

Being moved by God?

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

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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 satisfactorily 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 revus 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.

