogito*—be it thoroughly historicised and *placed* in the world from out of which it performs its cogitare.

Fourthly, reading Hemming's book, one is sometimes forced to ask, as Nathaniel once did to some extent, 'what good can come from philosophy?' But does not ontotheology work in both ways? Ontotheology is perhaps not only the merging of philosophy into theology, but also the other way around, in that theology *benefits* from this philosophical intrusion. For instance, is the philosophical view that we can see beings only in a provisional and inadequate way a mere distortion of an 'insight faithful to scripture'? Might it not be that to expect a beatific vision that exactly corresponds to the way it is portrayed in scripture and liturgy is some kind of hubris? But for this, perhaps, one does not read Heidegger, one reads Levinas.

Reply to Schrijvers

LAURENCE PAUL HEMMING

Heythrop College, University of London

I owe a debt of gratitude to Joeri Schrijvers, who has read and summarised *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God* with such care and sympathy. Albeit that he warns readers of the inevitable truncations and losses of nuance in a summary (and one feels he struggles a bit with Aristotle, but then so too did I), nevertheless, there is no doubt that he has attended to his task in ways that many readers will thank him for. I hope he will therefore set within the context of that gratitude the replies and questions I pose in response to him—that he will see them as provocations, not to his person or his concerns, but to his thinking.

Given the care he exercised, and with good knowledge of how well he knows the philosophical currents from out of which the book was drawn, I could not help but ask how he himself understands the questions he poses to me right at the end of his summary as arising *from within* the text, rather than added on, from outside. In response, one could say, why could a thinker not just ask what he wants to ask? Why should I expect that the questions he poses might arise from out of the central problematic of the book itself? Except that, if the book fulfils what it sets out to do, that is to throw *contemporary theological questions* into a certain relief, then to fail to ask *from out of that relief* could be argued as a failure to see the depth of the book's own critique. Or could it not be that the *book itself fails in its own task*? Indeed it could, but even here surely, the questions should point to that failure and illustrate it, rather than be added in from a general perspective.

Early on in Schrijvers' text he makes a claim which discloses a fundamental attitude, common in contemporary theology, which *Postmodernity's Transcending* self-consciously eschews and which it seeks to bring into relief. For Schrijvers says '*Postmodernity's transcending*, then, turns out to be a transcending, not for the sake of transcendence or even the Transcendent, but simply a transcending for transcending's sake—no matter who performs it, and even less 'to where' the transcending takes place. According to Hemming, however, this 'transcending', always and already presupposes a devalued and devaluated God.'

This statement is ambiguous: for it could say 'transcending always and already presupposes a devalued and devaluated God' or it could say '*here now*

(*in postmodernity, in the situation in which we take ourselves for granted*) transcending always and already presupposes a devalued and devaluated God.' The key to what Schrijvers intends (without intending) is in his redoubled 'devalued and devaluated'. For 'devalued' on its own, as the book shows (and Schrijvers shows the book showing) can be read 'in many ways'. But devaluated 'fixes' the meaning, so that we know *which* of the ambiguous readings of 'devalued' is intended: that devaluing which is not a separation from value, or a lack of connection with value, but *that* devaluing which began by taking God as set at highest value and then overpowers the all-powerful and declares it dead, and so to have no power at all.

Doesn't Schrijvers then place us firmly where we should be, in postmodernity's epoch, which shows that the epochal understanding of God is ever-changing and in flux? Or will we discover (through the questions that he asks) that he so presupposes that devaluation is our proper comportment to God, that the God we have devalued has ever been thus, and so he will read even those times when God was not set upon by value and devaluation as if they were the same as our own. The danger is not that Schrijvers has understood how postmodern we all now are, but that in having *not* understood the condition of postmodernity, he will himself turn out to be all too postmodern.

God as devaluated (not just as free from value) *is* the ontotheological God, the God who appears in the epoch of Metaphysics which runs in its phenomenological description from Plato to Nietzsche, and which is not yet over. The final question Schrijvers poses to me is 'might it not be that to expect a beatific vision that exactly corresponds to the way it is portrayed in scripture and liturgy is some kind of hubris?'. This is to exploit again an ambiguity, this time of the word 'expect'. For expectation, as Schrijvers describes it, suggests causal-anticipation: the expectancy of *Postmodernity's Transcending*, however, attempts to free God and man from every (rational, calculative, predictive) causal inference, because expectation here precisely does *not* mean preparatory-looking, anticipative knowing-what-to-look for, and yet seeks to show what is meant by being open *for* means, in a way that every preparatory expectation never can be.

And so Schrijvers' 'cap' to this question, which is not a question but a statement, attempts to foreclose the discussion. He says 'but for this, perhaps, one does not read Heidegger, one reads Levinas'. This illustrates the extent to which Schrijvers has not come to terms with the underlying critique of Levinas represented by the whole thrust of *Postmodernity's Transcending*. Schrijvers can be forgiven for this, because Levinas is barely mentioned in the text (a mere four times, and then never thematically). Where Levinas is discussed, however, it should be clear that the attitude of *Postmodernity's Transcending* is that Levinas, no more than any other of the disciples of Descartes and Husserl, is unable to free man and God from the causal relation in which since Plato they have been clenched.

In this Levinas and Nancy both fail to understand the import of Heidegger's term *Mitsein*, hence my extensive discussion of *Mitsein* in the sections towards the end of my introductory paper offered for this collection. *Mitsein* is that which I come to see and understand, when, and as, I extract myself *off from* the manifold that *Mitsein* names, in order to discover myself to be *oneself*. Levinas, like his appointed master Plato, announces the 'true' taxis of counting as *from one to two*

and to many.¹ This is the opposite order from the genuine, originary phenomenological experience of number, as Aristotle strived to say (and which *Postmodernity's Transcending* discusses at length).

How are we to discriminate the 'genuine and originary' from the posited and so already theoretically 'always already' true—true therefore, not from the rigorous discipline of phenomenological encounter, but just taken to be true 'for all time', as eternally true as God is said to be himself eternal? The answer to this is given in the emphasis that *Postmodernity's Transcending* pays to the phenomenon of time, of *what precedes and succeeds what*. It is this which I want to name as a discipline. Above all, as a discipline of thinking: not a discipline that thinking 'thinks' and so learns or discovers or acquires, mere technical proficiency, but rather the discipline that thinking *is*. This discipline which is thinking can be uncovered in its meaning by encountering thinking through self-thinking (the medial voice again!). This means through bringing thinking into an encounter with its self-essence, that reveals the genuine taxis or order of number: *from the unthought manifold through to the dual* (if we can still think with the Greeks) and thence to the one. Even this is a short-hand or a truncation, for thinking is *not* numbering, but numbering is the easiest way for us to discover, and so name, for ourselves the ways in which thinking *is*.

When we ask whether Schrijvers' questions arise from *out of* the matter at hand, what we are asking is: can he bring out before himself *for himself* the matter of thinking, the discipline of *thinking itself*? Am I being unfair? Why can't Schrijvers simply *juxtapose* his questions next to mine? Isn't this what Levinas does—juxtapose the other next to the same and then *construct* a relation between them that is so gripping a causal bond that taking it seriously becomes an imperative of ethics such that it is said to precede in importance even being itself? The phenomenon of *Mitsein* shows that these juxtapositions are *already there*, and as they become apparent, as thinking thinks them, then things begin to change (in how we think them), but they can never be *constructed*. Worse yet, every construction of them will cover over the fact that they already exist, and so plunge into darkness and oblivion what actually is to be brought to light.

In contrast to what Schrijvers takes for granted, *Postmodernity's Transcending* attempts an elaboration of transcending that does not 'always and already' presuppose a devalued and dead God, but that illustrates how *now* in postmodernity, transcendence is *self-evidently* in consequence of the death of God. It is only when we begin to think, to evade the self-evidences of ontotheology, that we can even hope to attain to the 'before and after of man', the place (which is no where) wherein we can be readied for the outspeaking of God and the gods. Man transcends, and that is the least of things (to echo a correction once uttered by Jean-Luc Marion to a work of his own),² but in gaining a proper phenomenological under-

¹ Cf. Levinas, E., *Altérité et transcendance*, Paris, Fata Morgana, 1995, p. 9. The epigraph to the book, found here, states 'La philosophie est platonicienne'.

² See the *Preface to the English Edition* by Marion of Marion, J.-L. trans. Carlson, T. A., *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1991. This *Preface*, which is a real 'hors-texte' of a kind precisely understood and commented on so well by Derrida, regulates and explains the rest of the text whilst claiming to be 'outside' it. Here Marion says that 'God is, exists, and that is the least of things' (p. xix) despite the fact that the rest of the book tries to say the complete opposite. Authors

standing of transcending, of the timeliness of the being of being human, *in* man's transcending, the divine may yet itself unfold (if God should so choose).

In note 25 Schrijvers says that 'the reader should be reminded that it is precisely this understanding, which is so closely related to Plato's anamnesis and Socrates' maieutics, that has set Levinas' thinking of transcendence in motion, adding '[Ethical] teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutics.' This ignores the way in which when pedagogy teaches it does not simply confront the student with what he does not know, that he should then, in sublime shock, recognise its truth and fall before it: pedagogy proceeds *from* what is known *to* the unknown. There is always an element of the known in the uncovering of the unknown. Even the Greek gods knew this, which is why in order to say *unanticipated* things to mortals they appeared in *anticipated* forms. Often it is only later that the human recipient of a divine appearing in myth discovers that he or she has received a visit and a message from Olympus. Even the divinity of Christ is attested in the Gospels by his conformity to what is prophesied for the messiah – it is not enough that he should have known for himself that he was the Son of God. The lunatic asylums are awash with sons of God with this sure knowledge, alongside new Napoleons, their corresponding Wellingtons, and all the rest.

If knowledge of God is always based on what we do not yet know, why does this make knowledge of God an ethics (as Schrijvers has Levinas do here)? Is it because it is only with the *force* of the ethical that the unknown can be enforced as true? Does this not expose once again Levinas' own sublime thrill at enforcing the effects of mere juxtapositions, and that his ethics is not ethics at all, but yet another appeal to an uplifting, commanding, sublime? The genuinely unknown, appearing in the realm of the familiar is what Heidegger called the 'uncanny'. About this uncanny I have written elsewhere that it is 'something which is not either monstrous nor immense nor minute, but simply that which cannot be measured, or calculated, or reasoned about or away; nothing, Heidegger says, that can be "grasped by the fangs of the will", but rather the way being itself shines out into the everyday—something so simple that it "belongs so immediately to the 'canny' that it can never be explained on the basis of the familiar". The uncanny – the demonic – is therefore what surrounds everywhere and makes possible the familiar, which, before it became familiar, was itself proffered as uncanny.'³

Already in Schrijvers' characterisation with respect to light—the light we get from some thinkers, and darkness we find with others, an entirely *metaphysical* attitude is betrayed. Rather we should say that the greatest darkness (from Plato) obscures the greatest light. We, who are barely even able to enter into what Plato has to say, are correspondingly barely in a position to discard him so easily, despite what Schrijvers suggests. These are the *truncations* of thought – which a summary inevitably is – making everything 'easier' and so more accessible. Is philosophical thought easy? If it is, why should we even bother with it?

are still trying to rub this extraordinary statement away and save the text itself—how Derrida might have smiled.

³ See Hemming, L. P., *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, p. 71. See for Heidegger's extensive discussion of the uncanny, Heidegger, M., *Parmenides in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 54, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1992 (1982), esp. pp. 147–155.

Although we must concur fully with Schrijvers' elegant presentation of the transition in thought that I claim occurs from Parmenides to Plato – that is, to the Plato we all recognise – we need also to remind ourselves that *this* Plato, the Plato of the school-room, the Plato of Aristotle's polemic is the Plato we have received. To what extent is it really faithful to Plato himself?

And here we come from the last to the first of Schrijvers' questions, when he challenges me to answer 'first, that a rhetor can speak of being/beings "as what it really is" seems to neglect the Heideggerian/Aristotelian adage "that being can be spoken of in a manifold of ways"'. Although Heidegger discusses this phrase, it is no adage of his own, but is rather Aristotle's assertion 'τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς'.⁴

Schrijvers suggests that I posit that the rhetor can speak the *singular, one* form of the thing that a thing is (if the rhetor is doing what I say he has to do). He reads 'being is said in many ways' as *a* being can be said in many ways. But what is intended here is not *a* being, but *the being of beings*: beings in their being. He attempts to set me apart from Aristotle and Heidegger by suggesting I have asserted that every self-identical thing has only *one* identity. In this Schrijvers haunts me with the postmodern claims to plurality—that things have many ways of being spoken (and suggests that Aristotle and Heidegger would have concurred). We have to ask: what kind of plurality is Schrijvers counterposing to my supposed *hen*, my claim to the unitary oneness of each phenomenon? He has missed the point, and missed how carefully *Postmodernity's Transcending* explains that each time the rhetor speaks, he must speak the being of what he speaks *anew*. The being in question could be a battle, an appearance of a god, or a case against a person or the state: it could be all manner of things. I say in *Postmodernity's Transcending* that 'the rhetor [. . .] names, not what has a *word* for a name, but what must emerge anew each time – and so come into presence' (p. 62). Schrijvers has, paradoxically, made the mistake of assuming that the word πολλαχῶς has a single *unitary* meaning, at all places and in all times.

Not only has he missed, therefore, that it is *being* and not *beings* that can be said in many ways, but even more, that *beings can also* be said in many ways. What does τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς say essentially? It says *essentially*, that is philosophically, that *beings, no matter how they are said, have a restriction to being*. This is the *essential* meaning which Schrijvers has overlooked completely. Surely he should have seen that the whole of *Postmodernity's Transcending* works through an understanding that words are *unstable*, that their meanings shift, smear and blur, and flip somersault from one thing to another constantly (no matter how often philosophers, Canute-like, 'define their terms' to 'fix' the meaning of the words that are their stock in trade). That *words* always mean the same everywhere and at all times is as much a pretension of ontotheology as that *things* have a unitary determination (in the mind of God).

Heidegger wants to indicate that already the term πολλαχῶς has *degenerated* in Aristotle into metaphysics, and taunts Aristotle that despite this recognition, Aristotle's attempt to fix this *being* that could be said in *many ways* through the categories, it could never be so adequately grounded—and inasmuch as it was

⁴ See, for one example, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026 a 33.

never grounded by Aristotle, nor was it ever by Kant.⁵

Schrijver's entirely postmodern citation of the *πολλαχῶς* – his haunting suggestion that in the light of the death of God and so because the 'true' meaning of a thing cannot be fixed by reference to its being causally generate from the mind of God – has to be counterposed to what Aristotle actually meant by this, which is quite different. But where I would concur with Heidegger – what I tried to bring out with respect to this word *anew* – is that the genuine originary unitariness of the rhetor's work is because *for those for whom and to whom the rhetor speaks, he speaks not a unitary thing, but a thing which emerges out of a unitary world*. This is why the rhetor can *tell* the 'truth' of the thing, because truth here does not mean the true *against* the false (the one meaning which shows up the wrongness of all the others), but truly-disclosingly (*ἀλεθθεῖν*) the rhetor discloses the thing in its world, *in the world in which he and those for whom and to whom he speaks, and which is thereby as a singular world made available to him and to them*. He has to do this *each time he speaks*, hence he must speak being in many ways because he is not *constructing this world* but *disclosing it as giving him to be each time*. 'Each time' here means *anew*, an essential part of the phenomenon of time.

The rhetor speaks *the essential restriction of the being in its being*, which means he speaks the world—and this means the character and being of the *time* and the character and being of the *place* out of which the being (of which he speaks) arises and comes to be. Two things are in play: not just the *ones who, through the rhetor, address the being (in its being)*, but also *the being (in its being) which addresses the ones co-presencing in its coming-to-be through the speaking of the rhetor, i.e. those beings (in their being) whom the being (in its being) addresses*. *This* has a singularity of time and place, a historical 'where' and 'whence' and 'whither'. *This* is what the rhetor says *once only each time he says it*—else he is no more than a parrot.

This resolves, in passing, the question which Schrijvers raises at note 22, where Schrijvers rightly notes that everyone from Aristotle via the Latin Averroists to Husserl, Levinas and beyond 'has not always been able to avoid the positing of a one, single transcendental ego' where the word *ego* and *soul* are interchangeable, while exposing why they could not resolve the question. In each case they were looking at the singularity of the *thing* and not the wholeness of world which is in each case *one*, from out of which the thing presences.

But this unity also resolves for us (*contra* Schrijvers) why the human being is not an 'epiphenomenon of the eventuating of being'. His attempt to make this suggestion into a moment of horror (he calls it an 'horrific picture') in his text, an ethical transgression in the order of philosophy, has not with sufficient depth understood man's restriction to world, and how man must uncover and speak in many ways the world to which he is restricted. Man needs no other world than the one which is his (and should keep his nose out of any other he thinks he has rights of access to, lest he be distracted). Understanding this (when man is so often tempted to other worlds, to those beyond, and those to which he can virtually have access) is the discipline and rigour of philosophy, a discipline which cancels all speculative expectations and which, did man accept it, would ready him for

⁵ Cf. Heidegger's discussion of Aristotle's phrase τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς at Heidegger, M., *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Q 1–3* in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 33, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1990, esp. p. 29ff.

God's utterance, God's word, when and where it given.⁶ Man should know his place, and know what place is his.

For my being-in-the-world can never be extracted from me (as a sort of horrid threat). Restriction to world is not a repression or limitation, but the generosity of the worlding of world, it is how world fits man to be himself. This is the very restriction of beings to being from out of which the philosopher must learn to be disciplined *to*, as much as the restriction that the rhetor (and philosopher) must learn to speak *of*. World is the basis for presencing/presence all the way down, as long as world remains interrogable for me. And when I finally lose my being-in-the-world, either through accident, senility or death, how am I to know that world persists beyond me, except by inference, by means of a postulation, a projection from the world-rich place I *now* inhabit? When will we learn to take more seriously Parmenides dictum 'τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν, τε καὶ εἶναι'.⁷

Schrijvers is to be commended for his appreciation of *Postmodernity's Transcending*, but I would ask him: if he can summarise the argument it makes, can he find his way in to the discipline which made it?

⁶ And would even ready man for heaven when he heeded God's calling of him to it through His Son, for all the cries against me of 'immanentist' from the theological epigones who have yet even to begin to understand the world in which they dwell, but nevertheless speak as if they had already secured and occupied their celestial vantage points and speak from them right now.

⁷ Parmenides, fragment 5 in Diels, H. (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 1922, vol. 1, p. 152. 'For the same is (indeed) for thinking as is for being.'

God and the Sublime

KEVIN HART

University of Notre Dame

What kind of theology articulates God and the sublime? Were this question posed by someone other than Laurence Hemming the chances are that it would quickly lead to a history of liberal Protestantism and its colonization of Catholicism. Everyone knows the story. It begins with a revolution. The Old Theology is overthrown in Königsberg: revelation and liturgy, and a lot of other dusty stuff, are pushed off to the side, though not thrown away altogether. So we are free at last! It turns out, though, that it was not a revolution but a coup. We are getting another King, and he is just about to be crowned. Word on the street says he comes from the royal house of the Sublime and that his name is 'Experience.' He is German, needless to say, and is known to some high up in the land as *Erlebnis* and to others as *Erfahrung*. The common people are often confused. Yet the King is religious – or at least very moral – and he rules benignly for a long time, granting state favors to Hegel and Schleiermacher. Even when he is dead, people look back to his reign with nostalgia: they become known in the land as 'Rahnerians.'

But, as I say, the old King dies. There is talk about *Entleben* from a man called Heidegger; another citizen, Adorno, declares that *Erfahrung* is impossible anyway. A man called Barth preaches vigorously that 'Experience' should never have been crowned in the first place, and his friend, von Balthasar, is nostalgic for an old member of the family who has not been heard of in years, a certain 'Archetypal Experience.' Yet good king 'Experience' was far from impotent – in fact, he was very attached to 'Feeling' – and so the royal house of the Sublime is not without issue. A new King assumes the throne, taking the name 'Limit-Experience,' and a fresh generation, called 'Postmodernists,' once again pay court. The new King is often indisposed, however, and the throne is mostly vacant. The Postmodernists wink and talk about the experience of non-experience. They are a clever lot. Some say that, in this brave new world, we experience events as images, and indicate a vast abyss called 'the imaginary.' They peer in and see no God there. Far from being deflated, they are exuberant and are soon talking about ordinary things in uplifting terms. The authority of the king is diffused throughout the land, they say, and he does not need to be seen upon the throne.

Laurence does not tell this story. Indeed, he tells us that he does not wish to relate a history at all, and does something far more interesting. He begins with the Postmodernists peering into the imaginary, still concerned with ‘upliftment’ even in a world without God, and offers a theological genealogy of our predicament. What kind of theology articulates God and the sublime? There are two possibilities, since we inherit two senses of ‘theology,’ one from Aristotle (the *logos* of the highest ground) and another from St Thomas (*sacra doctrina*), and Laurence is quick to point out how easy it is for Thomists and non-Thomists alike to remake Aristotle in the image of Thomas and vice versa. We need to differentiate these two thinkers very carefully, and Laurence makes good use of Heidegger for this purpose. I will not go into detail with respect to the analyses that Laurence offers of Aristotle and Thomas. They are at once bold and finely shaded, as is the account of Longinus. I am in broad agreement with him that the sublime can work only in terms of a theological anthropology that draws from natural categories, and that one does not find this in Thomas. Nor, needless to say, does one find it in Barth. The two theologians agree that the sublime appears in Christian theology as an element that was thought philosophically rather than theologically and that therefore has never been thought with sufficient inwardness by Christians. Postmodernists might well have taken aim at theology, but they have hit Aristotle rather than Thomas, theology as an attempt to secure the highest ground rather than as the development of *sacra doctrina*. Not that this situation allows Theology to continue reflecting on Scripture and the Fathers in splendid isolation. It must still traverse the postmodern as part of its difficult task of establishing a space in which God might be encountered and an understanding of what this ‘encounter’ might mean.

Postmodernity may have offered a range of withering critiques of the subject, but its theological starting point all too often remains in those critiques. Accordingly, its reflections on God largely remain in an attenuated theological – or, rather, philosophical – anthropology derived from natural categories (or from their transcendental matrix) that keeps generating effects of ‘upliftment.’ Such is Laurence’s first point, and I agree with it. Co-ordinate with Laurence’s insight is the lamentable situation in which God is figured as a value, a state of affairs that leads to the devaluation of the deity. This is Laurence’s second point. Again, I agree: I argued to the same end, although in a different way, in *The Trespass of the Sign* when examining apophatic theology. Yet Laurence has a third general point to make. Theology has a double task, to understand what ‘transcendence’ means in the postmodern world and, having achieved that, to transcend that world and indicate where theology has always and already been. With a warm glow of fellow feeling, I am once more in agreement, although I would place some of my emphases elsewhere than they appear in this book. Perhaps this third point gives me the best opportunity to respond to Laurence’s work. I will make some distinct points in a series of complements to *Postmodernity’s Transcending: Devaluing God*, and hope that they are heard and received as compliments.

I hope that Laurence was amused by my account of the good King Experience and the Royal House of the Sublime. Like him, I am dubious about the category ‘religious experience,’ especially when it is reduced to ‘feeling.’ It seems to me that we understand human being as liturgical being when we figure him or her

as *coram deo* rather than in terms of a particular set of experiences. If you wish, you can think of living *coram deo* as an experience of faith, although I find the expression less than helpful. Faith does not generate a new set of experiences; rather, it creates an allegiance to Christ that enables us to have a new experience of experience, as Eberhard Jüngel says, an experience that should turn us to engage with the possibilities of life that are documented in the gospels. It is less the case that faith is a counter-experience than that it is the medium in which experience is revalued, in which its 'peril' is exposed and offered up.

One of the things that theologians find when reading postmodernists is how parts of the Christian tradition are folded in particular ways, often to distance them from Christian formulae, and then offered as new and arresting ideas. This is so, I think, with Georges Bataille when he talks of 'counter-spirituality,' which I take to be a spirituality that is pursued by way of limit experiences, which are themselves understood as the dark truth of what has passed for 'mystical experience.' Maurice Blanchot takes up the idea, in his own way, when he develops the notion of 'counter-living.' Life has two dimensions, he says, one dialectical (and open to meaning) and another neutral (and strictly without meaning). This second, neutral dimension is marked by 'an overbidding, an outrage of life that cannot be contained within life'; it interrupts friendship and love, marking them at their most intense moments with a mark that is strictly outside them as they are conventionally understood. Blanchot will talk of counter-living as a response to the approach of the Outside or the Imaginary and will ponder it now in terms of writing and now by way of the everyday. To live an event as an image: there can be no more concise evocation of postmodern life.

A Christian will recognize a foreshadowing of Blanchot's second dimension in the word 'mysticism,' and will also see, with some apprehension, that mysticism has been construed by way of a Romantic concept of experience. Partly in reaction against that, Christians might also think of contemplative practices, especially the grace of interior prayer. To live the *imago dei* as an event: perhaps that formula suggests one of the ways in which Christians differ from advocates of the postmodern, even though, to be sure, we live in postmodern times. I take Blanchot to speak prophetically about those times, so let me linger with him for a moment or two longer. A reading of *L'Entretien infini* will quickly reveal that he develops his notion of the 'infinite relation' or the 'relation without relation' from a Jewish notion of prayer. A theologian who learns from Blanchot partly retrieves his or her own tradition, albeit folded into a strange shape. Unfolding that tradition (and, inevitably, refolding it as well), we might say that we do not experience God but rather encounter Him by way of an infinite relation established by the grace of faith. We are unable to posit the divine as a value; and we recognize, even without having to look over our shoulder at Pelagius or John Cassian, that it would be very wrong to attribute any value to ourselves with respect to a relation with the divine. Mirrors have the effect of forestalling both Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. We do not experience God, although we do become attuned in the liturgy and in prayer to the call of the Spirit. In the words of Isaiah, 'before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear' (Isaiah 66: 24). Prayer might not be 'upliftment' for Laurence, any more than it was for Thomas or for John of Damascus, whom Thomas cites in q. 83 of the

Summa Theologiæ. The ascent of the mind to God must be thought otherwise, by reference to a theology of Grace.

For Blanchot, the Outside is not God but it functions as the sacred in a very attenuated sense. (He would not call it 'sublime,' if only because he walks in fear of aesthetic categories.) In a remarkable reading of Kafka, Blanchot observes that 'Where the impossible speaks, a relation of strangeness (of transcendence?) is introduced that cannot be designated as such, a relation in which it would be deceptive to see any trait of the sublime (in the romantic manner), but which Kafka nonetheless refuses to perceive in terms of practical reason' ('The Very Last Word,' *Friendship*, 275). Blanchot has in mind two human beings held together only by speech. It is not a matter of a rhetor who produces 'upliftment' but rather of a call from the other person that hollows out the particularity that marks me and that I value. The relationship does not indicate a supersensible destination but a naked exposure to one another that cannot be justified in terms of nature or religion or indeed any value. This might be an exception to the sort of postmodern transcendence that Laurence mostly has in mind, or perhaps much postmodern thought has offered only weak readings of Blanchot's infinite relation.

At any rate, there is no question of experiencing the impossible (or, if you like, the imaginary or the outside); one can only be attuned to its approach, which hollows out the subject so that there can be no 'experience' in any familiar sense of the word. We are constrained, if we are to talk in this way, to do so in terms of 'experience of non-experience.' Oddly enough, it is the very same expression that von Balthasar uses when he tries to specify Christian mystical experience in terms of Christ as archetype. Talking of St John of the Cross, he says that the dark nights are precisely 'an "experience of non-experience" or an experience of the negative, privative mode of experience, as a participation in the total archetypal experience of the Old and New Testaments' (*The Glory of the Lord*, I, 413). In effect, von Balthasar stresses allegiance to Christ, which has the consequence of a kenosis, and he does so in clear opposition to Rahner's emphasis on transcendental experience.

I doubt that Laurence would accept Jean-Luc Marion's notion of 'counter-experience' as developed in *Étant donné* and 'The Banality of Saturation.' At issue here for Marion is a contradicting of the conditions of possibility for experience as such. The subject's intentional gaze is rebuked by the intuitions to which it is exposed, not necessarily because he or she is bedazzled but because of being disappointed by unfulfilled or displaced expectations, and in any case by the sheer resistance of the phenomenon to objectification. Marion's formulation is helpful in that it removes the category of experience from a foundational role in both systematic and pastoral theology. But do we find a new sense of the sublime creeping in at a higher level, a sublime that can be discussed in terms of disappointment rather than pain? To the extent that Marion is doing phenomenology, not theology, the answer would be yes. The banality of saturation would be an instance of what Laurence identifies as the sublime reset in the key of the everyday.

Kenosis remains our first word, then, for understanding what *coram deo* means. But it is not the only word, and we can begin to hear another when we turn to Laurence's consideration of transcendence. Had I the time, I would look closely at Laurence's acute formulation with respect to the interiority required by the

sublime. He talks at the end of the second chapter of an interiority which is 'interior to the outermost, the *eschaton* of the heavens.' Here Eckhart on the soul is set against Descartes on the theater of consciousness. Lacking that time, I simply cite another word from the New Testament that can be of help here. The word is *epektasis*, and I take it from Philippians 3: 13–14 where Paul talks of 'reaching forth unto those things which are before' and of 'press[ing] toward the mark.' The word is important for Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*: 'no good,' he says there, 'has a limit in its own nature' and we are to strive not for the possible, but for the impossible. Rahner's entire theology is perhaps a transcendental accounting of this Pauline figure.

The question is whether we can think the figure other than in a theology organized by the category of experience. In general, difficulties occur not with the word 'experience' but with a philosophical anthropology, relying on natural categories, that shapes our understanding of the concept. Is there a sense of being exposed to peril, a sense of 'experience,' that is not marked by the sublime? There is; it is the encounter with the living God in the liturgy and in prayer, and its vanishing points are *kenosis* and *epektasis*. I think of T.S. Eliot in 'The Dry Salvages' pondering the ordinary believer's sense of things:

For most of us, there is only the unattended
 Moment, the moment in and out of time,
 The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
 The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
 Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
 That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
 While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
 Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
 Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

Perhaps that is so, although I am uneasy about the supernatural being added to the natural in this way. It is instructive to read the lines that precede this well known (and very beautiful) passage:

But to apprehend
 The point of intersection of the timeless
 With time, is an occupation for the saint —
 No occupation either, but something given
 And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
 Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

What I wonder is whether the model of saintly life suggested here goes not give us a better sense of the Christian life, than the other lines I quoted. We are not all saints, and some of us are very far from being saints, but we are all called to be saints. If I might allude to Jean-Louis Chrétien, more is gained by pondering the choric nature of our response to that call than in the framing of it negative terms. Our *epektasis* is neither singular nor straightforward.

Laurence is less than impressed by ‘transcendence’ as conceived within postmodernity. Without disagreeing with him in the final analysis, I would simply recall Jean Wahl’s distinction between trans-ascendance and trans-descendance. Both are significant in postmodernism. The latter can be found everywhere, in the quest for a groundless condition of possibility such as *la différance*, as well as in the structure of what Lévinas and Blanchot, in their analyses of art, call ‘resemblance.’ Levinas finds a ‘split in being’ so that we are given at one and the same time a thing and its image. Art, he says in an important essay of 1948, drops the thing for the image, and although he modifies this thesis in interesting ways over the years he never changes his mind that ethics is prior to aesthetics. In my view, he misjudges the ethical character of great literature and great art and continues a philosophical prejudice in favor of—well, philosophy. It is significant that Levinas’s friend, Blanchot, uses precisely the same argument from trans-descendance to affirm the Imaginary that worries Levinas so much. Do we get ethics only by way of critique of the image and the imaginary? I do not think so, and I do not think that Levinas thinks so either, even though he is not completely open about it. In his review of *L’Espace littéraire* he chastises Blanchot for not being explicit about ethics, and Blanchot’s itinerary is henceforth precisely to show first that one should not discount Heidegger’s brushing aside of ethics as a misunderstanding of *ethos* and second that ‘ethics’ derives not from the other person as such but from the neutrality of the infinite relation.

Equally worrying, it seems to me, is Levinas’s figuring of trans-ascendance in terms of the other person rather than God, which has generated the program of ‘religion without religion,’ developed with vigor by Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo. Several things concern me about this, and I can indicate them briefly by way of the formula ‘X without X.’ It admits of two main interpretations. According to the first, it is a means of indicating transcendence: the former X is affirmed in an eminent sense that is lacking in the latter. I will dub this interpretation *theological*; it originates in St Augustine’s attempt, in his *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, to talk of God. Derivative from the first, the second interpretation also affirms transcendence but solely in the human sphere. God is relegated to the background: only in responding to the other person’s needs do I go towards God. I will call this interpretation *religious* because it takes the human bond as the primary way of acknowledging the deity. Derrida and Caputo, like Levinas, use ‘X without X’ in its religious sense while I wish to retain its theological sense. Derrida and Caputo intensify the religious sense more than Levinas, however, in centering their thought on ‘religion without religion’ rather than ‘relation without relation.’ My reservations here turn on a hidden debt to the enlightenment construction of Christianity as a religion – that is, a species of a presumed genus ‘religion’ – that makes a program of ‘religion without religion’ inevitable. Also, they turn on an attempt to figure the faith primarily as a quest for justice instead of the adoration of the deity. God ‘comes to mind’ in religion without religion, but it is a variant of the God of the philosophers, not the revealed God of the New Testament. In Laurence’s terms, we are sent to Aristotle when we need to return to St Thomas. Postmodern transcendence, as trans-ascendance, begins in the determination of an ethics before ethics and ends as an overweening ethicity that fails to respect the particular cases of religion and art.

'Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten'

Place, Calculation and Politics in Hemming's Postmodernity's Transcending

STUART ELDEN
Durham University

4.1 ART AND SPACE

The epigraph to this book is a quote from Martin Heidegger: 'Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten' (p. v).¹ It comes from one of Heidegger's last essays, 'Art and Space', delivered in 1969, and can be rendered as 'making space is the release of places'.² Alternatively it might be seen as 'rooming is the freeing up of places'. The placing of this quotation is perhaps deliberately enigmatic, with neither a translation or explanation. What might be meant by this? It seems to me to be well-placed, as there are a number of themes in it that relate to Hemming's book.

Like the seminars of the early 1960s on 'Time and Being' (collected in *Zur Sache des Denkens*) Heidegger's work in the essay 'Art and Space' displays some of the characteristics of work originally undertaken in the 1930s, particularly the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, his *Contributions to Philosophy*.³ In a marginal note to his 1947 'Letter on "Humanism"', Heidegger suggests that the work of the *Beiträge* speaks 'another language' to that of metaphysics, but that it remains in the background of published writings such as the Letter and in particular his lecture courses.⁴ In the late work, especially *Zur Sache des Denkens* and in this piece 'Art and Space' such concerns come to the fore.

Heidegger's concern in this essay is explicitly with sculpture, and at least

¹ Page references to Laurence Paul Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*, London: SCM Press, and Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005, are in parentheses in the text.

² Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens, Gesamtausgabe Band 13*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983, p. 206.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1976; *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 65*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe Band 9*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976, n. a.

originally, its relation to space.⁵ There appear to be three spaces involved in an understanding of sculpture:

1. 'Space, within which the sculptured form can be met as a present-at-hand object'
2. 'space, which encloses the volume of the figure'
3. 'space, which persists between volumes'.⁶

While we would obviously want to avoid applying calculative measurement to artistic figures, in terms of some crude coordinate geometry, there is the danger, Heidegger notes, that these three types of space are still merely derivative of physical-technological space.

But can physically-technically ordered space, however it may be determined, be taken as the sole true space? Compared to it, are all the other defined spaces – artistic space, the space of everyday dealings and interaction – only subjectively conditioned primitive forms and transformations of a sole objective cosmic space?⁷

For Heidegger the historical element is also important, in that 'the objectivity of objective world space remains unquestionably the correlate of the subjectivity of a consciousness', and this subjectivity is undoubtedly 'foreign to other times which preceded the modern European age'.⁸ Thus we find Heidegger explicitly relating the question of space to subjectivity, explicitly here through the twofold structure of Descartes' *ego cogitans* and his *res extensa*.

Rather then, for an answer to the question of the propriety [*Eigenes*] of space, its essential nature, Heidegger returns to language—so often the preoccupation of his late essays.

Even when we recognise the diversity of the spatial experiences of previous ages, do we thereby gain an insight into the propriety [*Eigentümliche*] of space? The question, what space as space is, is not even asked, let alone answered. It remains undecided in what way space *is*, and whether being in general can be attributed to it.⁹

Heidegger contends that in the German word for 'space' [*Raum*], the word 'making space' [*Räumen*] is spoken. This means: clearing out [*roden*], to make free from wilderness. Making space brings forth the free, the openness for the settling and dwelling of humans'.¹⁰

This is closely related to a range of Heidegger's earlier essays, dating from his engagement with Hölderlin in the 1930s and most explicitly in essays 'Building Dwelling Thinking' and 'Poetically Man Dwells' in the 1950s.¹¹

⁵ This account builds on and develops the one I offered in *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, London/New York: Continuum, 2001, pp. 89–91.

⁶ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

⁷ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

⁸ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

⁹ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 205.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

¹¹ Both these essays are collected in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze, Gesamtausgabe Band 7*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000.

Space is in essence that for which room [*das Eingeräumte*] has been made, that which is released into its bounds. That for which room is made is always granted, and hence is joined, that is, gathered, by virtue of a place. . . Accordingly, spaces receive their essential being from places and not from 'space'.¹²

It is from here that Heidegger suggests that 'making space is, thought in its propriety, the release [*Freigabe*] of places [*Orten*]'.¹³

There is however more to this phrase which is not quoted by Hemming, but which seems to me to be revealing in terms of the themes his book does treat:

Making space is, thought in its propriety [*Eigenes*], the release [*Freigabe*] of places [*Orten*] to which the destiny of humans who dwell turn, in the fortune of their home, or in the misfortune of their homelessness, or in the indifference to the two. Making space is the release of places where a god appears, the places from where the gods have disappeared or flown, the places where the appearance of the godly tarries long. Making space brings forth in each case, the placing [*Ortschaft*] prepared for dwelling. Profane spaces are only the privation of often very remote sacred spaces.

Making space is the release of places.¹⁴

In this we have the introduction of the notion of dwelling in relation to place, as these places are important to humans in terms of a home, in terms of the gods, in terms of dwelling. Heidegger stresses that 'place always opens a region, in which it gathers things in their belonging together',¹⁵ and that we must 'learn to recognise that things themselves are places, and not only occupy a place'.¹⁶ This notion of place is explicitly opposed to technological, Cartesian *space*: 'Place is not found within a pre-given space, such as that of physico-technological space. The latter unfolds only through the reigning of places of a region'.¹⁷ What this enables is the potential for rethinking the notion of space otherwise than extension such as is found in Descartes. Cartesian determinations of space – *spatium* – are as *res extensa*, the extended thing, a material body in the world defined by its extension, of which geometry is the science that allows us best access.

So, while in much of Heidegger's work there is an opposition between space and place, this is in order to distance place from space understood as extension—that is understood mathematically, geometrically, through calculation. But here, as in a few other late pieces, notably 'Building Dwelling Thinking',¹⁸ Heidegger collapses the terms back together, by hinting at their originary bond. This was clearly the intent of the understanding of time-space in the *Beiträge*. Time-space is not simply the coupling of time and space, but the very notion that allows each to be thought distinctly. *Zeit-Raum* is not the same as *Zeitraum*, that is a span of time, a notion that betrays a measured, mathematical sense. What this means is that neither time nor space in this idea are understandable in terms of their ordinary

¹² Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 156.

¹³ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 206.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, pp. 206–207.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 207.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, p. 156.

representations, but rather time-space is 'originally the site for the moment of appropriation [*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*]'.¹⁹

Returning to the subject of the lecture, Heidegger suggests that the initial direction of the piece was misguided, as 'the interplay of art and space must be thought out of the experience of place and region'. Where art is sculpture, there is 'no occupying of space. Sculpture would have no confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*—no setting apart from another] with space', instead 'sculpture would be the embodiment of places'.²⁰ In thinking of sculpture we should abandon the idea of volume, 'the signification of which is only as old as modern technological natural science', which would make sculpture 'an embodying bringing-into-the-work of places. . . the embodiment of the truth of being in its work of instituting places'.²¹

4.2 DEVALUING GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF CALCULATION

These themes run through Hemming's book. Many of them emerge in the context of the discussion of Sam Taylor-Wood's *Brontosaurus*, a hugely effective strategic move that helps to lock the themes of the book not simply into the question of God but also into a visual image that provokes and haunts the reader. 'To speak of embodiment is not to be embodied, but rather to direct the appearance of embodiment to *somewhere*, a place, the place of language perhaps or the imaginary, as if simply to *recall* the language of embodiment and to parrot and enact it constantly overcomes the disjunction between language and the thing of which language writes and speaks' (p. 3). So we have place, both as a *somewhere*, but also an imagined place, or a place of language. We also have an explicit concern with the very materiality of embodiment.

If we now turn to the twofold structure of Hemming's book we can see how such issues run throughout.

1. 'what is the structural place of the object now that it is understood as a hyper-real, and what does "place" mean when the imaginary and the representative is the founding basis for the real?'
2. 'how is the structural place able to give, not only the subject – sublime or ordinary – but the one disclosing the object, the one for whom the thing appears?' (p. 30)

A guiding issue is the notion of the sublime because of its relation to place, and the 'one for whom objects take up and have a place – the self, the subject, the being of being-human'. But a third question arises (essentially that one which is hidden in the quotation of Heidegger):

- 3 'who is the God or gods at issue in relation to the sublime?' (p. 30)

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, p. 30; see p. 235. For a fuller account, see Stuart Elden, 'Contributions to Geography? The Spaces of Heidegger's *Beiträge*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 23 No 6, 2005.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 208.

²¹ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 209.

Now clearly this is much too huge a set of questions for a single response. It risks – as Hemming already knows – being too huge for the book itself. But the key issue is that this question of place is not arbitrary, but intimately related to the broad approach being taken. This is so, even if here I will largely bracket the sublime, the subject and the question of gods, leaving these issues for others.

One of the running themes of Hemming's book is in the notion of devaluing – not as it might be appear as a sense of not valuing God, or of reducing God's value, his worth – but the question of un-valuing, removing a notion of value *from* God. For Heidegger the assault against 'value' philosophy can be found throughout his work—from early concerns with neo-Kantianism; through to his lectures on Nietzsche, where he suggests that a revaluation of all values still falls into these same problems. The philosophy of values, and even the revaluation of all values that Nietzsche proposes, is a reversal within metaphysics, an inverse Platonism.

For Hemming we find this stressed in a few places, not merely in Nietzsche, but also in Marx.

The metaphysics of Marx as much as of modern economic life arise on the basis of this indeterminacy, and in making it determinate, which means, in assigning it a value or giving it the task of the self-assignment of value the indeterminacy of the subject is evaluated and brought into fundamentally calculable relations (p. 4).

It is equally there in his reading of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: 'to change the world you must first have decided, in a valuative act, what the world is to be transformed *into*' (p. 4).

Geographers – of a particular kind – will find Hemming's inquiry works in related ways to questions of current concern, such as the claim that 'distance, temporal or geographical, is constantly worn-out by our immediacy to ourselves' (p. 9), and the discussion of museums like the Museum of Britain on Roman London which seek to make the past appear familiar through kitchens and bedrooms, what Hemming calls 'the effacement of the genuine past for the sake of what in them we most might find familiar' (p. 9). A whole range of issues and questions arise here, including those of distance, proximity – temporal and geographical – and the relation to value and values.

One of the most important discussions of this in terms of the question of place is found on p. 16 of the book. Hemming rehearses Heidegger's claim that the Greeks, in this instance Aristotle, did not have a word for 'space' but rather a notion of *topos*, which is closer to 'place'. He notes that 'only since Galileo and Newton has it been the case that every point in space is potentially the same, bears the same possibilities, and remains undifferentiated absolutely with respect to its position'. While for Newton every point in space is like any other, for Aristotle the points, the *stigmae* are determined through their *thesis*, their position, their proper place and, as Hemming notes, 'no two points in space ever have or bear the same properties – they are differentiated both absolutely with respect to themselves, and relatively with respect to one another' (p. 16). This remarkably clear exposition of the point is important in numerous respects, including the complex set of transitions that makes human *space* possible, which increasingly

obscures the sense of place.²²

As Heidegger asks, does the sense of space that can emerge through thinking it through place not fundamentally challenge the ‘space which received its first determination from Galileo and Newton?’²³ Galileo and Newton here is a shorthand for the Galileo-Descartes-Leibniz-Newton nexus, and usually for Heidegger this is reduced simply to Descartes, while for Husserl it is Galileo.²⁴ This is the space that emerges from the scientific revolution. As Heidegger puts it in ‘Art and Space’:

Space – this uniform extension, which is not distinguished at any point [*Stelle*], which is equivalent in all directions, but which is not perceptible through the senses?²⁵

For Hemming this sense of every point the same, particularly as it gets played out in post-Newtonian physics, implies the radical equality of space, its *democratic* nature.

If I am somewhat cautious of the final claim here, Hemming is correct to highlight the importance of the break in understandings of place and the emergence of a notion of space. In Aristotle we find a very different way of thinking of place. We can find this, for example in the way for Aristotle points can be found on a line, but a line is not merely a succession of points. This is radically different way of thinking a line than Descartes, and indeed from Aristotle’s own thinking of time. In the *Physics* (217b29–224a17) time is conceived as a sequence of ‘nows’, summarised by Hemming as ‘the “now” that each present moment “is” separates the stream of time, splitting the past and future by means of the present. The present, therefore, takes up an object like character’ (p. 34). What this means is that

Aristotle’s understanding of time is above all defined mathematically, as the countable – as in its very countability preserves in every moment both the same, the ever-same, and the different – the fundamentally differentiated with respect to every “now” which is worked out with respect to motion. Aristotle summarises this understanding of time by saying “time, then, is not motion, but motion with respect to *number*” [219b3] (p. 223, emphasis added).²⁶

Aristotle however thought place in quite a different way, notably in his suggestion that place is *not* determined by number, and that geometry and arithmetic are distinct, because their mode of connection is different.²⁷ This is not the case with time. A key question is thus how the Aristotelian *stigma* became the Cartesian point, effectively a *monas* in an arithmetic series.

²² On this generally see Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Berkeley: University Presses of California, 1997.

²³ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 204.

²⁴ See, especially, Edmund Husserl, particularly *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie*, in *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Walter Biemel, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950, Vol VI.

²⁵ Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p. 204.

²⁶ On this point, see also Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger’s Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2002, pp. 97–101.

²⁷ For a fuller reading, see Stuart Elden, *Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, Chapter Three.

This question raises a number of issues around the notion of sameness, otherness, and their relation (pp. 70–1), which run through the book. In a sense difference is that which makes possible both forms of comparison, that is differentiation, i.e. separation or division; *and* association, that is connection (p. 73).²⁸ It is important to relate this to the distinction between *khora* and *topos* (p. 79). *Khora* is 'place', but 'this place however, is not the particular place of *topos*, wherein what becomes appears, and from which it passes away, but place as such, place as it relates to the elements themselves as what withdraws and so opens a particular place wherein what appears can do so and then pass away'. For Hemming it is this sense of place that will be taken forward in Aristotle's notion of *topos* (p. 80). Plato claims that in relation to *topos* 'place as such, and anything that is in place, must always be separated and divided. Thus *khora*, as what makes every changeable thing available to appear as changeable, becomes in Aristotle the basis on which the structure of the cosmos and the self-motion of the elements is worked out' (p. 80). These are some of the most cryptic pages of the book, opening up fundamental issues without – for this reader at least – thorough explication. They are in a sense an attempt to make one fundamental point, undertaken through a discussion of Plato's *Sophist* on being and number:

This exchange therefore says that all being, everything which has *thesis*, a 'respect to where', and so has a particular place, is at the same time number. Nothing particular unusual is being said in Greek – what is placable is at the same time countable: the converse is also true: to put in place or posit is at the same time to assign a value, or count. . . This means all genuine being arises out of number, and all number is with respect to beings. It also means that the *hen*, the one, must find a place. In one way (as we shall see) for the Greeks every being is a particular being: every *on* is *hen*' (p. 82).

While I understand the reasoning here, this is such a rich vein to explore it is a shame that Hemming only touches on some of the key issues. They return in the discussion of *thesis* – relative position – in relation to geometrical figures. These always retain their respect to *where*, what of place remains with them. This helps to clarify the relation between the relative or absolute 'where', or position: *thesis* and *topos* (pp. 150, 155).

Hemming declares (p. 84) that Aristotle is significant not least because he is the one against which Descartes argues. This is revealing, because although Descartes is in much greater part a product of debates within scholasticism than is perhaps generally acknowledged – see the important work of Secada and Lang, cited by Hemming²⁹ – the contrast he sets up with Aristotle seems very stark indeed. As Hemming notes, the importance of Aristotle as target of Descartes is ontologically fundamental: 'here is the most important question in the historicity of the encounter with beings itself. Because the being of beings is now understood

²⁸ See Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, New York: Dover, 1992 [1934], p. 95.

²⁹ Jorge Secada, *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and Helen S. Lang, *Aristotle's Physics and its Medieval Varieties*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992; and *The Order of Nature in Aristotle's Physics: Place and the Elements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

differently, and in fact because it now stands on a fully ontotheological footing. . . .’ (pp. 159–60).

Hemming notes that

We have seen how a particular understanding of the mathematical – specifically the geometrical – comes to the fore especially in the period up to and including Newton and Descartes as the means by which what can be known about anything can *already* be known in advance of it – indeed this is the essence of the mathematical (p. 170).

In this radical rethinking of geometry, the foundational science which for Descartes is a mode of access to the material world of *res extensa*, the being of beings is understood differently, as being calculable. Things are rendered in such a way that they are already knowable, that is amenable to scientific inquiry: the essence of the mathematical.

These concerns with calculation specifically and measure generally run through Hemming’s book, as they do through Heidegger’s work as a whole, and are perhaps especially evident in the very interesting discussion of man as the measure of all things in Protagoras. There is not the space here to engage with this important reading, although I cannot resist endorsing Hemming’s claim that *metron* in Protagoras is not so much a measure as ‘a measured by’, in other words ‘a *metron* is that which gives the measure *to* whatever it measures’ (p. 128). On these grounds, as Heidegger realised, Protagoras is miles away from Descartes, in that the measure of all things is the human.³⁰

4.3 CALCULATION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

These discussions are a rich vein throughout this complex work. My sympathy with and admiration for Hemming’s work is therefore considerable. I do however have one fundamental problem with the issue of calculation, in relation to place and more generally, in this work. This is a political issue.

Hemming’s important discussion of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and Heidegger’s reading of it seems to me to radically underplay the political nature of both texts. The political is important in other respects too, in that it is evident that Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics* are informed by *Physics* (as well as other works). It is worth underscoring that Heidegger’s notion of being-together is the mode of connection not just of material world, but also of humans in community, found in his difficult comments on *Mitsein*, or being-with-others—*Miteinandersein*.³¹ Indeed, in distinction to some commentators, such as Jean-Luc Nancy,³² my position on this is not that Heidegger treats the subject inadequately, but that what he does say is deeply problematic.

In the 1924 course on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Heidegger notably discusses not merely being-in-the-world, but being-in-the-*polis*. The *polis* is determined through language, a speaking-together that is also a hearing, listening and obeying. The

³⁰ This is discussed at length in Elden, *Speaking Against Number*, Chapter Three.

³¹ See Elden, *Speaking Against Number*, Chapter One.

³² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée, 1996.

human is the *zoon politikon*, but also the *zoon echon logon*, the being that has and is held by language, *logos*, and indeed the second determination is the key to understanding the first. The idea that a community is determined through its relation to language leads to Heidegger's particular determination of the essence of the people, the *Volk*: language. Heidegger's *Volk* is not a biological, racial category, but a linguistically determined characteristic. In a related way, Heidegger uses his analysis of calculation as a means of access into his concerns with machination and technology, which is where he offers his most explicit criticism of contemporary politics.

But politics – in either Aristotle's or a modern sense – seems curiously muted in Hemming's text, which is all the more remarkable given the potential implications of mathematics for a view of the political world. There are some comments in places (i.e. pp. 166–7) but these seem inadequate given how politically charged Heidegger's reading of Aristotle is. Even on the understanding of *polis* offered here, as 'the public sphere, in the being of a whole people' (p. 167) *polis* does not simply equal world, so what is meant by Heidegger? Hemming's entirely legitimate suggestion that this people is not determined racially but through its 'fate and destiny' and its relation to the *logos*, that is language, is too hasty in terms of the ideologically loaded senses these terms had in 1924 Germany. Indeed, throughout his career the question of *Mitsein* and calculation were two of the most important political issues for Heidegger.

As Hemming notes in conclusion,

Devaluing God has turned out to be a concern with the mathematical – what we bring already to whatever we know of beings, may encounter them all over again. . . . Transcending postmodernity would be freeing God, and every being, from counting, that we might yet be in time to encounter them (or them us) (p. 237).

It is the question of escaping counting, calculation – and therefore maybe a retrieval of the mathematical as *ta mathematica*—that is the real concern for me. But this is always a political issue. There is lots in this book, but it opens up more than it is able to close down.

A Singular Question: *Mitsein*, συνουσία, and ὕψος *The Unsaid in Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*

LAURENCE PAUL HEMMING
Heythrop College, University of London

In festo Beatæ Mariæ Virginis a Rosario, 2004

In beginning, I owe a great many debts of thanks. First and foremost to Lieven Boeve, whose invitation and encouragement first brought me to Leuven to undertake the research that eventually became *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God*, and to the Faculty of Theology, for the welcome they gave me over nearly two years between April 2002 and December 2003. Once again, and with great intellectual and spiritual generosity I was welcomed into this scholarly community for the sake of the conference of which this was the opening paper.¹

The whole of *Postmodernity's Transcending* seeks to enquire into a question first asked by Heidegger himself: "how does it come about, what in space and time *allow* for mathematicising?"² If, therefore, the book concerns itself with

¹ The conference itself considered the final draft of the book before it was revised for publication. At that time it had the title *Devaluing God: Postmodernity's Transcending*. Although I had received (favourable) reports from the two readers, Professor Kevin Hart of Notre Dame University and Dr. Stuart Elden of Durham University, their comments and suggestions had not been incorporated into the text. The suggestion for reversing the title came from Stuart Elden. Many other debts of thanks are owed, both for the time of the conference and subsequently. To Dr. Yves de Maeseneer of Leuven, for organising the conference itself and for his subsequent editing of the papers; and to those others who offered critical responses: Kevin Hart, Stuart Elden, Professor Martin Stone of the Institute of Philosophy at Leuven; Professor Peter Jonkers of the Catholic University of Utrecht, and to drs. Joeri Schrijvers at Leuven, who prepared the summary of the text and was a lively correspondent at various points. One other deserves special mention for her help, encouragement, and suggestions, my colleague in the Society of St. Catherine of Siena (who sponsor the series in which the final published text was published), Dr. Susan Parsons. The pagination of this paper and the responses to it is now based on the text of the book in its published form.

² Cf. *Postmodernity's Transcending*, p. 235. Citing Heidegger, M., *Beiträge zur Philosophie in Gesamtausgabe* vol. 65, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1989, p. 387. 'Wie kommt es zu dem, was in Raum und Zeit die Mathematisierung zuläßt?'

questions of order, sequence, succession, hierarchy, unity and unindividuated identity, it does this not in order to gain proficiency in the technical-calculative skills of Western metaphysics (where reason and reckoning are exposed in their original sense of *rationes*, of kinds of countings-up), but to see on what basis the mathematical and the spatial stands.³ The book therefore takes as its guiding thread Heidegger's suggestion that *Sein und Zeit* itself contains an attempt to bring this question to light and provides an 'attempt to grasp time and space "in their pre-mathematical form"'.⁴ The sublime, with which *Postmodernity's Transcending* is intimately concerned, therefore is understood *either* as a form of calculation *or* as a phenomenal indication of something more originary and basic.

In the course of the work being accepted by the publishers,⁵ the two readers (both participants in this discussion) raised what appeared to be separate questions about the work, but which in fact were (for me at least) the same question. The question that they raise is at one and the same time the ground out of which the work was written, and the basis for the direction in which I would like to take future research. It seems appropriate, therefore, to address that question at once as a way of introducing the work, as also one which seems commonly to arise in the work's being received.

This, I would hope, raises from the very outset the question of what kind of enquiry *Postmodernity's Transcending* is, though by reference to a problem that the book itself does not fully resolve. *If* we are to accept Heidegger's contention that with Aristotle and Plato come the inception of Western metaphysics, immediately something very peculiar arises in our attempt to delineate this history. To delineate means literally, here, to assemble it into the straight line that we have taught ourselves histories always are. We read Plato through the lens of Aristotle. This is a point the book itself makes, that Aristotle sets up a relentless critique of Plato, exemplified by his critique of the understanding of the 'forms' and of eidetic mathematics, especially in the last books of his *Metaphysics*. Direct access to Plato would, at least to some extent, appear to have been mediated by Aristotle's reading of him, both shortly after Plato and even more so, nowadays. The way to Plato is historically – for good or ill – through Aristotle, a point Heidegger stressed in the opening to his lectures on Plato's *Sophist*.⁶

However, and at the same time and because of the quirks of history (and especially the saturation of Christian Mediaeval thought with a kind of Christian Neo-Platonism) we read Aristotle through entirely *neoplatonic* eyes. This means

³ We think of the spatial as the void, the 'open'. *Spatium*, from which 'space' is derived, both as a word and in its essence, is, however, a span or allotted breadth, i.e. a *reach*. Contained in the sense of the open void is the metaphysical *reach* that lays it open, and which therefore regulates and orders its openness—this entirely metaphysical determination lies at the basis both of Descartes' *res extensa* and the 'space' derived from Newton's physics.

⁴ Cf. *Postmodernity's Transcending*, p. 235. Citing Heidegger, M., *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, GA65, 1989, p. 387, referring to *Sein und Zeit*. Heidegger speaks of the attempt to understand time and space in 'ihrer vor-mathematischen Gestalt'. Cf. his own citations of Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit*, GA2, 1977 (1927), §24, *Die Räumlichkeit des Daseins und der Raum* (pp. 147–151) and the fifth chapter, §§72–77, *Die Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit* (pp. 492–533).

⁵ SCM Press, London and Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame.

⁶ Heidegger, M., *Platon: Sophistes in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 19, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1992, §§1–2.

that the Plato whom we learned at Aristotle's hand is at one and the same time presented as the interpretative key *and* the supposed forerunner, preparatory to our reading of Aristotle. If Aristotle obscures the way to Plato, an aristotelianised Plato is the lens through whom we encounter Aristotle: not only one, but *both* thinkers disappear into the same obscurity and oblivion, a darkness effected by the history of the practice of interpretation itself.

If therefore, on the one hand we are no longer able to understand Plato's insight into number as the before and after to being (because for Aristotle number can only be added to, and so *consequent* on, being, even if it has an ontological origination), at the same time, we are entirely confused about Aristotle's understanding of causation and place because we are always looking in Aristotle for a ('Platonic', numerical) 'before' to take precedence that is never there—never able to fulfil this role. The 'before', the 'already', and the 'after', are always *subsequent* discoveries, even when we discover in them what we thought ourselves already to know. And yet we persist in reversing the order of Aristotle's investigations to accord the before and the already the position assigned to it by later thinkers, themselves often claiming to be faithful to Plato. How to proceed?

Do we undermine Aristotle and Plato by bypassing them, say to the Presocratics? Or do we attempt a historiographical archaeology, of the kind the nineteenth and twentieth century inflicted on the texts of Sacred Scripture, in order to recover an historical Plato and an historical Aristotle whom we can *really* trust? (And thus, having rendered them as far remote from truth as possible and therefore *really* unintelligible, they have been declared to be precisely impossible to read: and now you know why both Catholicism and Protestantism is nowadays so often reduced to nothing more than a kind of petit-bourgeois or suburban ethics—having abandoned the one corrective to our basest instincts that we possessed, what other truth could we Christians possibly know except one that springs from our selves and our most immediate neighbours?) How would we know that we had succeeded in this hermeneutical task? By what measure could we claim to have succeeded?

The two questions raised by Kevin Hart and Stuart Elden are these: in the first instance, why could more not be said concerning Heidegger's understanding of *Mitsein*; and second, why was I able to make the 'mistake' of referring to Jacques Derrida as a negative theologian, and so why in the discussion of the sublime did I avoid almost any discussion of the French postmodern debate on sublimity, above all as exemplified in Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (to whose names might be added those of Lyotard and Courtine)?

Before I can show, however, that these two are essentially the *same* question, I need to introduce a clarification: indeed it is the very point that the book sets out to clarify. Repeatedly I asked in the book, what *kind* of theology is at issue when we seek to speak 'theologically': is it the theology of Aristotle, of Aquinas, of Kant, or whose? What does the term 'theology' actually mean? Aristotle is deliberately intruded into this list, since it is possible (because both Aristotle and Plato employ the term $\vartheta\epsilon\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\alpha$) to discuss theology *outside* the context of Christian belief. Kevin Hart has argued that theology is always a matter arising out of faith. In this he is in good company with Martin Heidegger, who as early as 1924 asserted that '*der*

Philosoph glaubt nicht' (in the context of arguing that, by contrast, the theologian did and must);⁷ however, Hart and Heidegger do not make this remark for the same reason. Heidegger rules out the construal of the question of being insofar as it is being as first philosophy (πρώτη φιλοσοφία), which is at the same time theology (θεολογία),⁸ preferring the entirely Lutheran formula 'Erstens handelt die Theologie vom menschlichen Dasein als Sein vor Gott'.⁹ Philosophy, as I have argued elsewhere, is *methodologically* an atheism for Heidegger.¹⁰

Postmodernity's Transcending actually goes to some lengths to show that the presence of the term θεολογία in the Greek literature (especially Aristotle and Plato) indicates that historically there has been a theology without reference to Christian (or any) faith—indeed Aquinas distinguishes between these two types of theology in the very first question of the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*,¹¹ and because of this confusion much contemporary (philosophical) theology is unclear whether it means by the term either the theology that pertains to faith or that which pertains to philosophy. In this sense almost all contemporary theology *and contemporary philosophy* has not yet reached the decision that Heidegger enforces from the very outset of his work, of the separation of faith and philosophy (and by that means—and this is the actual point of the enforced separation, showing how they actually relate, one to the other), nor understood what is at issue in that enforcement. *Postmodernity's Transcending* is an attempt to demonstrate the degree to which contemporary philosophy and contemporary theology, for all their denunciations of metaphysics, for all their claims to have overcome ontotheology, or even simply to have ignored it, remain yet *firmly and resolutely* ontotheological. A central concern of *Postmodernity's Transcending* is to illustrate the extent to which contemporary theology is bound to philosophy *in the wrong way*. In this it is not theology at all, or if it is, it is a genuinely *negative* theology in the sense that it seeks to *undo* theology's embrace of metaphysics for the sake of the *possibility* of a future theology that is not metaphysical.

Which brings us to the question posed to me by Kevin Hart. I want to reply to Hart, can Derrida not be called a negative theologian, even though I would never call Derrida a *Christian* negative theologian (which would indeed be thoroughly inappropriate)? Derrida says, not that he *is not* a negative theologian, but *that one may not say he (Derrida) is a negative theologian*. This is precisely the point of Derrida's essay *Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations*,¹² which I discuss extensively in Chapter Four of the book. Derrida says that one may not say 'Derrida is a negative

⁷ Heidegger, M, *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)* in *Der Begriff der Zeit, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 24, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 2004 (1989), p. 107. 'The philosopher does not believe' (author's italics).

⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: 1026 a 20 f.; 1064 a 41.

⁹ Heidegger, M, *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)*, p. 107. 'Theology *only* concerns itself with human existing as being before God' (author's italics).

¹⁰ Cf. Hemming, L. P., *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 2002.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I Q. 1, A. 1: Obj. 2; ad 2. 'Unde theologia quae ad sacram doctrinam pertinet, differt secundum genus ab illa theologia quae pars philosophiae ponitur.' ('Therefore the theology which pertains to holy teaching differs according to genus from that theology which is part of philosophy.')

¹² Derrida, J., *Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations*, a paper first given in English in Jerusalem in June 1986 under the title *How to Avoid Speaking*. Subsequently published in French in *Psyché: inventions de l'autre*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1987, pp. 535–595; p. 585. Translated into English from the French

theologian' even though one might *see* that he is concerned with the place and absence of God (this is the 'dénégation' at issue). And this is the clarification with which the whole book is concerned. The question here is about the priority of sight over speaking: that one can 'see' or 'know' certain things which one cannot then bring to speech. *Postmodernity's Transcending*, however, argues that even seeing (that is productive looking, what Heidegger once called *ersehen*, not mere onlooking)¹³ is in consequence of speaking; that *λόγος*, speech, is prior even to sight, since it is not *that* one sees, but *how* one sees: seeing, sensing, is always a 'how'.

This means asking how *this one* sees and so is always a question concerning *who sees*. This question brings to the fore how the one who sees 'sees', that is to say, in discovering that it is I myself who see, and that my seeing is different from yours, indicates that seeing has a place, a *locatedness* which *at the same time discloses me to myself as myself and not you or anyone else*. This locatedness is such that *what* the one seeing *sees* comes forth into the light with respect to its emerging from concealment *in* its visibility.

This bringing to the fore of one's own seeing is always the bringing to the fore that it is *mine*—what Heidegger calls in *Sein und Zeit* 'Jemeinigkeit'. In this bringing of the self to the fore *in* knowing what the self knows is the self-indication of the temporalising of the being of being human. But this temporalising *in* its coming to the fore is at the same time its being-named and being-said. Speaking is the naming and saying, the being-named and being-said of the temporalising of being human. *This* is what really unfolds time in its 'timing': 'speaking' taken in the widest possible sense, and so really 'thinking', assembles and brings forth the *seen* and so *thought* with respect to the unseen and unthought: this saying as a *located* saying is disclosed by its 'from whence'. Speaking is what lets seeing see (and hearing hear; and the other senses sense—speaking is the very *possibility* of ensoulment); at the same time I do not 'speak' the worlding of world, but in world's unfolding, I find myself speaking, and the inherent intelligibility of world, its possibility for lying-open is at the same time its possibility for being-spoken *of*.

We may indeed deny Derrida the right to silence us from calling him a negative theologian, precisely because Derrida's negative theology is his subjectival response to Heidegger's methodological atheism. Derrida, perhaps precisely as an unbeliever, does not understand what it means for philosophy *not* to believe, for philosophy to be and remain atheistic. He really cannot speak of philosophy attaining to its originary atheism, because he cannot avoid speaking of God, even negatively.

To attempt to attain to its ground without God (this is what is meant here) is what philosophy must recover, and for me as a believing, Catholic, Christian, here is why: philosophy must attain to its originary unbelieving ground in order that

by Frieden, K, as *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials* in Coward, H. and Foshay, T., *Derrida and Negative Theology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992.

¹³ Cf. Heidegger, M., *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte »Probleme« der »Logik«* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1992 (1984), pp. 83–87 'Wir nennen daher dieses Sehen, das sich das zu Sichtende selbst erst in die Sichtbarkeit erbringt und ersieht, das *Er-sehen*' (author's italics). ('Therefore we call this seeing, which first brings forth into visibility that which is to be seen, and produces it before itself, "productive seeing".')

God might undisclose, and so reveal, himself. There is no causal inference here, no suggestion that in my *having* attained to philosophy's originary ground, God *will then* reveal himself. Rather, it is that in my once having attained to philosophy's originary ground, *were* God to reveal himself, the *possibility lies open* that I be properly be disposed to know and believe in whom God is, and be saved. This revelation can never be prepared for, never anticipated. It is mine and addressed to me in every case. 'Der Philosoph glaubt nicht' does not mean that the philosopher cannot be saved, it means that the philosopher *to be a philosopher – to think* – does not learn to think and think what he knows from out of divine revelation: Christian or any other. And this is why I chose upliftment as the ground of the methodological enquiry of *Postmodernity's Transcending*: not because ὑψος, upliftment, is a rational or even noetic path to God, but because as a methodological theme it exposes the way in which in its history Christian theology has (and yet still is) constantly and inadequately tipped and tips over into philosophy and thereby in tipping-over, deprives philosophy of its ground: substituting the God of revelation for the ground proper to being itself. Philosophy cannot, and never will, recover its originary ground in a revealed divinity.

Is it the tipping-over that is to be brought to light, or is it not rather that the one for whom the tipping cannot ever be overcome is that one who needs to be brought to light and so out into the open? Is it that theology, as Christian faith, can do no other than this in its confrontation with philosophy, because this is its fate, and so as long as *I* am aware that this is its fate I am freed from its consequences while left free to understand its task and work? This interplay of the appearing of myself and the bringing to the fore of myself *for* myself (this thinking which is at the same time the moment at which my temporalising is as a speaking), is at the same time the way in which I can be shown to be historical. This disclosure of my being-historical is my bringing of myself out into the open with respect to what precedes me, even when what precedes my lies ahead of me as a task. This *I* that I name here is not the 'I' of Laurence Paul Hemming (a use that has made readers of my work say that I am 'too personal' in my writing), but nor is it the *I-in-general*, the *cogito* or 'Subject' of Kantian philosophy. It is that self-understanding that emerges from out of an understanding of the being of being human—the *I* of being-historical, of self-disclosive historical being. It is the *I*, the *eigen*, of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Ereignis*.

In *Postmodernity's Transcending* I attempt to show how, from the outset, what the sublime, ὑψος (or what in the book and hereafter I will principally refer to as upliftment), *names* and so speaks, as it becomes entangled with divinity, derived as it is out of an essentially neoplatonic reading of Aristotle's understanding of θεωρεῖν, contemplation. What *Postmodernity's Transcending* argues is that upliftment is another name for transcendence, ἐκστάσις. It is, however, not just any name, but the name for ἐκστάσις which attempts to make available the meaning of ἐκστάσις *in* its very standing-out: transcendence *as* transcending *in* its transcending. In this, strictly speaking it is *not* a name for transcendence as the transcendent, the already-transcendent, but *the* ontological name for transcending. In this respect it is one of the few places where contemporary language actually has a name for what Heidegger calls, technically, *das Anwesende*, presencing, as opposed to *die Anwesenheit*, presence. Understood like this, every attempt to construe sublimity

as presence (the 'standard' way of rendering upliftment in the literature, even if this rendering is advertised immediately as 'problematic', and so poses a 'problem' of representation, which then has to be 'solved') immediately is exposed as having covered over its genuine meaning: upliftment belongs and has a place in the *Seinsvergessenheit*, the forgettingness of being. The book does not, however, make this entirely explicit: to do so would result in its too quickly being written off as mere Heideggerising.

What I attempt to expose are some of the transformations that this transcendence *as* transcending is forced through for it to continue to name what it names. And here a most remarkable connection can be seen, almost by accident, almost as if we had fallen over it. Upliftment as the transcending of transcendence is the bringing-before myself of the description of transcending: it has from the outset an ontological character.¹⁴ And here is its temptation: if upliftment is an explicitly ontological description of existence, and one in which divinity or God or the gods also appears, have we not uncovered an ontological grounding for divinity, God, and the gods? This is the question which *Postmodernity's Transcending* itself attempts to address, and I do so by tracing the meaning of sublimity *against* the proclamation of the death of God in postmodernity in order to seek an answer.

Upliftment is the bringing before myself of whatever occurs in its sharpest form, the form that entrains me *to* whatever is occurring (upliftment is the opposite to, the abolition and disbandment of, boredom; of not particularly noticing what occurs and passes me by). As this, it is both attempting to secure what occurs, and the knowledge of its occurrence. (It is, for instance, the shock and the naming of the shock of the passer-by to the figure of the video-installation *Brontosaurus*.) Upliftment is the most originary description of the things that happen, of what-occurs (and both the objective and the subjective genitive should be heard here). Upliftment brings together in one place both time and speaking.

Heidegger notes in this connection that 'Die Zeit ist das, worin sich Ereignisse abspielen',¹⁵ a maxim he connects explicitly with Aristotle: 'Auch die Zeit ist nichts. . . . Es gibt keine absolute Zeit, auch keine absolute Gleichzeitigkeit'.¹⁶ Inasmuch as what occurs is a change, and change exhibits the phenomenon of time, at the same time, the naming and describing of change *also* arises on the basis

¹⁴ In fact, as the astute reader will already have noted, we remain entirely within the problematic of *Sein und Zeit*, of the distinction between *Existenzialität* and *das existentielle*. Cf. Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1977 (1927), p. 17 [12 f.]. 'Das Dasein versteht sich selbst immer aus seiner Existenz, einer Möglichkeit seiner selbst, es selbst oder nicht es selbst zu sein. Diese Möglichkeiten hat das Dasein entweder selbst gewählt, oder es ist in sie hineingeraten oder je schon darin aufgewachsen. Die Existenz wird in der Weise des Ergreifens oder Versäumens nur vom jeweiligen Dasein selbst entschieden. Die Frage der Existenz ist immer nur durch das Existieren selbst ins Reine zu bringen. Das *hierbei* führende Verständnis seiner selbst nennen wir das *existenzielle*. Die Frage der Existenz ist eine ontische "Angelegenheit" des Daseins. Es bedarf hierzu nicht der theoretischen Durchsichtigkeit der ontologischen Struktur der Existenz. Die Frage nach dieser zielt auf die Auseinanderlegung dessen, was Existenz konstituiert. Den Zusammenhang dieser Strukturen nennen wir die *Existenzialität*. Deren Analytik hat den Charakter nicht eines existenziellen, sondern *existenzialen* Verstehens. Die Aufgabe einer existenzialen Analytik des Daseins ist hinsichtlich ihrer Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit in der ontischen Verfassung des Daseins vorgezeichnet.'

¹⁵ Heidegger, M., *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)*, p. 109. 'Time is that, wherein events occur.'

¹⁶ Heidegger, M., *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)*, p. 109, citing Aristotle, *Physics*, 219 a ff. 'However time is nothing . . . there is no absolute time, and also no absolute contemporaneity.'

of, and exhibits the phenomenon of, time. Here one may see an immediate parallel with Aristotle's own attempt to explain time, but with an important difference. For the change that is named here is not 'countable' as are the 'nows' of Aristotelian time: rather it makes possible the exhibition of the self which *is* as temporalising. Not all temporal ecstases involve change – patience, boredom, waiting – to name only three, are disclosed almost by an enforced comportment to the absence of change.

Heidegger had noted that “‘Zeit’ ist in ‘Sein und Zeit’, so befremdlich das klingen muß, der Vorname für den Anfangsgrund des Wortes’.¹⁷ Language, speaking, is the exhibited ‘timing of time’: upliftment, precisely as a driving out of myself to an extreme, an outermost, so that I appear before myself that I *am* brought before myself, makes this visible.

What is remarkable is not the extent to which transcendence collapses through all of its historical transformations, but its persistence and endurance. Perhaps alone among the devaluations of postmodernity, transcendence as the postmodern sublime retains its capacity not to debase and flatten every hierarchy, not to democratise and annul every elite or annihilate and disindividuate every particular ascent, but rather to make available its meaning even for those whom the epigones of democratisation, anti-elitism and mass empowerment have decided have always been excluded (whether they were or not—rarely were the masses *consulted* or interrogated concerning the emancipations to be forced upon them). In postmodernity this means: mass access to the euphoria of consumption; ‘art’ or the (visual, videokinetic) aesthetic as the shock of the new, of shock-as-such. Even the most superficial blandishment has in the end to do just that—to deliver memorable titillation, the euphoric *necessity* for the appearance of the postmodern condition.

Upliftment exhibits two other features which makes it of such importance. Transcendence as such is ambiguous: at one and the same time it names transcending *in* its transcending (an entirely human concern); and at the same time it names *the* transcendent, an ontotheological name for God (or for the god beyond God – this is Derrida's negative point – and so the other-than-human within a human compass). This ambiguity has been present from the very outset, with Plato and Aristotle, and it remains in *all* contemporary discussion, even the supposedly most atheistic. This securing of the transcendent requires no belief (unbelieving philosophers persist in this securing all the time). In this sense upliftment persists *beyond* the death of God. Its other feature, however, is most vigorously exhibited not always, but *now*. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has traced how the blankness of the contemporary videokinetic field is a saturated blankness, and as such, is sublime.¹⁸ He accurately describes how ‘technology has subsumed the idea of the sublime . . . it combines limitlessness with pure ratio’.¹⁹ Technology, and specifically the visual and videokinetic mode of its dissemination, the *means* by which technology subsumes upliftment, is itself a temporal determination: what Gilbert-Rolfe calls

¹⁷ *Parmenides* in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 54, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1992 (1982), p. 113. “‘time’ is, in *Sein und Zeit*, no matter how strange it must sound, the proper name for the originary *ground* of the word’ (author’s italics). Cited in *Postmodernity’s Transcending*, p. 62.

¹⁸ Gilbert-Rolfe, J., *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, New York, Allworth Press, pp. 111–114.

¹⁹ Gilbert-Rolfe, J., *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, p. 127f.

‘the end of absence’ is in fact the replacement of the genuinely absent, *nothing*, with the already-known, with what has already come to presence and remains and persists in presence.

Gilbert-Rolfe’s point has already been made elsewhere by Edmund White, and explicitly with respect to exactly the ‘terribly average nakedness’ of much of the work of Gilbert & George, the same exposure that I suggest is paraded by the figure of *Brontosaurus*. White says of it that ‘nothing can be deciphered, nothing interpreted or added, because everything is already fully intended as a sign, totally saturated with meaning’.²⁰ Presence, as full presence as the end of knowing, is a determination of the ever-same and so *past*, even when we have not yet encountered it.

It is here, however, that the two questions of Elden and Hart – of the meaning of *Mitsein* and of the (missing) French theoretical articulation of upliftment or sublimity – coincide. This coincidence is visible perhaps most of all in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy opens his own consideration of upliftment by noting that ‘on pourrait penser que notre époque découvre à nouveau le *sublime*, son nom, son concept ou ses questions’.²¹ In a way beloved of French theorists, however, Nancy immediately announces a limit, a ban if you like, on how one is to proceed: ‘on ne fait jamais retour à rien dans l’histoire. Nous ne revenons pas au sublime, nous en provenons plutôt.’²² The published English translation of this passage says ‘one never returns to any prior moment in history. The sublime is not so much what we’re going back to as where we’re coming from.’²³ What Nancy describes, and the English translation reinforces, is an order of appearing, a temporal disposition toward the historiographical facts of the matter. Moreover, as if on cue, in the matter of demonstrating the interpretative character of translations, the English translation of the French work *Du sublime* in which these words function as the first few lines of the preface, and so the headline (the very rubric under which all else will appear), reinforces what is at stake, for the English title is *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*: the presence is *added* to make sure that precisely what is supposedly *in question* is there *without* question. Why is presence so important here – except that isn’t that what *Postmodernity’s Transcending* is all about, the ὄντως ὄν – of beings *the very being*, the first, foremost and most divine underpinning of all that is and so the persisting as such in its persistence, the ἀεί?

The French tells us that upliftment has reappeared in its centrality in thinking, its name, concept and questions. Then, Nancy tells us, this appearing must be subject to the ordinary passage of time—one can’t ‘go back’. Or is this what the French says? It says *literally* that ‘one never makes a return to nothing in history’ (here is a really accurate translation, one which will make every linguist wince with distaste). History is just that determination of time wherein *the* nothing never

²⁰ White, E., review of *Gilbert & George: A Portrait* in *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no. 13, July 1999, p. 10.

²¹ Nancy, J.-L., *Préface* in Courtine, J.-F. et al., *Du sublime*, Paris, Belin, 1988, p. 7. ‘One could think that our epoch has discovered anew the *sublime*, its name, its concept, or its questions’ (author’s italics).

²² Nancy, J.-L., *Préface*, p. 7. ‘One never makes a return to anything in history. We do not return to the sublime, rather we stem from it.’

²³ Nancy, J.-L., *Préface* in Librett J. S. (trans), Courtine, J. F. et al., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, New York, SUNY, 1993, p. 1.

reappears in the way that the *nothing in question* made possible what appeared in its appearing at the time. Taken as a literal translation of what Nancy says, this statement means history, and so the past as the persistence of what passes in the ordinary passage of time, is the place of presence as such: time moves on. A more generous translation, a translation that interprets Nancy despite himself and so in a way utterly unfaithful to Nancy's intentions would say: in the persisting of what persists, what lay behind and lies ahead of what has come into presence and persisted from its coming forth, this behind-and-ahead is hard to see, is hard to keep and hold *with* and *within* the persisting in presence.

But Nancy does not have this view of presence. Like Derrida (and Levinas, indeed!), his holding out against presence is holding out against 'the totalising'; he articulates the question of the whole, of totality and of the self entirely within the language of Kantian subjectivity. Thus upliftment – the sublime – is the instant wherein upliftment functions 'paradoxalement comme exposition hors de soi, passage à la limite (in)sensible de soi'.²⁴ He asks 'peut-on dire encore que la totalité, à cet instant, est présentée?',²⁵ concluding (only with some qualifications) that yes, this is indeed the case. Nancy's juxtaposition of the instant with the totality means that, despite his huffing and puffing over Kant's pomposity in the description of the sublime in the third critique, Nancy does not himself understand upliftment in a way other than Kant does. Upliftment, therefore, retains the relation to presence which itself must always be deconstructed, but having been placed within these parentheses, it may still prove to be a way of speaking about high instants. Which is exactly the *actual* paradox of postmodernity: postmodernity promises us that there is an understanding we *could* reach, but in always deferring that understanding (we are all, after all, in the know about it) let us remain with the language we have.

In the second half of his earlier statement (nous ne revenons pas au sublime, nous en provenons plutôt) Nancy poses the whole problematic of 'presence' as such and its temporal determinations, almost without noticing that he does so, and says, almost in an aside: 'we do not return to the sublime, rather we are in coming-forth [from it]'—that is to say: we stem from it.

Let us lay aside for later the question of Nancy's confidence in saying it is 'we' who are always limited in this way: at issue here is whether we can get back or whether we come forth and so stem from upliftment. Does this mean that it lies behind us – or does it roll out from ahead of us? *Provenir* – 'to come forth from', like the Greek word ἀρχή, has exactly this ambiguity, an ambiguity that lies in the whole history of the understanding of time itself. The persistent questioning of presence, as a questioning regarding God, has – for all its Gallican peregrinations – a much simpler and less anxious home. The question is not what presence *is*, nor what kind of *is* its historical manifestations have attempted to make-present, but rather, on what are these stood, and what is the ontological ground of presence? This is not other than the question of ground as we considered it earlier. If we return for a moment to Heidegger's 1924 lecture in which the philosopher ceases

²⁴ Nancy, J.-L., *L'Offrande sublime* in *Du sublime*, p. 66. 'Paradoxically, as exposition to what is outside of self, passage to the (in)sensible limit of self.'

²⁵ Nancy, J.-L., *L'Offrande sublime* in *Du sublime*, p. 66. 'Could one still say that totality, at this instant, is presented?'

believing, we discover why. The theologian above all attempts to make manifest the presence of absolute presence, the *ἀεί*. However, immediately after Heidegger asserts in this lecture that the philosopher does not believe, we are told *why*: ‘Fragt der Philosoph nach der Zeit, dann ist er erschlossen, *die Zeit aus der Zeit zu verstehen* bzw. aus dem *ἀεί*, was so aussieht wie Ewigkeit, was sich aber herausstellt als ein bloßes Derivat des Zeitlichseins’.²⁶

The question therefore arises, on what kind of understanding of temporality is Nancy’s understanding of upliftment stood? I have already suggested the answer to this question: an entirely Kantian subjectivity. But isn’t Nancy himself a critic of subjectivity—how can this be, and what mistake have I (obviously) made? The reason for excluding the discussion of the French theorists from *Postmodernity’s Transcending* is precisely because these accounts of the being of being human continue resolutely to resolve questions of presence and of upliftment on the basis of the philosophy of subjectivity—metaphysics, if you like. For the sake of time, and in the limited space that we have here, I will only observe that this manifests itself in two ways. First, by being unable to resolve the question of presence into a deeper question of what presence is and *opens* if it is *not* the *ἀεί ὄν*, or rather if the *ἀεί* turns out, as Heidegger argues, itself to be a different determination of being, and a derivation of being-timely, to the one which founds the metaphysical history of the West. To do this requires to take more seriously the *nothing* – to return, exactly as Nancy says one may not – to the *historical* manifesting of the nothing. Which exactly exposes why Nancy says one may not—because he (and he is not alone in this) has an entirely metaphysical understanding of time.

The second reason for excluding a discussion of the French consideration of upliftment lies in the vexed question of the relation between presence and intentionality. Intentionality – the archaeology of the question of the true intention of the authorial mind – arises out of the attempts to construe the absolute intentionality of God, which *Postmodernity’s Transcending* attempts to illustrate by reference to Aquinas. The French theorists have therefore not been wrong in dismantling – deconstructing – the baroque machinery of intentionality as it intensifies in its trajectory from Descartes to Nietzsche, and even to Husserl. This has, however, resulted in an impasse. Precisely because of the understanding of subjectivity on which their own investigations are stood, Nancy and others are forced to analyse presence and its effects through a kind of *epoché*, a placing of the question into an *atemporality* which illustrates the falsehood of intentionality itself but can get no further than this. Without Aristotle’s understanding of the unity of *νοῦς*, neither the object (nor the text) nor its relation to the subject (or the self) can be resolved—the question itself is endlessly deferred. Aristotle’s understanding of *νοῦς* cannot be recovered because, although it is the final interior and exterior unity of world – the way in which I fit in to the unity of the *same* world to which you too are accommodated (this is Hegel’s point) – even Hegel was only able to resolve this unity with respect to history (world is no longer finite, it changes *absolutely* and not just relatively), and – are we not all agreed – that attempt has failed, its time is passed.

²⁶ Heidegger, M, *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)*, p. 107. ‘When the philosopher enquires after time, then he is resolved to *understand time from out of time*, for example from the *ἀεί*, which thus looks like eternity, but which turns out to be a mere derivation of being-timely’ (author’s italics).

For Aristotle νοῦς turns out to be attained through sequence, countability, μάθησις. Hence the concern of *Postmodernity's Transcending* to ask: first, how does sequence, succession and hierarchy appear; and second, on what ground does sequence stand? This is the basis of the whole of the analysis of the mathematical and μάθησις in the book. The answer is very simple. There is *nothing other* that sequence, hierarchy and μάθησις could stand upon than the temporalising being of being human itself. Upliftment – transcending – is the temporal occurring of being human, it is how being human is passed through what-occurs.

There is indeed in Nancy a critique of subjectivity, and Ignaas Devisch sums it up in a way that parallels my own enquiry. For Nancy, he says, ‘politically speaking the significance of the subject is that there is a relation to others only on the basis of an autonomous individual who pre-exists all communal formulations and decides independently whether she or he enters sociality or not, whether he or she “signs” the social contract or not’.²⁷ This is almost a summary of the critique of subjectivity that I advance in the *Introduction to Postmodernity's Transcending*. This is Nancy’s own exposure of the false temporal structure of Postmodernity, his own denial of the possibility of a philosophy of subjectivity: such a fictive moment of decision (and a fictive *deciding subject*) can never actually occur. Why therefore, might Nancy and I be at odds? Shouldn’t we be in total agreement?

Heidegger develops the existential analytic of *Dasein* through understanding *Dasein* as nothing other than temporality—literally, ‘timeliness’ (*Zeitlichkeit*). Nancy pursues this analysis and pronounces it correct, but argues that there is a more primordial understanding of *Dasein* even than *Dasein* itself—*Mitsein*, *Miteinandersein*.²⁸ Nancy says (quite correctly) of this primordial understanding that *Mitsein* is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself, and then adds ‘Sur cette base, il devrait être absolument clair que le *Dasein*, pas plus qu’il n’est “l’homme” ni “le sujet”, n’est pas “un”, unique et isolé, mais toujours seulement l’un, chaque un, de l’un-avec-l’autre. Si cette détermination est essentielle, elle doit acquérir et exposer sans réserve une dimension co-originare: or on a déjà souvent remarqué que cette co-originarité, malgré son affirmation, cède le pas à la considération du *Dasein* “en lui-même”.²⁹ In other words Nancy is seeking the originary ground of *Dasein* (which he says Heidegger failed in) and Nancy grounds it in *Mitsein*. The question we must keep in view in Nancy’s considerations is: given that the analytic of *Dasein*, and *Mitsein* as a determination of the meaning of *Dasein*, arises on the basis of *Dasein* as *nothing other* than timeliness, how does Nancy show us that *Mitsein* is *also* primordially timeliness, and if *Mitsein* is not this, in what is *Mitsein* to be grounded?

²⁷ Devisch, I., *A Trembling Voice in the Desert: Jean-Luc Nancy's Rethinking of the Space of the Political in Cultural Values*, vol. 4, no. 2, April 2000, pp 239–256, p. 241.

²⁸ Nancy, J.-L., *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1996, p. 46. ‘L’être-avec (le *Mitsein*, le *Miteinandersein* et le *Mitdasein*) est très clairement déclarée, par Heidegger, essentiel à la constitution du *Dasein* lui-même.’ (‘Being-with [*Mitsein*, *Miteinandersein* and *Mitdasein*] is very clearly declared by Heidegger as essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself.’)

²⁹ Nancy, J.-L., *Être singulier pluriel*, p. 46. ‘On this basis, it becomes absolutely clear that *Dasein* is neither any more “man” nor “the subject”, it is not “a one”, unique and isolated, but always only the one, each one, of the one-with-another. If this determination is essential, it needs to attain to and expose without reserve a co-originary dimension: but as has often been noted, despite this affirmative co-originary, he gives up on the step to the consideration of *Dasein* itself.’

In fact Nancy argues not that *Mitsein* is timeliness, but that the grounding of *Mitsein* is at the same time the aggregation of being-amongst, taken as a multiplicity of ‘ones’: this is the basis of his frequent description of *Mitsein* as ‘l’un-avec-l’autre’. But the-one-with-the-other is *already* an ontological determination (which is to say, it does not arise *from out of* an ontological questioning). It is (if we take as correct Aristotle’s arguments rehearsed in *Postmodernity’s Transcending* for the originary grounding of mathematics) what μύθησις makes possible, my already having discovered that I am one, on the basis of discovering that you are other to my one, and we-many are already and even prior to our being-two-together. Nancy takes this discovery as *already-present*, *already-prior*. It is the very basis on which he derives the plural of *Mitsein* as the plurality of the many ones that we all (already) are. The question is: how did Nancy come to know that he was such a one-with-another? He presumes this knowledge is self-evident, but in fact in so presuming, he presumes that it is already originary to my knowledge that I am a one, otherwise he could never have structured his statement in this way.

Even to know that you are a one-with-another is an ontological determination. This is in fact the very basis on which Cartesian subjectivity is attained, that there is *always self-evidently an ‘I-am-one’ that can think ‘I am’ prior to its thinking anything else or any other relation*. So is the actual *being* of one-with-another in some sense *prior* to being brought forth that *you* and *I* and *we all* are ‘l’un-avec-l’autre’? The answer to this is yes: when we are, unthinkingly, simply the ‘many’. The ‘many’, the unthought, ungrounded, *manifold* has not the plural or dual or singular mathematical quantity of particular and determinate number (note, please, that plural, dual, singular are also – in Greek at least – *grammatical* numbers), but *no* determinate number at all. The manifold – the indeterminate many – is *prior* to number, and prior to its *enumeration*. The individuations of number are themselves extracted *from* the prior (and always already at hand) manifold. The many as such is unthought. But we can think of the many. However, the *thought* of the ‘many’ *becomes numerable* and determinable, *in the very act of being thought* – it enumerates as it thinks, and the thought ‘numbers’ – but the many *as such* is *always* innumerable and indeterminate and *unthought as such*. Devisch comments on Nancy’s privileging of *Mitsein* over *Dasein*, saying ‘Nancy asks, why did Heidegger take so long to elaborate the “with”?’.³⁰ Except Heidegger does not take so long to *get to* the ‘with’ of ‘being-with-one-another’, he was already fully aware of it and it can be found fully elaborated in Plato. *Mitsein* can be taken as a translation of συνουσία, which means variously society, social exchange, communion, even social or sexual intercourse. Above all and first, however, it means συνουσία, ‘alongside-and-together-with-insofar-as-there-is-actual-being’ (hence ουσία and not ὄν, εἶναι), being-with. As a term it appears in Plato as meaning ‘the manifold’.³¹

In contrast to Nancy, therefore, Heidegger did not find *Mitsein*, συνουσία, as something to be attained to or achieved—he found it already there, already ly-

³⁰ Devisch, L., *A Trembling Voice in the Desert*, p. 242.

³¹ See, for a fuller discussion of this Hemming, L. P., *Can I Really Count on You?* in Jordan, M. (ed.), *Authorizing Marriage? Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, forthcoming, where the meaning of the term συνουσία is discussed in relation to Aristophanes’ speech in the *Symposium*.

ing present (exactly as the unthought indeterminate manifold actually is). Nancy, in contrast, sees the manifold as essentially a task. ‘Aucun’ he says ‘pourtant, n’a radicalement thématé l’avec comme le trait essentiel de l’être et comme sa propre essence singulière pluriel’.³² What does this actually say? It says we must *think* the essence of being, *as* the indeterminate manifold, and we must think it *through* the determination ‘singular plural’ (notice how we have lost the dual, now that we are no longer Greeks).³³ But the ‘singular plural’ is not any kind of real determination, it is a name, like ‘the infinite’, for marking an indeterminacy.³⁴ In other words, Nancy will leave the manifold *indeterminate*. He will determine it *as* the indeterminate. Not: the indeterminate, which could then go on to be determined (however arbitrary those determinations might be) *but* the persisting-in-indeterminacy, the ‘ever-indeterminate’. The ‘ever indeterminate’ of being is, surely, nothing other than ‘infinite being’. Have we in Nancy’s understanding of *Mitsein* simply recovered the definition of full presence, masquerading as something else—the indeterminate infinite *of our very selves*, τὸ ἀεί ὄν, now no longer functioning as a name for God, but as a name for the whole of beings *as* the whole of human being, society, the πόλις, call it what you will?

Further evidence: *Mitsein*, says Nancy, is more originary than *Dasein*, it lies prior. Now as the prior it is the always-before, the *a priori* (the without-any-other-prior, and from the always-before). The *a priori* is nothing other than the ἀεί. Nancy says we have to attain this as a formal (indeed imperatively moral) task: ‘que l’être, absolument, est être-avec, voilà ce qu’il nous faut penser’.³⁵ So the always-prior of the ἀεί is what we have to reach by thinking it, thinking *through* to it. It lies ahead of us. Except if we think *Mitsein* in its genuine determination as the manifold, it is nothing of the kind—it is what lies genuinely behind us, it is the ‘from out of which’ thinking thinks. It is what thinking thinks *from* not *to*. Nancy has put *Mitsein*, as a covert thought of the ἀεί, in the wrong place, in the place of the ἦν εἶναι of Aristotle’s formal cause, *not* in any genuine ‘before’. None of this is a question of being—it is rather, the question of how being arises on the basis of different temporal determinations. We have, despite ourselves, been forced to exhibit two different kinds of temporalising of being. Nancy’s temporalising of eternity, albeit in a masked, covert, ‘forgotten’ way, and—well what exactly?

Heidegger reminds us, the ἀεί is *not* a definition of eternity (insofar as we are philosophers, and so not looking for the eternal God of first causes), but itself a temporal determination: it is therefore not the ‘ever-before’ but the ‘from-

³² Nancy, J.-L., *Être singulier pluriel*, p. 54. ‘No-one, however, has radically thematised the *with* as the essential trait of being et as its proper singular plural essence’ (author’s italics).

³³ Here is proof why Nancy thinks singular-plural is a *geometrical* thought—it is simply two points at opposed ends of a continuum. But the singular-plural conceals the grammatical dual, at which point it becomes clear that what is at issue here is not a continuum, but a sequence with definite, determinate, stops: number. The plural is not, and never can be, genuinely indeterminate: it is accounted for as the ‘third in general’.

³⁴ This can be demonstrated precisely by the means by which the individuation of number is itself attained: every actual number is attained through its specificity and determinate relation to other numbers—every number has a genuine beginning and end that separates it from every other genuine actual number. Determinacy is *of the essence* of number as such. For the Greeks, there can never be a genuine (or ‘real’), but indeterminate, number.

³⁵ Nancy, J.-L., *Être singulier pluriel*, p. 83 f. ‘That being, absolutely, is being-with, here is that which it is necessary for us to think.’

which'. *Mitsein* turns out to be the prior temporal determination of *Dasein* in the matter of attaining to *Dasein*. Let us put this in a more formal way. For Heidegger, *Dasein*, as a genuinely ontological determination, is something which appears in thinking. Thinking is a thinking-from-to (hence its proper Greek name was not νοεῖν, thinking as such, but διανοεῖν, thinking-from-to, thinking-through-to). Thinking-through *is the same thing as, is another name for, temporalising*. Thinking from where to where? For Aristotle, as *Postmodernity's Transcending* shows, this is a thinking from natural being, φύσις, to enduring-being-ever, ἦν εἶναι. However this is not just onlooking-thinking, idle thinking-about. Rather this is thinking in its bringing itself into itself as thinking: that which comes to be thought in the elaboration of the philosophy of subjectivity as intentional consciousness, knowing that I am thinking insofar as I am thinking. This is what makes Aristotle genuinely ontological in his thinking, that the self comes before itself in what it thinks of. Two words account for this thinking insofar as it is a self-thinking, which *Postmodernity's Transcending* attempts to exhibit the meaning and function of: μάθησις, and ὕψος.

Counting: the very means by which I extract myself from the manifold and account for myself is an abstracting, a διαίρεσις, a dividing the world up and so *counting* and calculating it in the very act of dividing, but this is the means by which change is accounted for and so *temporalised*. Temporalised means exhibited or pointed-up *as* and *in* a temporal determination. As a dividing-up, it is also a bringing of the self before what the self is brought before, the whole, the manifold. The self, coming to itself, does so by making manifest to itself its timeliness: in doing so, it measures its timeliness by the λόγος-character of the account: hence the 'why' and the means by which temporalising and speaking are grounded ontologically in the same way. The name of the whole, the manifold, *das Seiende überhaupt*, being overall, Heidegger repeatedly demonstrated functions as a covert name for God, hence why the divinity of ὕψος as upliftment and so sublimity becomes a category of metaphysics.

This abstraction, the very thing that should bring the self as a self-exhibited being, a self-determinable and self-interrogable being before itself in its being is, however, cancelled by the *what*, the τι, of what it brings before itself: itself in relation to the whole, the manifold. The self is not able to exhibit itself on the basis of the being of its being, but rather only on the basis of beings as such, what the self has in view in its abstracting imagining. The loss of the being of the self before the self *in favour* of the *what* of what the self brings before itself is the *false* grounding of the αἰεί, why presence takes over and displaces presencing. This is the very *Seinsvergessenheit* in its operation.

This is why intentionality always appears as a striving-ahead-to-get-to (ὁρέξις) the 'what', the τι, of the object in view—and why Nancy puts *Mitsein* as the manifold in the wrong place, as ahead of him, as what (as a moral task, we *must* think) is to be got to. Not because *Mitsein* is a thing, an object of intentional consciousness, Nancy is too well schooled in the dangers of such thinking; but rather as what eludes intentional consciousness and so needs to be brought forth *as what eludes it*: thus it becomes what lies *even further ahead*, if we could but 'see' the indeterminate manifold by distracting the gaze from the particular object (and now you have in a mere nutshell why the sublime is so concerned with the conun-

drum of representing the *unrepresentable*). The ever-further-ahead is no more than the ‘ever’ as such, *ἀεί*, the *underlying present presence of whatever is present*, which is why Aristotle only understands *μάθησις* in terms of abstraction—the ever-more abstractedness that leads to full presence.

But to get ahead to this is to get no further ahead than Hegel got, for the manifold, as the *out* of which is only invisible because it is the *from-where*. It can be brought to sight by *thinking of it*, but then we have only a thought about it, we can never think it as such, it is genuinely unthinkable, and happily so!

And here is why *Dasein* is not intentional consciousness. The question of upliftment, and of *μάθησις* in general, is not *what ‘it’ is*, its *τί*, but how it appears at all, *on what it is stood*. This is the question of ground. Its ground is the actual temporalising of the being-of-being-human, *Dasein*. Time: Time, however, as nothing, is, strictly speaking the *Ab-Grund*, the without-a-ground, it is groundless. The grounding of the being of being human turns out to be, not ground as such, but groundlessness. This, unlike *Mitsein*, is something to be attained through thinking, but it cannot ever be attained by thinking *Dasein* as a thing, or as a covert name for the subjectivity of the subject. In his 1924 lecture Heidegger argues that ‘*das Grundphänomen der Zeit ist die Zukunft*’.³⁶ This is the-from-out-of-what the future is not striven forward to, but emerges, it is the *conferral* of futurity *in Dasein*, from out of which *Dasein* draws itself as itself (from whence it temporalises), i.e. makes itself self-interrogable and self-questionable.³⁷

Have we not here relapsed into speech of *Dasein* as a thing? Does not Heidegger rule this out? In a later lecture course, Heidegger’s appended notes stress this need for erasure: ‘*das Da-sein kann aber hier nicht einmal genannt werden, weil es sogleich gegenständlich gedeutet würde und die Bestimmung des Wesens der Wahrheit nur zu einer “neuen” Theorie herabgesetzt werden könnte*’.³⁸ Part of the problem of leaving the word *Dasein* untranslated in English is we overlook the fact that, heard with German ears and since Kant, the word simply means ‘existence’. Human *Dasein* as human existence *also* has a certain indeterminacy about it: human existence can mean—existing in general, or it can mean a *particular* human existence: you, me, l’un avec l’autre. In every case for Heidegger existence in this technical sense means ontological existing, existing and knowing at the same time *that I am* and that *I am*: the work of Longinus’ *ῥήτωρ*: to gather into a commonly *thought* worlding of world from out of an already *unthought* manifolding manifold those who, through upliftment, are brought before themselves in a particular and determinate way—who share and are at the same time individuated through a common *παθήσις*, common experience as ‘occurring-with’ *discovering* themselves to be *συνουσιῶν*, being-together-with. Here *Mitsein* is not attained as a *must-think*, a moral task which is at the same time something ahead of me to which I must get to.

³⁶ Heidegger, M., *Der Begriff der Zeit (Vortrag 1924)*, p. 118. ‘The grounding phenomenon of time is the future’ (author’s italics).

³⁷ This repeated use of the reflexive pronoun, which seems so clumsy to us, is the mark of the missing medial voice in modern Western European languages. No such clumsiness would appear in a Greek description, where the middle voice would indicate a self-evident self-reflexivity.

³⁸ *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 193. ‘Here *Da-sein* cannot even be mentioned, because it would immediately be interpreted as an object and the determination of the essence of truth would be denigrated into a mere “new” theory’.

There is one final question I want to ask: do we explore the question of the meaning of *Dasein* with respect to what Heidegger himself thought it meant? Doesn't it in any case change, let us say from the lecture on time in 1924 to *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 or the *Beiträge* in 1936–38? This is, of course, the question of intentionality, the question of an authorial archæology all over again, and it should precisely be obvious why we need no longer ask the question in this way. Bringing existence before ourselves *as* a question is precisely to ask the question of who we are as existing. In this sense every attempt to answer the question is both disclosive of the one answering, and is a description of that means by which the question comes before us at all. There is, strictly speaking, no intention to be described; rather there is an enquiry into what it means (and this means *who*, since τὶ has no gender in Greek) to describe existence in its existing.

We see here how it is we may resolve the question of how we may read Plato and Aristotle, and, most importantly, how we may discover what it is that is at work in the way in which we read each through the other. For on the way to reading them, we uncover not what they say, but of what they are speaking, and what in their speaking leads them both to uncover and cover-over in particular ways. We learn of what it was they were encountering, in its unfolding. We learn, in other words, *against* Nancy, to return to the nothing in what they say in order to understand what they brought out into the open.

Being-together-with and knowing it: a group coming together to consider an artwork, be it a video installation like the one discussed in *Postmodernity's Transcending* and entitled *Brontosaurus*, or perhaps considering a book about this artwork. Determinately coming together in an experience which, we hope, for the time being might yet be sublime. For the privilege of writing for you and speaking to you, I thank you.

Some Reflections on *Postmodernity's Transcending* from the Perspective of Modern Philosophy

PETER JONKERS

Catholic Theological University of Utrecht

Laurence Paul Hemming's book offered me the opportunity to study postmodern theology more closely and to examine the ways in which it wants to make use of pre-modern, modern and post-modern philosophical insights in order better to understand the mystery of faith. Having said this, I found it very difficult to grasp the issues which Hemming addresses in his book not only because of the content – he discusses a wide range of philosophical positions – but also because of his style—he chooses a variety of specific philosophical insights from a great number of philosophers in order to fit them in his own theological scheme. It appears to me that the workings of this scheme remain quite vague.

In order to be able to present some thoughts on Hemming's book from the perspective of modern philosophy, I will start with a short summary of some characteristics of modern philosophy, as given by Heidegger in his well-known essay, *The Age of the World-Picture* because Heidegger's approach to the modern age is congenial to Hemming's and his analysis of modernity is still very influential. I will then relate this characterization of modernity to the seventh chapter of Hemming's book in which he discusses the implications of the concept of the sublime in modernity.

6.1 HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION OF MODERNITY

According to Heidegger every age, including modernity, is founded on a fundamental metaphysical position which embraces:

(1) The manner and way in which man is man, that is, himself [...] (2) The essential interpretation of the being of beings. (3) The essential projection of truth. (4) The sense in which, in any given instance, "man is the measure".¹

This means that every age is founded on an understanding of man, of Being, of truth, and of values. In modernity, this metaphysical position has taken a specific shape: man is conceived as a subject which approaches the world as an object, truth has become 'certainty for a representing subject' and values have been reduced to subjective constructions. One of the most visible results of modernity's metaphysical decision is the 'loss of the gods' (*Entgötterung*), or as Hemming calls it, the 'flight of the Gods'.

This expression [the loss of the gods] does not mean the mere elimination of the gods, crude atheism. The loss of the gods is a twofold process. On the one hand, the world picture Christianizes itself inasmuch as the ground of the world is posited as infinite and unconditioned, as the absolute. On the other hand, Christendom reinterprets its Christianity as a world view (the Christian world view) and thus makes itself modern and up to date. The loss of the gods is the condition of indecision about God and the gods. Christianity is chiefly responsible for bringing it about. But the loss of the gods is far from excluding religiosity. Rather, it is on its account that the relation to the gods is transformed into religious experience. When this happens, the gods have fled. The resulting void is filled by the historical and psychological investigation of myth.²

The loss of the gods is a twofold process in which firstly the world picture Christianizes and then Christendom reinterprets its Christianity as a world view. The Christianization of the world picture becomes apparent in what Heidegger refers to elsewhere as the onto-theological structure of metaphysics. Modernity is characterised by a development in philosophy such that the ideal of knowing is oriented to the model of exact science. Mathematics, and subsequently physics, have become the paradigm of all well-founded, certain knowledge and according to this paradigm, philosophy understands Being as ground while thinking gathers itself towards Being as its ground in the manner of giving ground and accounting for the ground.³ Thus, this ground is the ultimate principle on the basis of which the whole of reality can be understood as something radically coherent and transparent. Of course, only God qualifies as this absolute ground and consequently, modern philosophy attributes a central position to Him. Heidegger's analysis of this process brings to light the onto-theological structure of the most prominent metaphysical systems of modernity, particular examples of which would be: Descartes' idea of the infinite; Leibniz's principle of sufficient ground; Spinoza's absolute substance and Hegel's absolute idea.

The second stage in the loss of the gods is that Christendom reinterprets Christianity as a world view. The consequence of this shift is the degradation of

¹ M. Heidegger, *The Age of the World Picture*. In: Idem, *Off the beaten track*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 79.

² M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, p. 70 [M. Heidegger, *The Age of the World Picture*, p. 58].

³ M. Heidegger, *Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik*, p. 48 [M. Heidegger, *The onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics*, p. 57].

the all-encompassing faith in God and divine worship to a detached view of the world competing with other world views. As the title of his essay already indicates, Heidegger's *The Age of the World Picture* examines the essence of the (modern) world picture. In ordinary (German) parlance, this term has a neutral meaning, referring to some view of or attitude towards the world. But for Heidegger, this term has a very specific and fundamental meaning. He considers the fact that the world has become a picture to be the essence of modernity, which is why, strictly speaking, it is incorrect to contrast the modern world picture with that of the Middle Ages or of Antiquity. The interpretation of the world as a (representational) picture only becomes possible in modernity. What exactly does Heidegger mean by 'world picture'?⁴ Let us take a close look at each element, 'world' and 'picture', separately. Considered philosophically, the word 'world' serves here as a name for beings in their entirety. This term not only includes nature and history, but also the world-ground, no matter how its relation to the world is thought. From the perspective of the Christianization of the world view analyzed above, this means that by conceiving God as giving ground He is included in the sphere of representational thinking which accounts for the ground. As a result of this, He turns into something that can be represented, although His position as the absolute ground of the world is a unique one. When using the word 'picture' we automatically think of a copy of something, a photo or a painting but for Heidegger, 'picture' refers to something more fundamental. When we say that we try to get a picture of something, we implicitly use this word in a normative way.⁵ The picture or representation we make of something thus becomes, as it were, the norm or standard of the thing in itself: the matter itself stands in the way it stands to us, before us. Consequently, making a picture of something or imagining something does not only have to do with visualization but also, and even more basically, with conceptualization. Moreover, this representation is not an arbitrary product but is something present for the mind's eye in all its necessary coherence and totality i.e. as a system. Finally, the term 'world picture' also has the connotation of the world (Being as such) being present and available for a representing subject.

Understood in an essential way, "world picture" does not mean "picture of the world" but, rather, the world grasped as picture. Beings as a whole are now taken in such a way that a Being is first and only is being insofar as it is set in place by representing-producing humanity.⁶

The interpretation of Christianity as a world view is dependent on the world having become a picture for a representing subject. Consequently, the expression 'Christian world view' only has meaning within the context of the (modern) world picture and to some extent may be understood as the conscious, articulated expression of Christianity. 'World view' means that man is conscious of the fact

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, pp. 81ff. [M. Heidegger, *The Age of the World Picture*, pp. 67ff.].

⁵ This normative aspect is even more striking in the German expression 'wir sind über etwas im Bilde' (we put ourselves in the picture about something). This expression constantly plays a part in Heidegger's analysis of the world picture. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 82 [*Ibid.*, p. 67].

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82 [*Ibid.*, pp. 67–8].

that he looks at the world from a certain, in this case Christian, perspective and that he attributes a value, perhaps even the highest value, to his faith. On the basis of this conscious evaluation, he can enter into dialogue or confrontation with other world views and other values but all these world views and the value attributed to them are only possible under the condition that the world as such has already become a picture of which man can make an image or a view. Only against the much larger background of modernity, in which man posits himself for the first time as a subject opposed to the world (as object), is he capable of observing or viewing the world in a self-conscious, detached way, of evaluating it in relation to other world views, etc. Thus, the decisive factor is not so much that in the course of modernity, Christianity has entered into a tense relationship with other religious and non-religious world views but that it has understood itself as a world view at all. When this occurs Christianity has lost its original Christian character.

Why is this so? In its earliest and (in Heidegger's view) most authentic shape, Christian religion is not a world view at all but a way of life, completely dominated by faith. The faithful experience God not only in heaven or simply as the architect of the world or as the highest metaphysical principle (Supreme Being, *causa sui*. etc.) but as the living Father who has entered history in a concrete way and foretells humanity of its salvation. Moreover, faith is not man's initiative or his construction, but something that is bestowed upon him on the basis of the promise made in the Gospels. The faithful believe in God as the one who really acts, who chooses his flock and thus reveals himself as a loving shepherd of his people. This faith is not construed by man; it is received without merit; it is pure grace. However, in the modern age faith becomes a world view and so this all-encompassing religious mode of existence vanishes. Man takes a detached, observing attitude towards the world and assigns to God a place in it as its first principle. As a consequence of this, it is up to the faithful to consider God and religion to be of (some) importance to life. Religion thus becomes a value which man has to balance against other values (like work, enjoyment, health, etc.). The crucial difference between original, authentic faith and a modern, pious view of the world is that in the former view faith is a human response to God's initiative, whereas in the latter view the human subject is the exclusive point of departure on which his religious view of the world is founded. In this way, the subject can also assure himself of the certainty of faith. In real terms this means that he chooses the world view that fits him best, or construes for himself a new eclectic world view by using elements of the existing ones. Finally, the notion 'place' presupposes an organizing subject, which assigns a position to everything and everyone. The result of this evolution is that religion loses its truth and reality, and turns into a religious experience. Man no longer sees God's activity in the world, but only subjectively feels His presence in the interiority of his heart. Here we see that the well-known opposition between the God of the philosophers and scientists and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not of decisive importance. The present-day faithful, who have turned away from all theological and philosophical speculation about God to a (anti-intellectual) religiosity of feeling are as much victims of the loss of the gods as those who stick to philosophical theism, albeit in different ways. In short, it is obvious that *all*

modern forms of religiosity have lost their authenticity since they have conformed to the premises of the age of the world picture. They all are dominated by the loss of the gods.

On the basis of this analysis, the question arises whether in the age of the world picture, it is even possible to think and to speak about God in a truthful way at all. Heidegger is very pessimistic about the consequences of the loss of the gods: when it has come to this, the gods have fled. As said before, this failing of holy names should certainly not be identified with atheism. Rather, it announces a situation of indecision about the gods; the holy, as the element in which the gods are dwelling; human life completely dominated by God's grace and the experience of a world that constantly reveals God's activity—all these features of an authentic religious existence have vanished and left a great emptiness. Now man himself has to decide whether or not God exists, on the importance of religion to his life, etc. However, just at the moment when he wants to take a decision on these issues, he notices the things on which he has to decide withdraw and escape his controlling power. This is the situation of indecision about God and the gods. In effect it is not man's decision, but it is something that happens to him as destiny, as a consequence of the age of the world picture. At present, man can decide autonomously on many things, almost on everything, but not on the fact *that* he has ended up in this situation.

In this situation of indecision, all thinking about God is both *too late* and *too soon*. We should not understand the statement that our thinking about God is *too late* as a yielding to atheism or agnosticism and even less as indifference with regard to this issue. The indecision about God is not the consequence of a conscious human decision, but the result of a certain understanding of Being which reigns in our age. In its turn, this understanding is the result of a certain destiny of Being (*Seinsgeschick*). Once the gods have fled, man has thrown away his chances to establish an authentic relationship with God; he is too late. For the same reason, our thinking about God is *too soon*. Precisely because the loss of the gods is not the result of a human decision but happens to man as his destiny, every human attempt to put an end to this indecision, perhaps by promoting God and religion again as valuable objects of philosophical inquiry or by stressing again the value of faith in God, is a confirmation and strengthening of the loss of the gods rather than a means of overcoming this loss.

The only thing that man can do in this situation is to prepare the ground for the divinity to manifest itself again. Only if man lives within the boundaries of this ground is he able to understand the original meaning of the word 'God'. In a well-known fragment of his *Letter on Humanism (Brief über den Humanismus)*, Heidegger goes more deeply into the nature of this ground:

The [sort of] thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of Being questions more primordially than metaphysics can. Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify.⁷

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Brief über den Humanismus*. Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1949, pp. 36–7 [M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*. In: Idem, *Pathmarks*. Cambridge, Cambridge University

With this remark Heidegger indicates how much preparatory work has to be done in order to rediscover the meaning of the word 'God'. In general, he describes this work as the 'overcoming of metaphysics'. This is certainly not a Hegelian sublation, but a step back out of (the reign of) metaphysics into its essence, it moves from accepting metaphysics as a given construction (of which Hegel's system is one of the most prominent examples) to its deconstruction. This step back implies that metaphysical thinking is questioned from the perspective of the truth of Being as a coming-to-pass of unconcealment and concealment. In this way, the construction of metaphysics loses its overwhelming, coercive character and appears as a product of its age, as a manifestation of a specific destiny of Being. As far as the question of a more authentic meaning of the word 'God' is concerned, this thinking does not simply accept the fact of the loss of the gods as the inevitable fate of modern culture. On the contrary, it asks, more fundamentally, which conception of man and world, truth and values has brought this destiny about and why it is able to present itself as something unavoidable? Thus, the fate of the loss of the gods loses its coercive character.

6.2 HEMMING'S ALTERNATIVE TO THE METAPHYSICS OF REPRESENTATION

Contemporary philosophy can be characterized as an attempt to 'overcome metaphysics' and in particular to overcome the fatal consequences of modernity's understanding of man as a subject, of Being as an object, of truth as representation, and of values as a subjective construction—in short of philosophy as representational thinking. The outcome of this project, which is still in progress, is not only essential for the future of religion and theology, but also more generally for the future of man and world, thinking and acting. Hemming's book is one of many examples of this project.

My comment on Hemming's book is that I agree with the general orientation of his inquiry, viz. the necessity to find new ways to think transcendence and thus to overcome a certain kind of metaphysics. But I do not agree with his general account of modern metaphysics because it is far too monolithic. Many modern philosophers are well aware of the problems raised by the rationality of the Enlightenment in general and its dramatic impact on religion and theology in particular. These philosophers are trying to develop new ways to think transcendence philosophically, and these attempts are worthwhile. So from the perspective of modern philosophy, I would wish to draw attention to these alternatives, not only for the sake of historical correctness but also because some of these answers can be introduced fruitfully into the contemporary philosophical and theological discussion.

In order to point out the risks which both Hemming and I encounter in attempting to deconstruct representational thinking, I refer to Derrida's famous article, *Les fins de l'homme*⁸ because at the end of this text he points out these risks. On the one hand, one can try to deconstruct representational thinking without

Press, 1998, p. 267].

⁸ J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 109–136.

switching grounds. In this case (which more or less represents my approach) one takes up what has remained implicit in the original basic issue of a given philosophy in order to divert the instruments and the bricks of it and redeploy them in the building of representational thinking itself. The risk of this approach is that one confirms, consolidates or supersedes on a more fundamental level that which one wanted to deconstruct. This is the risk of my approach. But Hemming's approach is also susceptible to a risk, albeit the opposite one. Derrida warns us about the dangers of deciding to switch grounds abruptly and to pitch one's camp boldly outside the tradition of modern philosophy appealing to an absolute breach and difference. In addition to the other hazards which may threaten such an emigration (viz. that the new territory is more naïve and more restricted), this approach runs the risk of a reduction to the oldest ground. Let us put both my approach and Hemming's approach to representational thinking to the test in order to see whether Derrida's warnings hold true and if so, whether they hold in both cases or in just one.

I will confine myself to Hemming's interpretation of Kant in the seventh chapter of his book. He criticises Kant's theoretical philosophy as an example of the modern philosophy of subjectivity and the metaphysics of representation: for Kant, even the unrepresentable is represented to the subject. In this respect, I want to show that Kant takes a much more balanced attitude with regard to the unrepresentable.

In general, according to Hemming, Kant's theoretical philosophy runs parallel to Descartes' and can be characterized as a philosophy of subjectivity and representational thinking. In the case of Kant, he illustrates this by analysing Kant's notion of the 'inner concept'. Unfortunately, this is not correct: the German term '*Inbegriff*' does not at all mean 'inner concept', neither does it refer to subjective interiority, but simply means the sum total. This means that the conclusions which Hemming draws with regard to the status of the self on the basis of the notion of the inner concept are basically unfounded. More generally, Kant uses every opportunity to stress the differences between his philosophy and Descartes' and this holds true with regard to three elements of the basic metaphysical position analysed above viz. the self or the I, God as the being of beings and truth as representation. For Descartes truth is always true before us, always already true, because it is true first in the mind of God, on this point he follows medieval philosophy. For Kant, however, the ultimate foundation of truth is not God, but the transcendental unity of apperception. Secondly, this transcendental unity is not the same as Descartes' notion of the I as a thinking substance, indeed it is no substance at all but a formal, transcendental condition for our finite, human knowledge. This implies, thirdly, that Kant's position with regard to the metaphysics of representation is not the same as Descartes'; on the contrary, for Kant there remains an unbridgeable gap between appearances, which can be known by the subject, and the thing in itself, which remains unknown.

Let us take a closer look at this unbridgeable gap between appearances and the thing in itself. When Kant thinks of the thing in itself, he primarily refers to the ideas of reason, viz. the I, the world, and God. On the one hand, he explicitly rejects Descartes' interpretation of them: the ideas of reason are surely not '*des idées claires et distinctes*', i.e. realities of the same order as the mathematical realities, as

Hemming erroneously suggests. On the other hand, however, as regulative ideas they are of vital importance to man's knowing, in that they orientate his thinking without him ever being capable of representing them. So, the teleological nature of man's relation to the sublime, his reaching out to a beyond which he cannot represent, is not only characteristic for Kant's third Critique but also characterizes man's relation to God in his theoretical philosophy.

In conclusion, in order to clarify the relation between the knowing subject and his reaching out to a beyond, I will give a short analysis of the famous passage of the preface of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: 'I had to supersede knowledge in order to make room for faith.'⁹ Let me try to analyse the key words of this passage. In this context, 'knowledge' means objective, scientific knowing, and comes close to what Hemming calls 'representational knowing'. The most important objective of the Critique of Pure Reason is not only to analyse the conditions under which this kind of knowledge is possible but also to set its limits as clearly as possible. Kant's reasons for doing this are not only negative, i.e. pointing out that a scientific knowledge of the supersensible is impossible, but also positive, i.e. laying bare the domain of the supersensible, to which knowing has no access, but towards which reason nevertheless reaches out. For human reason, the supersensible is a possibility of thinking that is free of contradiction. What are the implications of this for the meaning of the word '*Aufheben*'? First, it is quite obvious that Kant, some twenty years before Hegel, uses this word both in a negative and a positive way. Secondly, and more importantly, the negative aspect of *Aufheben* is subordinate to the positive one, since Kant uses the word '*um*' (in order to) to determine their relationship. Thirdly, the result of the *Aufhebung* is not a kind of representative thinking in which all is already present in the mind of God but a reaching out to a beyond of scientific, representative thinking. Finally, for Kant, the word 'faith' does not refer to something irrational, something that is separated from all knowing by an abyss. On the contrary, it is a reasonable faith which implies that the reasonable subject reaches out to a domain that he cannot represent but that is nevertheless of vital importance to his knowing, his acting and his power of judgement. This means that Kant's famous saying 'I had to supersede knowing in order to make room for faith' can be considered as a way to transcend postmodernity.

⁹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B, XXX.

Reply to Jonkers

LAURENCE PAUL HEMMING
 Heythrop College, University of London

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*.¹ Above all, Heidegger argues that 'however, Nietzsche throughout conceives of nihilism through valuative thinking'.² 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*

¹ 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).

² '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).³ 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.⁴ 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’.⁵ 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’.⁶ 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’.⁷ Further on what the *Inbegriff* attempts to name are successively *omnitudo realitatis*,⁸ *ens realissimum*, *ens originarium* and

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

⁴ 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.

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

⁶ ‘... 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.

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

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

ens summum.⁹ 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’¹⁰. 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,

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

¹⁰ 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*.¹¹ 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.

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

The Subject's Destruction?

A Note on Adorno's Sublime

YVES DE MAESENEER

Catholic University of Leuven

'In spite of persistent economic and political inequalities, all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally formalized values – that is, values completely empty of all human content in the historical sense. Thus in the extreme, every Japanese is in principle capable of committing, from pure snobbery, a perfectly gratuitous suicide (the classical sword of the samurai can be replaced by an airplane or torpedo), which has nothing to do with the risk of life in a Fight waged for the sake of historical values that have social or political content.'

(A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*)¹

Our expectations were far from fulfilled since almost no space had been given to theology. My automatic grammar checking immediately marked this opening sentence as undesirable. It runs against one of the basic rules on which all writing manuals agree: 'Avoid the passive'. It is not only a question of economy: the passive voice makes sentences excessively wordy. It introduces vagueness and confusion, since the word order situates the cause of the action at the end of the sentence, or even allows omitting it altogether, thereby evading the question 'By whom?' The active voice is to be preferred because the reader should know from the outset who the subject of the action is.

Theologians are used to their computer's allergy against their writing—most of their concepts do not belong to the standard thesaurus. But the recurrent refusal of the passive voice may point to a more fundamental feature of our secularised context. This writing rule fits in with a modern grammar, centred on an active subject. Symptomatic here would be the fate of the *passivum divinum*. Some older readers may have vague memories about a construction in the passive voice in which the one causing the action is not specifically mentioned, and as such God

¹ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, London, 1969, 162. I would like to thank Tom Jacobs for this reference.

is implied as the actual subject. The complete obliteration of the divine passive could count as a grammatical definition of secularisation; the devaluation of the passive in general appears as the grammatical consequence of the death of God.

How to give God a voice in Microsoft's world? How to speak about transcendence today? How to represent the transcendent in a context in which God seems to have no place anymore? In the wake of the French phenomenology which is in vogue these days, it looks as if good theology would consist in neglecting our software's warnings and stubbornly (re)using the passive voice. Indeed, the retrieval of the religious in writings of Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry or, earlier on, Emmanuel Levinas, involved a rediscovery of receptivity and passivity over against the activism of the modern subject. This bold restoring of the theological passive often takes the shape of an aesthetic turn—the Eastern Orthodox icons, for instance, introducing a dimension of radical receptivity.

8.1 THE SUBLIME AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE SELF

In his interpretation of the modern devaluation of God, Hemming is using the same parameters – subjectivity, causality, aesthetics . . . – but in a way which undermines our presupposed grammatical opposition. To think of the divine in the passive voice already is half-way to a devaluation of God—it values God as a cause and as such introduces a subject-object relation which opens up the road to the dethroning of the divine Subject by the modern *cogito*. A contemporary plea for the theological passive would come down to a mere inversion of the same ontotheological logic. Hemming probably would point to an alternative way of speaking, even more obsolete than the *passivum divinum*: what the Greek knew as the medial, a verbal form in between of the passive and the active (cf. Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending*, p. 22). How philosophy could rediscover the medial voice as a way to prevent ontotheological schemes of causality and intentionality from intruding into our understanding of God, would lead us too far.

Hemming's book presents itself as an investigation in the topic of the sublime, using this term as a key to unlock the question of the place of God, or, better, the displacement of God in our contemporary context. To my disappointment I could not see any theological use for this work, until I found out that this was exactly the point. The author's intention is to show that there is no place for Christian theology in the aesthetics of the sublime. Philosophers, and in their wake theologians, desperately looking for a *locus theologicus*, are mistaken in representing the sublime as a road to overcome the nihilist devaluation of God. The very idea that one should conquer a place for God is itself part of the impasse in which contemporary God-talk is stuck. Attempts at revaluing God are merely mirroring the devaluation of God: the very idea that one has to value God (or to put God in place) at all, is based on a logic which from the outset rules out the very possibility of God's appearing. The only thing that does appear is the will to power of a postmodern self which decides 'to ascribe a value to God – to produce and reproduce God . . . to revivify God – God as the artwork which I shall become' (p. 212). 'I believe in God' becomes a slogan, a point of view, an opinion, a position to be taken up—above all, a political stylisation' (p. 207). The ones who

advocate overcoming the 'death of God' and that declare God is flourishing again, make a parody of believing, only serving their inflated egos. Blaming nihilistic culture for its death drive, they turn out to be the most nihilistic of all. Hemming sardonically comments on those who feel themselves called to speak up for God: 'Here is a true necrophilia, that I should dance with the corpse of this dead God and have it flourish in my hands!' (p. 212).

Hemming's genealogy of the sublime intends to debunk the place where a lot of theologians hoped to find a last refuge.² The many theological attempts to represent the transcendent in a context in which God seems to have no place anymore are exposed as misled, as based on false illusions and a misunderstanding of the ground on which we stand. What is at stake in the postmodern aesthetics of the sublime, far from opening up a space for God, in fact is the securing of the self. Their critiques of Modernity notwithstanding, postmodern thinkers are basically continuing the modern project of securing the subjectivity of the subject, be it in a Nietzschean parody. Referring to Jean Baudrillard's analysis of our televisual age or Slavoj Žižek's film criticism, Hemming strongly suggests that the sublime in our context merely functions within the representational technique of the 'imaginary self-postulation' of subjectivity (p. 30). The postmodern subject is through and through aesthetic: 'Every work of art is at the same time, therefore, the production of a subject: every subject is a self-productive artwork.' (p. 203) The aesthetic turn of theologians ends up in their naïvely occupying positions which are designed by two malfeasant architects: either Hegel or Nietzsche, or both at once. They are unaware that postmodernity's transcending, as articulated in the figure of the sublime, is inevitably involved in the 'constant positing of the priority of the self' (p. 37). The only god that can be envisaged in this postmodern space is a prefab god, subjected to the rules of the all-productive self. No salvation has to be expected from this side: the Sublime is a purely anthropological category.

8.2 THE SUBLIME 'AGAINST THE SUBJECT' (ADORNO)

Hemming's book is expressing a provocative claim concerning our contemporary condition. An all too easily made objection could be that the book does not contain enough elaborated discussions on postmodern protagonists—on Lyotard's interpretation of the sublime, just for one example. Indeed, his major focus is on the philosophical roots which precede today's situation, presupposing that the Modern framework is still ours; and that Heidegger's reading of modern philosophy on the basis of ontotheology is the accurate interpretation of the whole. Rather than regretting the sometimes too aphoristic character of Hemming's claim, a responsible reader of his text should try to corroborate the interpretative direction indicated.³ So one could wonder what would happen if Hemming were to read

² Cf. John Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent,' in Paul Heelas e.a. (eds.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 258–284; Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, London: Routledge, 2001.

³ In his contribution to the symposium Hemming himself undertook such a rereading of his own book by means of a detailed analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy's writings (cf. *A Singular Question* in this volume).

Theodor W. Adorno, one of the pioneers of the contemporary aesthetic turn, an influence on both Lyotard and Žižek. In particular in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno attempts to break through the modern subjectivist impasse, by turning towards the aesthetic, and especially towards the sublime. In this Adorno does not try to overcome the subject, nor to return to a premodern horizon, but to open up within the modern subject the possibility of a real encounter. Art, as that paradoxical given which is both subjectively produced and not to be reduced to the subject,⁴ offers a kind of purgatorial experience, which is the experience of the sublime.

Adorno reinterprets Kant's account of the sublime and indicates how the Kantian sublime involves an experience in which the subject is initially overpowered, but Kant subsequently turns this overpowerment of the subject into an affirmation of the subject. The transcendental subject discovers itself as superior over nature, because it is gifted with reason. Adorno, on the contrary, radicalises the moment of overpowerment by the sublime. The experience of the sublime confronts the subject with a negation of the subject, and this negation cannot be overcome by the subject. The experience of the Sublime is 'Erschütterung'⁵—which can be translated as 'shuddering, tremor, a shock'. For Adorno, the tremor is all but a gratification of the self. Rather it is about the 'annihilation of the self in front of art'⁶. Art refuses to serve the subject, to be a function of the subject.

Art provokes an experience 'against the subject'.⁷ The shock is a 'reminder of the liquidation of the self, which by being shaken up becomes aware of its limits and finitude'⁸. He adds:

At this moment the subject in front of the sublime is moved to tears. Becoming aware of nature breaks up the hubris of its self-positing. "Tears well up, I'm returned to the earth!" In this, the self steps out of the imprisonment in itself.⁹

The sublime confronts the subject with its 'Naturhaftigkeit'¹⁰ (its 'affinity with nature', 'belonging to nature'). The subject finds itself indissolubly bound to nature. The tears of pain, the crying of the subject, bears witness to its bodiliness: the subject is a body.

⁴ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970 (further abbr.: ÄT), 99: 'Das Kunstwerk, durch und durch *thései*, ein Menschliches, vertritt, was of *phúsei*, kein blosses fürs Subjekt, was, kantisch gesprochen, Ding an sich wäre.' ['The artwork, through and through *thései*, something human, is the plenipotentiary of *phúsei*, of what is not merely for the subject, of what, in Kantian terms, would be the thing itself.' (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Newly translated, edited, and with a translator's introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 63)].

⁵ ÄT, 364. 401.

⁶ ÄT, 364: 'die Vernichtung des Ichs im Angesicht der Kunst'.

⁷ Cf. ÄT, 401: 'Hat das Subjekt in der Erschütterung sein wahres Glück an den Kunstwerken, so ist es eines *gegen das Subjekt*; darum ihr Organ das Weinen, das auch die Trauer über die eigene Hinfalligkeit ausdrückt.'

⁸ ÄT, 364: 'Memento der Liquidation des Ichs, das als erschüttertes der eigenen Beschränktheit und Endlichkeit innewird'.

⁹ ÄT, 410: 'Dieser Augenblick bewegt das Subjekt vorm Erhabenen zum Weinen. Eingedenken von Natur löst den Trotz seiner Selbstsetzung: "Die Träne quillt, die Erde hat mich wieder!" Darin tritt das Ich, geistig, aus der Gefangenschaft in sich selbst heraus. Etwas von der Freiheit leuchtet auf'.

¹⁰ ÄT, 295.

In the experience of the work of art, the subject is subjecting itself to the work of art.¹¹ The experience of art consists in an 'ästhetische Entäusserung an die Sache, das Kunstwerk'¹², an 'aesthetic turning outwards into the work of art', or in another translation: 'an aesthetic kenosis of the subject into the work of art'. The encounter with art involves the 'self-negation of the viewer, who virtually vanishes in the work'.¹³ As the word 'virtually' indicates, the sublime does not provoke a real annihilation of the subject: art is necessarily fiction. Adorno does not drop the subject; he is looking for the possibility of a modern subject that turns itself against itself in order to transcend its modern imprisonment in itself.¹⁴ The tremor in front of the sublime is breaking the subject open: in this experience the ego, bent on self-preservation, becomes aware of the fact that it is a pseudo-subject.¹⁵ In the shock of the sublime, the self enters into the possibility to leave its self-positing self behind. In his account of the sublime Adorno highlights its power against the subject. Art is not so much about self-productive representation, but about a process of negation, which allows the subject for a purgatorial movement of self-destruction.

As many postmodern philosophers after him, Adorno deploys in his aesthetics a negativity in order to escape from subject's self-imprisoning drive to self-preservation. Extrapolating from his remarks on Derrida's 'negative theology', Hemming's objection could sound:

The negation of something positive does not yield something of entirely different order, it simply yields a thing which is determined in advance and entirely from out of that which it negates [...] are we not simply performing a reversal within ontotheology's compass, and so leaving everything the same, just upside-down? (p. 62)

Hemming's question owes its rhetorical force to a kind of mathematical evidence. The negative of a positive number is formally seen the same number, the minus added only a minor shift: $x + (-x) = 0$, so negation does not really make a difference. Hemming suggests that the postmodern focus on negativity is just a kind of trick by means of which the modern subject survives: a decentred subject is still a subject; 'it continues to appear in the light of the place provided for it by Descartes, by Leibniz, and above all by Kant' (p. 3). At this formal level, any change in the contents of what appears does not matter.

Does this formalisation take the centrality of the negative in postmodern aesthetics serious enough? To be sure, Hemming has a recurrent interpretation of postmodern negativity. He even states that the subject is marked by 'self-denial' (cf. p. 3 and p. 44), but oddly enough, this self-denial is not referring to a self denying itself, but rather a self denying things in order to produce and secure

¹¹ ÄT, 396: 'sich unterwerfen'.

¹² ÄT, 178.

¹³ ÄT, 396: 'Selbstnegation des Betrachtenden, der im Werk virtuell erlischt'.

¹⁴ This does not imply a weak subject: '[e]inzig das Autonome vermag sich kritisch zu wenden gegen sich und seine illusionäre Befangenheit zu durchbrechen' (ÄT, 178).

¹⁵ ÄT, 364: 'Zwar verschwindet das Ich im Augenblick von Erschütterung nicht real; der Rausch, der dahin sich bewegt, ist unvereinbar mit künstlerischer Erfahrung. Für Momente indessen wird das Ich real der Möglichkeit inne, seine Selbsterhaltung unter sich zu lassen, ohne dass es doch dazu ausreichte, jene Möglichkeit zu realisieren.'

itself. Hemming is stressing throughout the book that the self, the human subject, posits itself by means of the negation of God and the world, the forgetting of the being of being. Hemming claims that the postmodern self is produced and consumed at the cost of God and world. A postmodern aesthetics of the sublime is manifesting the logic of representation, which would be a logic of the subject's production and consumption.

Let us have a look at the *Brontosaurus* once more, the visual example which is said to capture our contemporary situation. Hemming's interpretation focuses on the formal – videographic and cinekinetic – features which exemplify the visual aesthetics which conditions the production of the self. However, the body in case is not just a body, it is an ugly body. And why? Because it is an emaciated body—as Hemming euphemistically mentions 'almost emaciated' (p. 1). It is a body that visualises the dark side of the ruling postmodern aesthetics: it is the body of *anorexia nervosa*. As much as the self is produced, the postmodern self is fascinated by its own destruction. *Anorexia nervosa* is the symptomatic figure of a self-destructive subject. (Another symptom is the high rate of suicide. And especially among popular artists, artists who are the motors of postmodern imagination, and as such the main producers of the postmodern self.) What if the postmodern sublime has more to do with the elimination of the modern subject than with its reproduction? My question is: what place would you give to this self-destructive tendency? Is it just to be considered as the reverse side of the self-productive mechanisms? If so, I would object this reversibility: there is an irreversible moment in destruction, the moment of death, exemplified in the self-mutilated body.

As my remark is basically an *argumentum e silentio*, I just would like to invite Hemming to open up a perspective on this question of self-destruction, as a basic feature of postmodern aesthetics—not only pointing towards a major divergence from a modern self-productive subject, but also invoking another fashionable theological figure: kenosis, the self-emptying understood as a movement of self-destruction. He does not mention kenosis once. Kenosis seems up to a certain extent the negative of the sublime, understood as upliftment. What if the death of God does not necessarily provoke a reaction of self-upliftment, but rather self-destruction? Or is this tragic fate drowned out by the giggling, which apparently accompanied the making of the *Brontosaurus*? However, it is only in *Legoland* that construction and destruction are part of an infinite play which can start every time anew—this reversibility is what Hemming rightly blames a certain misunderstanding of temporality for.

Hemming does not mention the destructive side of today's sublime in explicit terms. It is even absent at places where one would expect it—for example when the apocalyptic is dealt with, which appears without any connotation of destruction, reduced to its etymological meaning of 'unveiling'. Or is the destructive lurking behind the book's Heideggerian motto 'Räumen ist Freigabe von Orten'. 'Räumen' is not just making space, it is a destructive activity—'räumen' is what you need bulldozers for. What if Hemming's *Devaluing God* is the aesthetic act of self-destruction par excellence? The ultimate Kojévian gesture, or rather Adorno's 'virtual self-liquidation', or both at once?

In the end, the radicalism of Hemming's philosophical position seems to

be counterpoised by a theological refuge into the liturgical sphere (p. 244). But *'what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?'* How the altar can stay untouched by the tolling of Nietzsche's funeral bells, remains unelucidated. To put it differently: does Hemming see any relation left between reason and prayer?

Reply to de Maeseneer

LAURENCE PAUL HEMMING

Heythrop College, University of London

I am indebted to Yves De Maeseneer in the care with which he has brought out the entirely negative intentions of *Postmodernity's Transcending*. I want to address two matters in my reply: first to comment on his raising of the question of the relation of *Postmodernity's Transcending* to his reading of Adorno; and second, to provide an answer to the question he poses to me at the very end of his paper.

Before any of these however, it is well to remind ourselves, what kind of *nihil*, nothing, negativity, lies at the basis of Western Metaphysics, beyond metaphysics, and in my own work. Are they all the same? Or does negation manifest itself in different ways? De Maeseneer notes two odd things about *Postmodernity's Transcending*: first, that I have paid insufficient attention to a *nothing* that he finds as a possibility in the work of Adorno; second, that a certain kind of negation fails to appear in the book.

What kind of nothing is the negation that Adorno describes? *Postmodernity's Transcending* traces Kant's understanding of transcendence, through Kant's understanding of upliftment (*das Erhabene*), which I claim is the sublime understood 'as that power and instrument to *negate* beings in favour of being in general, being as God. Upliftment, as the reading-off from beings to being as such *is* a negating' (p. 183, my emphasis). This is in Kant's thought the manifestation of the essential nihilism that Martin Heidegger traced as manifesting itself in the whole of metaphysics, and *as* the essence of metaphysics when he claimed that 'the metaphysics of Plato is not less nihilistic than the metaphysics of Nietzsche'.¹

Both in its discussion of Parmenides and of Protagoras, *Postmodernity's Transcending* attempts to trace another understanding of the *nothing*, the 'nothing' of being in presencing, a nothing in which God and the gods could appear, in the unsaid which persists in the said (p. 69), and the unessence that pertains to the gods. This unessence is 'the way the gods stand *before* they dispose themselves' (p. 219, my emphasis).

¹ Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche, in Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1997 (1961), vol. 6.2, p. 309. 'Die Metaphysik Platons ist nicht weniger nihilistisch als die Metaphysik Nietzsches.'

To which does Adorno's own description of negation apply? De Maeseneer notes that 'Adorno reinterprets Kant's account of the sublime and indicates how the Kantian sublime involves an experience in which the subject is initially overpowered, but that Kant subsequently turns this overpowerment of the subject into an affirmation of the subject'. The suspicion is that this is a different nothing to Kant's, because whereas for Kant 'the transcendental subject discovers itself as superior over nature, because it is gifted with reason' for Adorno 'the experience of the sublime confronts the subject with a negation of the subject, and this negation cannot be overcome by the subject' and so this leads to 'an annihilation of the self in front of art'. Is Adorno's *nothing* other than Kant's, and does it provide for a renewed discussion of subjectivity (as De Maeseneer claims)? Adorno's subjective self-negation is the essentially *interpellative* moment of a modernist (as opposed to postmodern) subjectivity (close in form to that described by Althusser) which leads, as De Maeseneer says, to 'the tears of pain, the crying of the subject, [which] bears witness to its bodiliness: the subject is a body'.

Here is exactly the contemporary theological attitude: we emphasise the *embodiments* of the believer. What De Maeseneer finds in Adorno is the devaluation of the uppermost values and revaluation of all values precisely as Kant's sublime is reinscribed by Nietzsche: instead of the sublime indicating the subjective relation to the supersensible, the sublime returns the subject to embodiment *because there is nothing else beyond*. The Kantian negation 'bounces back' in Adorno, and negates, not *beings* for the sake of being, but the *subject* which then becomes the subject's claim on *being as such* over *the particularity of his being*. This realises itself through the production of a 'self-image' (hence it is essentially metaphysical). The subject reads himself *against* and *from out of* what is depicted here, so that what is here depicted almost before we have realised it, more concerned with the sociological consequences of this self-image – the consequences arising from our embodiment – than with any indication of the supersensible or God. In this sense, we would have to conclude, Nietzsche's nihilism is ahead of and lays out the possibilities explored by Adorno, and not the other way around. Put another way, Adorno's *nothing* is *essentially* the nothing of Western metaphysics.

The genealogy that De Maeseneer suggests for Sam Taylor-Wood's *Brontosaurus* that arises from his reading of Adorno and that opens up the possibility of a further exploration of subjectivity is identical with Kafka's *Hungerkünstler*, the artist who takes control of his body *through* overcoming the rigours of *anorexia nervosa* and turns *himself* into an anorexic artwork. Immediately the connections between the claims of *Postmodernity's Transcending* and its analysis of Nietzsche become apparent (cf. pp. 202–204).² In fact, however, the genealogy of *Bronotsaurus* is closer to Bruce Nauman's 1967–68 cinemetic installation, *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*.³

This installation depicts the repetitive (and so machinic) movements of Nauman's figure (in fact the artist himself), counted by the dictatorial sound-beat of a metronome, so characteristic of the constructivism of high-modernism. Here

² Kafka, F., *Ein Hungerkünstler*, in Kittler, W., Koch, H. G. and Neumann, G., *Ein Hungerkünstler: Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, Frankfurt, Fischer, 1994.

³ One of a series of similar artworks performed by Nauman in the mid- to late 1960's. See: <http://www.eai.org/eai/tape.jsp?itemID=3793>.

the human figure is constrained by the ordered, geometrical regulation of space which is laid out by the beat of time and the frame itself.

The metaphysical relations of the anorexic, even the self-mastering anorexic of the *Hungerkünstler* are essentially those of intersubjectivity—of the structure of valuation which the anorexic sets up by placing the one spectating his *periculum mortis* in a constructive relation of control. The anorexic starves for the sake of the other.⁴

In *Brontosaurus* Taylor-Wood radicalises all of this, and parodies the anorexia of postmodernity's figurations of the body by – sharply – taunting the fat with the figure's emaciation as a private triumph of effortless willed control, not as a horizon of starvation which threatens not only the hunger-artist but also the viewer. This is an essentially postmodern claim to power, proclaiming the overcoming of the negations of subjectivity not through self-annihilation but through parody and the withdrawal into the non-accessible, all of which *Postmodernity's Transcending* itself attempts to trace and perform, not cinekinetically, but rhetorically. The figure of *Brontosaurus* represents the pure prior postulate of the *cogito* in its essential solipsism,⁵ which postulates the refusal of every particular relationship with the 'outer', with world as such, until the subject-postulate 'decides' to enter into world and alterity.

Both in his reference to Adorno and in the genealogy he suggests for *Brontosaurus*, De Maeseneer has perhaps underestimated how radical the critique of subjectivity in *Postmodernity's Transcending* is, to the point where there is no return to the subject possible from its conclusions. The human is simply never constituted by metaphysical negations, and this is the reason why De Maeseneer is unable to find negation just exactly where he looks for it ('Hemming does not mention the destructive side of today's sublime in explicit terms. It is even absent at places where one would expect it').

At the very end of his paper, De Maeseneer says 'In the end, the radicalism of Hemming's philosophical position seems to be counterpoised by a theological refuge into the liturgical sphere (p. 244). But *'what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?'* How the altar can stay untouched by the tolling of Nietzsche's funeral bells, remains unelucidated. To put it differently: does Hemming see any relation left between reason and prayer?⁶

The question is not one of refuge, but rather of what my own negation of ontotheology is concerned with. As De Maeseneer correctly notes, the purpose of *Postmodernity's Transcending* is to blunt and limit the speculative pretensions of speculative theologians. In this I understand much (if not nearly all) contem-

⁴ The complex of these relationships has been analysed in great detail in an unpublished PhD thesis by Knapp, F., *Dandyism as a Principle of Aesthetic Composition*, University of Cambridge, 2001.

⁵ This is the problem which disturbed the resolution of the *cogito* right down to Husserl's attempts to resolve them, from where the work of Buber, Levinas and others took off. *Brontosaurus* returns us to this unresolved problem. Cf. 'Die transzendentalen Probleme der objektiven Welt' ('The transcendental problem of the objective world') which Husserl resolves in appealing to 'transcendental intersubjectivity'. Husserl, E., *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, pp. 91–155, ref. pp. 91, 110.

⁶ De Maeseneer is quoting Nietzsche, F., *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, III, §125, in eds. Colli, G. and Montinari, M., *Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 3, Munich, de Gruyter, 1999 (1967–1977), p. 482. "'Was sind denn diese Kirchen noch, wenn sie nicht die Gräfte und Grabmäler Gottes sind?'"

porary theology, Catholic as much as Protestant, ever yet to be infected with the grandiosity of Hegel. John Milbank has on occasion charged me with a certain ‘nihilism’ precisely because, in detecting this negative thrust, he is yet to understand why it is there. The essential attitude of contemporary theology is, I would suggest, ‘constructive’, it continually rethinks, re-imagines, re-discovers, re-sources. Theology in the contemporary mode seems to me to be a discipline in permanent state of recovery, and as such has been essentially driven by the concerns of philosophy, as *Posmodernity’s Transcending* seeks to show, probably since the emergence of the *analogia entis* as a formal doctrine, but certainly since Descartes.

The well-trained theologian will immediately recognise the familiar tag of liturgical study *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Normally translated into English as something like ‘the law of prayer is the law of belief’, it asserts that what is prayed – and here liturgical, public, prayer is specified – defines and lays out the terms for what is taught, and so believed. Critics of much contemporary liturgical theology have pointed out, however, that the phrase taken like this is ambiguous. For it suggests a possible instrumentalisation of the Sacred Liturgy to the theological. If the law of prayer is tied to the law of belief in this way, then *when* theology revalues itself, the textual and ritual form of the Sacred liturgy must be altered together with it.

The critics who notice this ambiguity of *lex orandi, lex credendi* often point to the discussion of this very phrase in Pope Pius XII’s 1947 Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* which, arguably more than *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, inaugurated the processes of liturgical reform in the Catholic Church.⁷ Pius XII exploits this ambiguity when he absolutely reverses the order of prayer and matters concerning belief (by which, therefore, is meant theology) in the Encyclical. He says: ‘But inasmuch as we desire to differentiate and describe the relationship between faith and the sacred liturgy in absolute and general terms, it is perfectly correct to say, “Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi” – let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer’. As an aside one should note that this exemplifies Pius XII’s fundamental radicalism – this supposed ‘arch-conservative’ in fact is in perfect agreement with all those who argue that the Sacred Liturgy is subordinate and instrumentalised to the decisions and conclusions of theology. Did Pius XII initiate this attitude? Or did he not rather authenticate an inevitability that was already there and had already unfolded? And yet he did this *because* of his confidence in the certitude of Catholic theology, a certitude to which he witnessed in a papacy almost constructed from out of the possibilities of post-war philosophical (I hasten to add, *not* theological) aestheticism and high-modernism.

Now inasmuch as theology has been overcome by its subordination to philosophy, Pius XII, his critics argue, opened the flood-gates for an entirely rationalistic reconstruction of the Sacred Liturgy that Scipio dei Ricci and the disgraced council of Pistoia could only ever have dared hope for.⁸ In the wake of the political

⁷ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter of 20th November 1947 *Mediator Dei* in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis* [AAS], Vatican, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1947, vol. 14, pp. 521–595; p. 541. ‘quodsi volumus eas, quæ inter fidem sacramque Liturgiam intercedunt, rationes absoluto generalique modo internoscere ac determinare, iure meriotque dici potest: “Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi”.’

⁸ For an account of the Synod see Bolton, C. A., *Church Reform in 18th Century Italy*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, esp. pp. 55–114.

and philosophical transformations of the postwar period, the certitude in which he placed his hope collapsed.

My concern is this: in my work on Heidegger and Postmodernity I have precisely sought to show the limits of philosophy in its relation to theology. My argument has been that philosophy has *no place* in the practice of theology, but the informed and well-formed theologian must himself be *well-schooled in the practice of philosophy*. At the same time the theologian must *derive his theology as entirely a commentary on and adjunct to the Sacred Liturgy in its practice, mediation, and proclamation of Sacred Scripture*.

If we take De Maeseneer's second question first ('to put it differently: [do you see] any relation left between reason and prayer?'), the problem it addresses is this: Contemporary theology is driven by an *essential* rationalism: what worse kind, let us say, than by that celebrated by Denys Turner, when he argues that there *must be* a rational demonstration of the existence and being, but that despite 200 odd pages of irascible, scratchy theology *he is not particularly moved to discover it or tell us what it is*. We just have to take it on recommendation it does exist.⁹ When that rationalism is exposed in its vacuity, De Maeseneer's question emerges as a *cri de coeur*—if theology is no longer to be driven by reason, then by what exactly, and what indeed will drive prayer, if the motor force of theology (which has been made to govern prayer) itself is gone? I have shown, at least in very broad outline, how the altar has *already* thereby been touched by the tolling of Nietzsche's funeral bell. The devaluation of God means that the altar has at least the potential to be desacralised—to be nothing other than the occasion for a depotentiation or devaluation, or at worst a nostalgic site of the repetitious *absence* of God. And if theology drives prayer, and theology loses its ground, then what indeed of our prayers to God?

If we follow De Maeseneer's questions concerning Adorno, it is only a short step from De Maeseneer and Adorno to the sociological move attained through Berger's critique of Adorno: theology *rearranges* the subject through the reconstruction of the liturgical event. At every stage the subject reads himself *over-against* what he is present to in the Sacred Actions. Hence the drive for a busied *actuosa participatio* (the watch-word of contemporary Catholic liturgy) because there is never a level at which the subject is sufficiently participative in what (Adorno's theory demonstrates) *essentially annihilates him*. The only recourse is the *constant rearrangement of the Sacred Liturgy, of Theology, and of ecclesial structures to re-accomodate the negated subject*. Here, at the altar, Nietzsche's bell rings out.

How else is the Sacred Liturgy and its relation to theology to be understood?

⁹ Turner, D., *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Cf. esp. pp. 4–5 for the groundwork of his case. He concludes (p. 262) 'I do not imagine that in this essay I have done more than offered some case for a greater theological trust in reason than is customary today, and to have cleared the way . . . for a more theologically positive understanding of reason'. The problem is that this is a reason that never actually delivers the argument it promises. St. Thomas believed that salvation for the human being would mean the deification of the human intellect, but he also argued that prior to the four last things, and to the actual event of the deification, the intellect was forced to take what it would later know *de intellectu* on faith. There was, in other words, content to his deferral of the conclusion of the triumph of the *intellectus humanus*, which would be its actual identity with the *intellectus Dei*. It is frankly unclear what Turner's deferral of the question is *for*.

For the proper Christian reading of Liturgy is surely *iconic*. When I attend the Sacred Liturgy I am recalled to the steps of Calvary, to the Sacrifice and the Sacred Banquet which atones for my sins and the sins of the entire world, and which unites me to the *Ecclesia* both extant and celestial through the sacrifice of Christ which ends my enmity with God. In that sense am I embodied truly, in the body of Christ. I am included in this body (of Christ, of the Church) by virtue of its being the central act of my redemption (the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ) in its iconic and ritual form. Through baptism (and my thereby having been sealed with the Spirit), catechesis, prayer, and penance I am (made) fit to be present, and through the merits of Christ alone, to take my part in participating in and offering the divine sacrifice of the Son to the Father, *through which* I share in the eternal conversation between the Father and the Son. I become the subject and site of divine revelation.

To conclude. The form *lex orandi, lex credendi* is an abbreviation, a tag of the School-room. It originates from Prosper of Aquitaine, where its proper order is unambiguously stated: *ut lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi*: let the law of prayer determine the law of belief.¹⁰ You will note this is the opposite of Pius XII's formulation, and had Pius XII quoted Prosper, and not his abbreviation, all that followed might yet have been different. The question of the altar is one of *my relation and relating to it*. If I relate to it as a 'negated subject' in the way Adorno describes, I will adopt the contemporary Catholic attitude that the Sacred liturgy is inherently hierarchical, performed by one distinct and not typical in the ranks of men (a priest), exclusive, elitist, hieratic, clerical, (you'll recognise this contemporary litany) and so must constantly be depotentiated to become democratic, inclusive (to the point of sentimentality: where is the female in this liturgy, the poor, the person of colour, where the 'ordinary person', where the innocent [suffering] child?), so that almost before we have realised it, we are more concerned with the sociological consequences of the Sacred Actions than with their indication of God.

If, on the other hand, I relate to the altar through an understanding in which the theology that formed me has itself been determined out of the Church's tradition and practise of liturgical prayer, the altar and its meaning will come alive for me, and will open up as an icon.

¹⁰ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitula Cælestini*, 8 in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 51, 209–210. 'Præter beatissimæ et apostolicæ sedis inviolabiles sanctiones, quibus non piissimi patres, pestiferæ novitatis elatione dejecta, et bonæ voluntatis exordia, et incrementa probabiliū studiorum, et in eis usque in finem perseverantium ad Christi gratiam referre docuerunt, obsecrationem quoque sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quæ ab apostolis tradita, in toto mundo atque in omni catholica Ecclesia uniformiter celebrantur, ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi.' ['In addition to these inviolable decisions of the blessed Apostolic See, by which our most holy fathers, rejecting the arrogance of this harmful novelty, have taught (us) to attribute to the grace of Christ both the first steps of a right will and the necessary progress to a praiseworthy ardour and even the perseverance in these efforts until the end, let us consider equally the rites of the priestly supplications which, transmitted by the apostles, are celebrated in the same manner in the entire world and in the whole catholic Church, in such a way that the order of supplication determines the rule of faith.' Translation by Winger, T. M., *Studia Liturgica* vol. 24, 1994, p. 181.]

Curricula Vitae

Yves de Maeseneer (1976) is researcher at the Faculty of Theology, Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). He is a Postdoctoral Fellow of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO-V), working on the relation between theology, politics and aestheticisation. He published articles on Hans Urs von Balthasar, Theodor W. Adorno, contemporary art, globalisation, terrorism, and religious experience.

Stuart Elden (1971) is Reader in political geography at Durham University (UK), and the Academic Director of the International Boundaries Research Unit. His research is at the intersection of politics, philosophy and geography. He is the author of *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (2001), *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (2004) and *Speaking Against Number: Heidegger, Language and the Politics of Calculation* (2006).

Kevin Hart (1954) is Director of the Program of Religion and Literature at the University of Notre Dame (USA). His research is at the intersection of literature, philosophy and (post)modern theology. Among his publications are *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (1989; expanded edition: 2000), *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (2004), and *Postmodernism: A Beginner's Guide* (2004).

Laurence Paul Hemming (1962) is Dean of Research at Heythrop College, University of London. His main interest has been in the relation between philosophy and theology. He has written on the work of Martin Heidegger, as well as St. Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. He has published two research monographs: *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (2002) and *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God* (2005).

Peter Jonkers (1954) is professor of philosophy at the Catholic Theological University of Utrecht (the Netherlands). He publishes on German Idealism, contemporary metaphysics, and philosophy of religion. Recent publications are: *The Importance of the Pantheism-Controversy for the Development of Hegel's Thinking* (2002) and *Illusory Imagination versus Nihilistic Reason: A Historical-Philosophical Case Study of the Role of Imagination in Religion* (2003).

Joeri Schrijvers (1977) is researcher at the Faculty of Theology, Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium). He is Research Assistant of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO-V), working on the ‘theological turn’ of French phenomenology, mainly in the works of Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas. He published articles on Jean-Yves Lacoste’s phenomenology of liturgy.