



Heidegger's Last God and the Schelling Connection

George J. Seidel

Volume 55, numéro 1, février 1999

Fernand Dumont sociologue, philosophe et théologien

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/401217ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/401217ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Seidel, G. J. (1999). Heidegger's Last God and the Schelling Connection. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 55(1), 85–98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/401217ar>

HEIDEGGER'S LAST GOD AND THE SCHELLING CONNECTION

George J. Seidel

Department of Philosophy
Saint Martin's College

*RÉSUMÉ : L'article traite du thème du « dernier Dieu » dans les *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, 1936-1938, de Heidegger. L'auteur présente d'abord un échantillon représentatif des vues heideggeriennes concernant Dieu et la théologie jusqu'à la publication (1989) de cet ouvrage très peu commun. Le « dernier Dieu » est ensuite retracé jusqu'à la première philosophie de l'art de Schelling et ses leçons ultérieures de philosophie de la mythologie ainsi que de philosophie de la révélation. Puis les notions d'Ereignis, de Dasein, le sens de Seyn (en tant que distinct de Sein), le premier et l'autre commencement, sont examinés à la lumière de la thématique du dernier Dieu. Enfin, la Christologie que l'auteur trouve dans les *Beiträge de Heidegger* est évaluée.*

*ABSTRACT : The article deals with the theme of "the last God" in Heidegger's 1936-1938 *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. The author first presents a representative sampling of Heideggerian views regarding God and theology up to the time of the publication (1989) of this highly unusual work. Next, the "last God" is traced back to Schelling's early Philosophy of Art and later Philosophy of Mythology and Philosophy of Revelation lectures. Then, the notions of Er-eignis, Da-sein, the meaning of Seyn (as distinct from Sein), the first and other beginning, are examined in the light of the thematic of the last God. Finally, the Christology the author finds in Heidegger's *Beiträge* is assessed.*

When I was studying in Freiburg in the early 60's, I recall Werner Brock saying that the reason Americans do not understand Heidegger is that they were separated from discussions going on in German university circles during two world wars, and they are not always familiar with the philosophical tradition out of which Heidegger comes. Over the years I have come to appreciate the wisdom of Prof. Brock's remark.

One of the important figures in the tradition for Heidegger is certainly Schelling.¹ This is particularly the case with Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*.

1. In the Preface to her translation of Heidegger's *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1985, Joan Stambaugh remarks that "Schelling is one of the thinkers to whom Heidegger has the most affinity." In *The Finitude of Being*, Albany, SUNY, 1992, p. 72, she suggests that Schelling's appeal for Heidegger lies in the fact that not everything, especially when it comes to God, can be explained rationally. Special thanks go to J. and K. Byron for looking over the manuscript, making suggestions for its improvement, and checking the proofs; and to an anonymous francophone reader regarding dates of works in Schelling's later philosophy.

nis), *Contributions to Philosophy : Concerning the Event*,² specifically in relation to the theme of the last God (*der letzte Gott*) prominent in that work. In an earlier piece, which emphasized the connection between Heidegger and his erstwhile fellow Marburger Rudolf Bultmann, I argued that the *Beiträge* contains Heidegger's Christology,³ and went on to describe the difficulties that any Heideggerian "Christology" would necessarily labor under. Exposing the "Schelling connection," I hope, will both broaden and reinforce that earlier interpretation.

I

Before turning to Schelling, it might be well to indicate some of Heidegger's express views regarding religion and theology. No attempt is made to include every passage in Heidegger's works where he mentions God or theology. Rather, a representative sampling is provided to indicate, if only by way of contrast, why the *Beiträge* represents such a remarkable work in the Heideggerian corpus.

In a work published in 1963, concerning his relation to phenomenology, Heidegger writes that after four semesters he gave up the study of theology (toward ordination to the Catholic priesthood) in order to devote himself to philosophy. He adds that already in 1911 he had begun to see that the strained relations (*Spannung*) between ontology and speculative theology were caused by metaphysics.⁴

What metaphysics means for Heidegger, as differentiated from ontology, becomes clear in *Being and Time*, where, at the end of the Introduction, he calls for a "destructuring" of the history of ontology. Part of what this means is that God must be gotten out of metaphysics, in the same way that metaphysics must be gotten out of theology. Heidegger indicated this in a work he published on Hegel's metaphysics in 1957, dealing with the way in which God gets into philosophy as the essence (*Wesen*) of metaphysics. After all, he argues, one cannot worship a *causa sui* (the "God" of Spinoza), nor can one pray to it or fall down on one's knees before it, or dance and make music to it.⁵

At first sight this may appear to be but the old saw about the difference between the God of religion and the gods of the philosophers. But it is more. It is also the burden of Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead." The metaphysical "God" of a Hegel or a Spinoza must be sacrificed. The God Nietzsche declares deceased, the "God" of the "supersensible ground" or the "goal of the real," must be given a pious burial.

Already in 1927, before a group of theological students at Tübingen, Heidegger had argued that theology, as a positive science based upon revelation and historical

2. *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1989. Henceforth : *Beiträge*.

3. "A Key to Heidegger's *Beiträge*," *Gregorianum*, 76, 2 (1995), p. 363-372.

4. Cf. "My Way to Phenomenology," in Martin HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, tr. J. Stambaugh, New York, Harper and Row, 1972, p. 75.

5. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Identity and Difference*, tr. J. Stambaugh, New York, Harper and Row, 1969, p. 71-72.

occurrence, is, as such, absolutely distinct from philosophy.⁶ He goes on to characterize what is termed Christian philosophy as “wooden iron,” a contradiction in terms. Indeed, in the 1949 introduction prefixed to the fifth edition of *What is Metaphysics?* Heidegger asks rhetorically: When will Christian theology finally decide to take seriously Paul’s words (1 *Corinthians* 1:20) concerning the foolishness of the wisdom of this world, namely philosophy?⁷

On the other hand, in a 19 August 1921 letter to Karl Löwith Heidegger describes himself as a “Christian theologian.”⁸ Of course, the emphasis is on the word “*logos*,” and with it the rich connotations this word has in Heidegger’s thought, from his Heraclitus interpretations on.⁹

In his *Letter on Humanism* (1947), Heidegger asks what being is, and answers that it is simply itself. It is not God, nor is it the ground of the world (*Weltgrund*). He adds that to proclaim God simply as the “highest value” is little short of blasphemy.¹⁰ Still, in the 1929 work *On the Essence of Ground*, he noted that although the interpretation of *Dasein* as a Being-in-the-world makes no decision either for, or against, the possible existence of God; nevertheless, perhaps by clarifying the meaning of *Dasein*’s transcendence it may be possible to inquire how the relation of *Dasein* to God is ontologically constituted.¹¹

However, when one understands what the Freiburg philosopher means by the word “transcendence,” that is, a “standing out” (*ekstatisches*) of what is “standing in” (*Innesteher*) the world,¹² one may wonder whether there is really anything like transcendence in Heidegger at all, certainly in any traditional sense. Still, in a Proseminar he held in Zurich with Professor Spoerri in 1951, Heidegger does intimate that his thought concerning the meaning of being might be helpful in preparing the way for a new theology. This would not imply attempting to think God by means of (*durch*) being; rather, he suggests, were he to write a theology, the word being would not even appear in it. Faith, he says, has no need of the thought of being, for then it would no longer be faith. Luther knew this, says Heidegger, his church seems to have forgotten it.¹³ With Kant, Heidegger agrees that the word being is simply not a possible predicate for God.

6. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1956, p. 218.

7. Cf. Walter KAUFMANN, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, Cleveland, Meridian, 1956, p. 218.

8. Quoted in Theodore KISIEL, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, cf. p. 7, 78, 287.

9. Cf. G.J. SEIDEL, *Martin Heidegger and the Pre-Socratic's*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1964, p. 87-105.

10. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, D.F. Krell, ed., New York, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 228.

11. Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Essence of Reasons*, tr. T. Malick, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p. 91, n. 56.

12. Cf. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Letter on Humanism,” in *op. cit.*, p. 233.

13. I am unaware whether this has been published or not. I typed a copy of it from a transcript circulating in Freiburg when I was there in the early 1960’s.

One can see that Heidegger takes something of the same view regarding the strict separation between speculative philosophy and religion as does Kierkegaard ; so much so, that it is difficult to imagine how theology, in any traditional sense, could be undertaken on Heidegger's terms. For he notes that Christian theology with its doctrine on Creation, takes one of the basic principles of philosophical speculation, "From nothing comes nothing" (*Ex nihilo nihil fit*), and turns it into "From nothing comes created being" (*Ex nihilo fit ens creatum*).¹⁴

One may, perhaps, be inclined to agree, for philosophical as well as for theological reasons, that God should be extricated from metaphysics, certainly if Hegel's "onto-theology" is taken as the model. However, it is difficult to imagine how theology might radically expunge the word being from its vocabulary, that is, if theology would want to say anything about Creation. Further, some form of the verb "to be" would have to be employed in relation to God, the principal subject matter of theology. Indeed, for Heidegger God is not being ; nor is *Dasein* "being." The latter is simply openness to the "it gives" (*es gibt*) of being, as Heidegger puts it in his 1962 lecture *Time and Being*.¹⁵ Perhaps, Heidegger has gotten God out of metaphysics. But then the difficulty with any Heideggerian ontology, totally lacking anything like a traditional notion of essence, is how to determine the meaning of being.

Heidegger may, perhaps, have begun to sense this difficulty. For in a writing published in 1962, concerning the switch (*Die Kehre*) his thought took in the 1930's over his inability to find the language to complete the proposed plan of *Being and Time*, he writes :

Whether God lives or remains dead, is not decided by human religiosity, still less by the theological aspirations of philosophy and science. Whether God is God happens out of, and within, the situation of being.¹⁶

In other words, the position one takes regarding being, even if it should not influence theological considerations as such, is not without its possible bearing upon the kind of God that would be thought, and hence upon the way in which theology would be done.

Heidegger may be willing to grant that some form of the verb "to be" might have to find its way into theological considerations, but certainly not a form of the verb "to exist." Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger draws a sharp distinction between being and existence. He must do so in order to avoid what he regards as the traditional metaphysical approach to being, which would attempt to define human being in terms of the categories of non-human being. By this move he would also attempt to avoid the trap into which Feuerbach inadvertently slipped, namely that of trying to define the human in terms of nature, while defining nature in terms of the human. Thus, Heidegger notes that the only being that can be said to "exist," open-stanced in the truth of being, is *Dasein*. The rock is, but does not exist. The same is true of the tree, the

14. Martin HEIDEGGER, "What is Metaphysics ?" in *op. cit.*, p. 107-108.

15. Martin HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being*, p. 5ff.

16. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Die Technik und die Kehre*, Pfullingen, Neske, 1962, p. 46.

horse, the angel, and God as well. In saying that God is, but does not exist, Heidegger adds that it should not thereby be imagined that God, like any of the other things that are — but which do not exist — is somehow unreal, or a mere idea (*Vorstellung*) of the human being.¹⁷

The limitation of Heidegger's own thinking can be easily discerned in a brief essay written in 1964 on the problem of the verifiability of theological and religious language.¹⁸ The question is approached and resolved, or better, dissolved, in typical Heideggerian fashion. It is simply the wrong question. Theology is not a natural science. The verifiability of non-objectifying (*nichtobjektivierenden*) thought and language is a problem, in Heidegger's opinion, only if one views thought as representation (*vorstellen*); in which case one would have to view art, for example, as equally non-objectifying and unverifiable. Similarly, it is a problem only if language is taken as simply the product of human beings. And as the philosopher has insisted in earlier works, it is primordially language that speaks, not the human being. Human beings come to speak only to the extent that language speaks in and through them.

The above represents Heidegger's views on religion and theology up until the publication, in 1989, of the *Beiträge*, a work written between 1936 and 1938, shortly after — significantly I think — he had delivered a course of lectures on Schelling's *On the Essence of Human Freedom*. Before examining the *Beiträge*, however, it might be well to turn to the Schelling of the Schelling connection.

II

Obviously, it is not possible to do a complete reread of Schelling,¹⁹ even of those areas of Schelling's philosophy that appear to find their way into Heidegger's thought. Rather, I will confine myself to those parts of Schelling that throw light upon the theme of the last God in the *Beiträge*.

Central to Schelling's interests is his philosophy of art. In this respect he is very much the romantic philosopher. Drawing upon the philosophy of Spinoza (Nature naturing, Nature natured), Schelling insists that the self-affirming being of God expresses itself in nature.²⁰ The task of the artist, as he says in his 1802-1803 lectures at Jena on the *Philosophy of Art*, is that of "imaging" the infinite into (*In-einsbildung*) the finite in and through the artist's creative imagination (*Einbildungskraft*, SW III, 406; cf. also IV, 24). In this sense, all art is but the outpouring (*Ausfluß*) of the Absolute (SW III, 392). God is the absolute cause of all art (SW III, 479). It repre-

17. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Was ist Metaphysik ?*, 7th ed., Frankfurt am Main, 1955, p. 15-16.

18. Martin HEIDEGGER, "Das Problem eines nichtobjektivierenden Denkens und Sprechens in der heutigen Theologie," in *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, p. 37-46.

19. For this one may consult G.J. SEIDEL, *Activity and Ground: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Hildesheim, Olms, 1976, p. 89-137.

20. *Schellings Werke*, M. Schröter, ed., München, Beck, 1958, III, 399. Henceforth: SW, with volume and page numbers cited in the text. The supplementary volumes (*Ergänzungsbände*) will be cited with Arabic numerals.

sents the Absolute producing its being (*Wesen*), but symbolically (*zum Symbol*, SW III, 480-482, 502). The work of art, like the Christ, represents the infinite in the finite. The difference between the two, he will say later, is that in art the imaging of the infinite in the finite is relative, and not absolute (SW III, 501). Christ represents the apex (*Gipfel*) of the divine become human, and hence is the human become divine.

In Christ, rather, the finite is symbolized in and through (*durch*) the infinite as the latter by the former [...] so as to lead the finite into the infinite (SW III, 451-452).

This is the essential difference, in Schelling's view, between Christianity and the pagan mythologies or the art produced by the Greek imagination : in Christianity not only is the infinite imaged in the finite, the finite is taken up into the infinite.

For Schelling, the symbolic is where both the general and the particular are absolute. Some examples of the symbolic are : art, philosophy (from the standpoint of arithmetic or geometry), sculpture, and drama. In the domain of the religious, Maria is the symbol of the "eternal woman." In the gospels there are symbolic actions : the baptism in the Jordan, the Last Supper. The church and its liturgy are symbolic. Angels are symbols of good and evil. Indeed, any seeing of the infinite in the finite is a symbolic endeavor (SW III, 427-467 ; on angels cf. p. 357). The symbolical, as art generally, is tied up with Schelling's rich notion of the potencies (*Potenzen*), which, in the *Philosophy of Mythology*, will be tied into what he terms the theogonic process, whereby the histories or stories of the Gods (*Göttergeschichte*) actually come to be in consciousness. The potencies represent the content implied or involved in this process.

It is in this context that the phrase "the last God" (*der letzte Gott*) occurs in Schelling (SW III, 452). He insists that the divine becoming human differs in paganism and in Christianity. In the latter there is a finitude that has fallen away from God which, in the person of the Christ, is reconciled with God through an annihilation (*Vernichtung*) of that fallen finitude. Drawing upon the notion of *kenosis*, from Philippians 2:6-8 — God emptying himself out, taking the form of servant, etc. — Schelling says that in self-sacrificing his infinitude it is as if (*als ob*) Christ puts an end to the old time (*alten Zeit*), the old world of the pagan Gods : Christ is simply there to set the limit : the last God. God is the apex (*Gipfel*), and the end, of the old world of the Gods.

Thus, while earlier acknowledging the greatness of Greek religion and poetry, Schelling insists that "the last God" represents the end of the old world, a world tragically fated to pass away with Christianity. God become human, the infinite in the finite, is the end of the old world of the Gods (SW III, 312-314). It looks forward to (*Vorsehung*), and prepares for, a new age. The new age is that of the Spirit, the ideal principle, the dominant soul of the new world (SW III, 452).

In his *Philosophy of Mythology*, lectures given at Berlin in 1842 (though earlier in Munich, in 1827 and 1831), Schelling examines in greater detail the meaning of myth. The histories or stories of the Gods (*Göttergeschichte*) represent a theogonic process, that is, it is a subjective process. Still, although mythology naturally repre-

sents a God-positing on the part of consciousness,²¹ the question "How does consciousness come to God?" is, in his view, the wrong question. Rather, the first motion comes from God, representing an event that is above and beyond history (*übergeschichtliches Ereignis*, SW VI, 188, 193). In other words, although the process is subjective the *content* of the process is the potencies (*Potenzen*), which are the actual and in themselves theogonic powers.²² Schelling will later speak of the Christ as a cosmic power (*kosmische Potenz*, SW VI, 251). Schelling sees Christ as the *eternal* mediator between the divine and the human. Christ (Christianity) is older than the world, in the world before the world is (SW VI, 579). Such theogonic powers, again, have an objective meaning, not merely a subjective one (SW VI, 348). Thus, it is not the divine Self that is in consciousness, but only a mirror-image (*Gleichbild*) of it. Further, it has a meaning that is not only religious but a general one as well (SW VI, 214, 218).

When Schelling comes to the monotheism section of the *Philosophy of Mythology*, he speaks of God as being itself (*Seyende selbst*); this is the basis for God's uniqueness. God is not *Seyn*, but the general possibility of being (*Seyn*, SW VI, 281ff.). It is in this sense that God's essence is his existence (*Seyn*); which essence is "to-be" (*seyn wird*). This accords with Schelling's rendering of God's reply to Moses in Exodus 3:14, the "name" of God: "I will be what I will be." It is the freedom or existence (the authentic) side of God that overcomes the ground or nature side of God, as Schelling sets this up in his *On the Essence of Human Freedom*. And because that existence is free, he maintains that it is outside being. God is the immediate can-be (*unmittelbar Seyn-könnende*). This is not some mere passive potentiality, but the actual can-be of an active will (SW VI, 287-293). It is Spirit, the can-be of the divine ground as the beginning of its being (*Anfang seines Seyns*).²³

The themes touched upon in Schelling's earlier works come to theological fruition in his *Philosophy of Revelation* (lectures given at Berlin in 1842, again in 1845/1846, and previously from 1831 on). One thing new in the later Schelling is that he transfers the nature or ground (the dark side) of God, as set up in *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, to the bad angels (SW VI, 676; cf. also 633ff.). One item of interest, in relation to Heidegger, is the way Schelling defines faith: it is to take as true (*für wahr zu halten*, SW VI, 409). Heidegger uses the same phrase to describe faith in the *Beiträge*.²⁴ Schelling refers to the New Testament as a new and second creation, not an event (*Ereignis*) that had to happen by necessity, but the manifestation of the most free and personal will of God, an extra-ordinary event (SW VI, 403-404, 416). The "first beginning" is creation (SW VI, 498) — or is it the *Seyn* that is the Father as the source and principle of the divinity (*fons et principium divinitatis*)? At any rate, the second beginning is the Son, who possesses *Seyn*, the appearance of the second potency (*Erscheinung der zweiten Potenz*); this is a new process and one

21. "[...] natürlich Gott-Setzenden des Bewußtseyns [...]" (SW VI, 247).

22. "[...] die wirklich und an sich theogonischen Mächte [...]" (SW VI, 209).

23. SW VI, 297-298. As Schelling will say later, God is essentially freedom (SW VI, 504).

24. *Beiträge*, p. 368-369.

in human consciousness.²⁵ This *Seyn*, he insists, is outside the Father, the Father as the “substance” for the *Seyn* of the Son (SW VI, 442, 452). Indeed, the Son is so completely God that God (Father) would not be God without the Son (SW VI, 504).

Nevertheless, although the first beginning is creation, the *Logos* is there in the beginning (SW VI, 554). The beginning is an eternal one, neither before nor outside the end (complete Spirit), the end neither before nor outside the beginning. Thus, the beginning should be thought as there with the end, and the end as there with the beginning (SW 6, 259). In other words, as Schelling says later : “The beginning of creation is also the beginning of the generation (*Zeugung*, or testimony) of the Son” (SW 6, 323). This is, again, the eternal cosmic Christ.

In the *Philosophy of Revelation*, Schelling devotes some time and effort to an exegesis of the Prologue to the gospel of John (SW VI, 481-510) — seemingly *de rigueur* for the German idealist philosophers — as also an exegesis of Philippians 2:6-8 (SW VI, 431-442, 554-557). What he does, however, is to read John’s Prologue from the perspective of the *kenosis* theme in Philippians. Heidegger follows a similar pattern in the *Beiträge*. In this context Schelling criticizes Fichte’s view of the Johannine *Logos* as merely in knowledge (*bloß im Wissen*).²⁶ Schelling, on the other hand, takes the phrase “in the form of God” found in Philippians 2, reading it, in conjunction with the Johannine *Logos*, as a being outside-the-divine divine-being (*außer-göttlich-göttliche Seyn*), the Godhead hidden (SW VI, 557). The Christ is the “eternal mediator,” his birth a final, but entirely external, event (*Ereigniß*), fully present in the circle of other external givens.²⁷ Schelling has the Christ as a mediator, indeed, as very much an “intermediary being,” since Christ is outside God in virtue of his eternal humanity, outside and independent of the human in virtue of his divinity

-
25. SW VI, 429-431. The *Potenzen* are always connected with consciousness in Schelling, cf. SW 6, 65. The third potency is, of course, the Spirit (SW VI, 457). This sets up the three time periods in Schelling : before creation, the time of the Father ; the present, the time of the Son ; the future, that of the Spirit (SW VI, 463).
26. SW VI, 493-494. For a consideration of the Fichtean *Logos*, cf. G.J. SEIDEL, “The Atheism Controversy of 1799 and the Christology of Fichte’s *Anweisung zum seligen Leben* of 1806,” in *New Perspectives on Fichte*, New York, Humanities Press, 1995, p. 143-151. Fichte gives a specifically theological, not to say Christological, significance to the distinction between *Seyn*, as expressing absolute being (the Father) and *Daseyn*, determinate being or actual existence (Son). Thus, in his exegesis of the Prologue to John’s gospel he says, “[...] the consciousness of being (*Seyn*), the *Is* relative to being, is immediately *Daseyn*” (*Fichte’s sämtliche Werke*, J.H. Fichte, ed., Berlin, Veit, 1845, V, 439-441) ; the *Logos* is the image of the absolute being (*Wesen*) in the actual world (cf. *ibid.*, V, 526). Fichte gets this distinction between *Seyn* and *Daseyn* from Schelling, cf. *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* (1795), though in this early work of Schelling’s the orientation is primarily ethical (like the early Fichte), *Daseyn* in every age striving to posit itself as pure *Seyn* ; the infinite task of practical reason is to make the absolute being and empirical existence (*Daseyn*) identical (SW I, 133-134, with notes). In the *Philosophy of Revelation*, Schelling indicates an awareness of Fichte’s *Anweisung* (SW 6, 53).
27. “Diese Geburt ist ein letztes, aber völlig äußeres, ganz in den Kreis anderer äußerer Begebenheiten eintretendes Ereigniß” (SW VI, 565). Schelling argues that Christ’s resurrection is proof of the irrevocability of the Incarnation (SW VI, 609).

(SW VI, 617). For Schelling, then, the Christ is neither, strictly speaking, divine nor human, but something in between.²⁸

III

The subtitle of *Beiträge zur Philosophie* is *Vom Ereignis* (Concerning the Event). However, the word *Ereignis* has rich connotations in the Heideggerian vocabulary. In Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology* there is no special meaning attached to the word *Ereignis*. When he comes to the *Philosophy of Revelation*, however, the word does take on a special meaning.²⁹ In Heidegger's *Beiträge* the word is often hyphenated (*Er-eignis*), to indicate that he wishes it taken in its deeper etymological sense. Thus, the event is an eye-opener (*er-äugen*, open up one's eyes to). The word is also made to relate to *an-eignen* and *zu-eignen*, which mean make one's own, take to oneself, appropriate. In this connection he uses the neologism *Er-eignung* to indicate that *Seyn* determines that human beings should become the property (*Eigentum*) of *Seyn* (*Beiträge*, p. 263) as a result of their encounter with (*Ent-gegnung*), and decision for (*Ent-scheidung*), *Da-sein*, the "being" that is very much "there."

The encountering of the divine and the human occurs in this *Er-eignung* (*Beiträge*, p. 477). And *Da-sein* — the word is generally hyphenated in this work — is the "in between" (*das Zwischen*) between the human and the divine.³⁰ Thus, in the *Beiträge* Heidegger speaks of *Da-sein* as the Between (*das Zwischen*) in between the human, as the basis for history, and the divine, in its history (*Beiträge*, p. 311). *Seyn* is the "in between" between the divine and the human.³¹ As noted above, a similar position is adopted by Schelling in his *Philosophy of Revelation*: the Christ is neither divine nor human but something in between.³²

Heidegger draws a sharp distinction between *Sein* and *Seyn* in the *Beiträge*, a new sort of "ontological difference." The distinction is in keeping with his earlier stated program to get being (*Sein*) out of theology and being (*Seyn*) out of metaphysics. If I am reading Heidegger correctly, he uses the older spelling for being (*Seyn*) to refer to the divine being in *Da-sein*, as distinct from the human being-there as what is first grasped (*Vorgriff*, *Beiträge*, p. 317). The distinction Fichte made between *Seyn* (God) and *Daseyn* (Christ), with its background in Schelling, was noted above (cf.

28. SW VI 577-578. Which position Xavier TILLIETTE (*Le Christ de la philosophie. Prologomènes à une christologie philosophique*, Paris, Cerf, 1990, p. 160) dubs modalist, the view that distinctions within the Godhead are only transitory.

29. SW VI, 404, 565. In an earlier piece, "A Key to Heidegger's *Beiträge*," I cited Bultmann in this connection. In his commentary on John's gospel, Bultmann speaks of the *Logos* of the Prologue as the *Ereignis* (*Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 18 ed., Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964 [reprint of the 1941, 10th ed.], p. 7); the judgment of the world (*Weltgericht*), the *eschatologische Ereignis*, is implicit in that event (*ibid.*, p. 111).

30. *Beiträge*, p. 311. In his commentary on John's gospel Bultmann also sees the Christ as the *Zwischenwesen* (*Das Evangelium des Johannes*, p. 12).

31. *Beiträge*, p. 470-471. *Seyn* is the Between in the midst of beings and the Gods, and, from that perspective, incomparable, "needed" by the latter, hidden from the former (*ibid.*, p. 244).

32. SW VI, 577-578.

footnote 26). However, Heidegger parts company with both Schelling and Fichte when he says that it is impossible to get to *Seyn* from the understanding of *Sein* that derives from human subjectivity (*Beiträge*, p. 259). *Da-sein* represents the overcoming of all subjectivity.³³

Heidegger goes along with Schelling in believing that there is no rational approach to God, above all when it comes to the meaning of *Da-sein*. Heidegger, however, would go further and remove the element of consciousness and subjectivity entirely from Schelling's theogonic process. When it comes to the meaning of the last God, he says, all scientific knowledge is impossible, and dialectic will be of no avail (*Beiträge*, p. 407-412). This may remind one of Kierkegaard's objections to Hegelianism in the *Philosophical Fragments*, and the necessity of a leap of faith relative to the Paradox. No reason, says Heidegger, can be given for the revelation (*Wesung*) that is *Seyn* (*Beiträge*, p. 509). Indeed, there is a Kierkegaardian, as well as a Schellingian, connection in Heidegger's *Beiträge*. Thus, he insists that there is no direct road leading from the *Sein* of things to *Seyn*, since the viewpoint of the being of things is outside the *Augenblicklichkeit* of *Dasein* (*Beiträge*, p. 75). One may again hear echoes from Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*: the moment of faith relating to the moment that was the Paradox (the infinite in the finite) "in the moment."

In the "Monotheism" section of his *Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling speaks of God as being itself (*das Seyende selbst*), but not as *Seyn*, since the essence of God is "to-be" (*seyn wird*), which "to-be" is, as such, outside being (*Seyn*). Heidegger, on the other hand, insists that God is not a being (*ein Seiendes*) least of all the highest being (*das Seiendeste*, *Beiträge*, p. 472). Likewise for Heidegger, God is not to be identified with *Seyn*; rather, *Seyn* reveals itself tempo-spatially (*zeit-räumlich*) as the Between; which "in between" is never grounded in God, nor in the human, as something living and at hand, but instead in *Da-sein* (*Beiträge*, p. 263). As the "in between" between the human and the divine there occurs with *Da-sein* an *Ent-gegnung*, the encountering of the divine and the human in the appropriation (*Er-eignung*) of the human by the divine (*Beiträge*, p. 311, 477). "Making this truth one's own" (appropriation) is, from the human side, Heidegger's description of faith: knowledge of the essential (*Das wesentliche Wissen*). Faith for Heidegger, as for Schelling, is *Für-wahr-halten*: holding onto what is taken as true.³⁴ As suggested above, Heidegger uses the word *Seyn* to refer to the divine being in *Da-sein*. Again, this represents the newer version of the "ontological difference," which, he maintains, grounds the earlier one in his thought.³⁵ *Das Seyn west*, he says, *das Seiende* "ist."³⁶ Again, for

33. *Beiträge*, p. 303. The relation between *Da-sein* and *das Seyn* is not a subject-object relationship (*Beiträge*, p. 254). In the recently published 1929 summer semester lectures, *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 28, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997, Heidegger criticizes the subjectivism of German idealism as a continuation of Cartesian subjectivism (p. 130, 271).

34. *Beiträge*, p. 368-369. Earlier in "Phänomenologie und Theologie," p. 52-53, Heidegger had described faith, in typically Johannine fashion, as *Wiedergeburt* in and through *der gekreuzigte Gott*.

35. "[...] *das Seiende* is grounded in the *Wesung des Seyns* and has its origin therein" (*Beiträge*, p. 465). Is this the "all things were created through the Word" of John's Prologue?

Heidegger God is not *Seyn*; rather, *Seyn* “west” spatio-temporally as the “in between” (*Beiträge*, p. 263). And how does it “west”? It “west” as a bold and risky venture (*Wagnis*), it “west” as the “in between” (*Beiträge*, p. 475-476). It represents a leap (*Sprung*), a risky venturing forth (*Wagnis*), into the being’s history (*Seinsgeschichte*).³⁷ The verb “west” derives its meaning, I think, from another of Heidegger’s neologisms — so far as I am aware peculiar to this work — namely *Wesung*, a word found at the beginning of the work, at the end, and throughout. He speaks of the *Ereignis* as the *Wesung des Seyns* (*Beiträge*, p. 7). Also, he speaks of *Wesung* as the *Sagen “des” Seyns*, where “des” is a genitive of a peculiar sort. *Wesung*, I would suggest, is simply Bultmann’s *Offenbarung*, revelation, what *Seyn* does when it “west.” The “of” *Seyn*’s bespeaking (*Sagen*) is of a peculiar sort in that the *Logos* is not only the revelation “of” God, it *is* that revelation. In other words, what *Seyn* does when it “west” in the *Er-eignis* is reveal itself: “In the revelation of the truth of Being, in the Event and as the Event, is hidden the last God.”³⁸ Again, the genitive is a peculiar one in that not only is the Event the revelation of *Seyn*, it *is*, or better, reveals itself in, and as, that revelation, *Da-sein*, standing in the openness of beings (*Beiträge*, p. 217). The last God.

Another leitmotif of *Contributions* is contained in the phrase *Wesung der Lichtung des Sichverbergens*: *Da-sein*, as the revealing of the clearing for self-concealing, belongs to this self-concealing which reveals itself as the Event (*Beiträge*, p. 297). *Da-sein* as the other beginning represents a unique being (*einzigartiges Seiendes*, *Beiträge*, p. 296). Like Schelling, Heidegger reads John’s Prologue through the eyes of Philippians (2:6-8): Heidegger speaks of the original revelation as a total break (*Zerklüftung*), revealing itself in the moment of the leaping forth of *Da-sein* in (or into) the Event.³⁹

Another of the important themes in *Beiträge*, also sounded in Schelling, is the distinction Heidegger draws early on between the “first beginning” and the “other beginning.” The first beginning represents the truth of beings. The reaction is one of wonder (*Er-staunen*); philosophy begins with wonder (Plato, Aristotle). The other beginning experiences the truth of being (*Wahrheit des Seyns*), inquiring about the being of truth (*Seyn der Wahrheit*), a truth that gradually dawns on one (*Er-ahnen*, *Beiträge*, p. 179). In Heidegger, as in Schelling and the German idealists generally,

36. *Beiträge*, p. 472. According to Heidegger, it is not possible to inquire into the truth of *Seyn* (*ibid.*, p. 449), even though it is eminently question-worthy (*Frag-würdig*, *ibid.*, p. 413). Indeed, for Bultmann it is the question: “Who are you?” (*Das Evangelium des Johannes*, p. 165), and the answer is the *egô eimî* (I am) of John’s gospel, which, I submit, is precisely the meaning of *Seyn* in Heidegger’s *Beiträge*. *Da-sein* is the truth of *Seyn* that is in play, and well worth asking about (*Beiträge*, p. 313). Again, this is not a matter of the truth of the being (*Sein*) of beings (the old metaphysics), but of the truth of *Seyn* (*ibid.*, p. 428). The truth of *Seyn* is not a metaphysical question: *Das Seyn ist das Er-eignis* (*ibid.*, p. 470); in the face of *Da-sein* metaphysics remains simply clueless (p. 472).

37. *Beiträge*, p. 227-228. And drawing upon the notion of leap (of faith) in Kierkegaard, Heidegger says that there is a corresponding human leap into (*Einsprung*) *Da-sein* (*ibid.*, p. 417).

38. “In der *Wesung der Wahrheit des Seyns*, im Ereignis und als Ereignis, verbirgt der letzte Gott” (*Beiträge*, p. 24).

39. “[...] öffnet sich nur in der Augenblicklichkeit des Vor-sprungs des *Da-seins* in das Ereignis” (*Beiträge*, p. 75).

creation (the first beginning) and the incarnation (the other beginning) are closely linked. Heidegger speaks of the "other beginning" as the echo (*Anklang*) of the "first beginning." This may account for the meaning of *Anklang* in the *Beiträge* (cf. p. 107ff.). Thus, he says that the transcendence of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* is not the same as the transcendence of the creator (*Schöpfer*). (We will leave aside whether there is any real transcendence in *Being and Time*.) At any rate, Heidegger insists that the creator's transcendence totally disappears in *Da-sein* (*Beiträge*, p. 217).

As suggested above, in this tradition the tie up between creation and incarnation occurs in virtue of the idealist exegesis of the Prologue to John's gospel. In his *Philosophy of Revelation*, Schelling insists that beginning and end, end and beginning, should be thought of as coterminous: "The beginning of creation is also the beginning of the testimony of the Son."⁴⁰ Similarly in Heidegger, the last God is the end of the other beginning. However, it is an end in the sense of an "And so forth," the ultimate commencement (*das Anfänglichste von Anfang an*, *Beiträge*, p. 411, 416). As Heidegger says, the Being-unto-death of *Da-sein* does not end in nothing. Rather the opposite; it opens up from the beyond (*aus dem Äußersten*) the openness of *Seyn*. In this context death is not merely the outermost possibility of the *Da* (of *Da-sein*), but the inmost possibility of its complete transformation (*Beiträge*, p. 283, 325). The intrinsic finitude of *Seyn* reveals itself in the beckoning (*Wink*) of the last God. No un-loosing (*Er-lösung*) occurs here; rather, there is the grounding of *Da-sein* in *Seyn* itself, the "belonging to" of the human in *Seyn* through the (last) God. It is this that sets up the conflict between the passing by of the last God and human history.⁴¹

In Schelling the last God spells the end of the old world of the Gods. With the God become human, the infinite in the finite — so that the finite might become infinite — the old world of the Gods is tragically fated to pass away. Likewise, in Heidegger there is a flight of the Gods that have been (*gewesenen Götter*) from their positions of dominance (*Beiträge*, p. 408. Cf. also p. 235-237). We do not know the laws according to which such must have occurred. There is the necessary element of mystery involved in the eventful event (*Er-eignung*), in the revelation (*Wesung*) of *Seyn*. However, Heidegger insists that the *Wesung des Seyns* is not itself the last God. Rather, this revelation grounds the hiding through which the creative power of God comes through (*das Seyn durchgottet*) in word and sacrifice, thought and deed (*Beiträge*, p. 262). In *Da-sein*'s urgent standing in (*Inständigkeit*) there is also a holding back (*Verhaltenheit*): the silence of the passing by of the last God (*Beiträge*, p. 406).

There is one significant difference — theologically a significant one — between Schelling and Heidegger on the score of the future. For Schelling the last God looks forward to, and prepares for, a new age. The new world is that of the Spirit, the dominant soul of the new world. One hears no such voice in Heidegger. Rather, what

40. SW 6, p. 259, 323.

41. *Beiträge*, p. 410, 413. The word *Erlösung* has the obvious religious and theological meaning of redemption or salvation. However, Heidegger hyphenates the word, indicating that he wishes it understood in some more original sense. I am unsure what that original sense is.

sounds concerning what is coming (*Zu-künftigen*) is the Spenglerian note: "Our age is one of decline" (*Beiträge*, p. 397).

According to Heidegger, knowledge, dialectic, system ("The period of the 'system' is past," *Beiträge*, p. 5), etc., will not get us to the truth of *Seyn*. Nor can historical criticism (*Historie*) get at the true history (*Geschichte*) of *Seyn* as Event (*Beiträge*, p. 494); it cannot get at the "in between" (*Zwischen*) of the true history of this encounter between the divine and the human (*Beiträge*, p. 479). Although Schelling may speak of the theogonic *Ereignis* as supra-historical (*übergeschichtliches*, SW VI, 193), one suspects that Heidegger's references here are more to the distinction drawn between *Geschichte* and *Historie* in *Being and Time*, as it is exemplified in the existential exegetical method of Bultmann.

IV

Toward the end of his *Philosophy of Revelation* Schelling offers that he has no particular interest in appearing orthodox; his interest is in explaining the phenomenon of Christianity (SW VI, 593). Similarly, Heidegger's Christology in the *Beiträge* — if I am correct in my reading — is certainly not a traditional one. Neither Heidegger nor Schelling speak of the two natures in Christ. In Schelling's case the word nature is just another word for Spirit, hence it can hardly be used in a contrast between divine and human natures. Heidegger, on the other hand, totally deconstructs the Greek notion of nature (*physis*) so that it cannot really be used in a theological context.

The two philosophers deal with the issue of Christology in terms of the philosophical positions they have previously laid out. Thus, Schelling's presentation rests heavily upon the notion of theogonic powers, and the tie up this has with consciousness and subjectivity, even though he insists that the theogonic powers or potencies have an objective, and not merely a subjective, meaning. For Heidegger, there is still too much subjectivity involved in such a position.

Both Heidegger and Schelling look upon the Christ as an intermediary being. For Schelling, the Christ is outside God in virtue of his humanity, independent of the human in virtue of his divinity; hence, neither, strictly speaking, divine nor human. In Heidegger, likewise, the *Da-sein* that is revealed in the *Er-eignis* is a "Between" in between the divine and the human. Now while it is true that some mutations of gnosticism look upon the Christ as an intermediate being, there are other characteristics of gnosticism which Heidegger clearly does not share. Heidegger's animadversions to subjectivity indicate a strong reaction against any notion of esoteric knowledge or *gnosis* in this connection. Similarly, often characteristic of gnosticism in a Christological context is the view that the death of the Christ was merely apparent. Heidegger's emphasis on the death of *Da-sein*, and the most awe-filled (*furchbarste*) rejoicing attendant upon the dying of a God, death as the greatest testimony (*höchste Zeugnis*) of *Seyn* would certainly run counter to such a view (*Beiträge*, p. 230).

Heidegger develops his own terminology in the formulation of his Christology. There is a basis in the German idealist tradition for some of his choices of words, as has been noted. His program of getting God out of metaphysics and being out of theology is taken care of with the new “ontological difference” between *Sein* and *Seyn*. *Seyn* is not God, but rather, as I read Heidegger, that which is revealed in the revelation of *Seyn* in *Da-sein*. Schelling, in his version of the Trinity in terms of the three potencies, has the Father (the first potency) as the *Seyn* of the Son. In Heidegger *Seyn* is the divine side of the “in between.” One may wonder what has happened to the Father — as well as the Spirit — in the Heideggerian “Trinity.”

I realize that this reading of Heidegger’s *Beiträge* as containing his Christology is a controversial one. It will be controversial for both Heideggerians and anti-Heideggerians. Heideggerians prefer to think of Heidegger as theologically neutral, even an atheist. Anti-Heideggerians see him as an unrepentant Nazi. So how can he have a Christology? To the Heideggerians it may be pointed out that the Freiburg philosopher has always been a theist with a privative alpha, an a-theist. To the anti-Heideggerians it may be said that even an unrepentant Nazi — perhaps especially an unrepentant Nazi — has need of salvation. There is the remark Heidegger made in the *Der Spiegel* interview: “Only a God can yet still save us.”⁴²

42. “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten” (Spiegel-Gespräch, 23. IX. 66; *Der Spiegel*, 30 [1976] Nr. 23, p. 193-219).