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## Heidegger’s Figure of the Last God and Path to Being Itself

**Abstract:** In the present article I explain the role of the figure of “the last god” in Heidegger’s thought after the so-called Heideggerian “turn.” Drawing on Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, it is argued that the figure of “the last god” demonstrates Heidegger’s path to “being itself,” which I distinguish from the path to being presented by him in his earlier thought, mainly laid out in *Being and Time*. The figure of the last god is not to be understood as a god in a religious framework, but rather as an explication of metaphysical radical thinking, rendered as Heidegger’s view of “divinity of the other beginning.” The notion of the last god is presented against the background of several of Heidegger’s ideas (as specifications) discussed in *Contributions* namely: disclosure of being itself, the renewal of metaphysics, the understanding of nothing/nothingness in relation to being, the problem of the “sign” (*Wink*) or the ontic and ontological differences. In a metaphorical form, Heidegger leads us – by means of the specifications given – towards the experience of the “last god,” whose “passage” is for *Dasein* the experience of being itself, is the event of being. In the text presented here, I will “lead” the reader along such “path.” At the same time, I will engage Heidegger’s language without neglecting its semantic “depth,” showing how Heidegger extracts hidden meanings from words.

**Keywords:** being, entity, the last god, sign, nothingness, onto-theo-logy, enowning, essential swaying

## Introduction

Heidegger's philosophical work is primarily focused on the problem of being.<sup>1</sup> His philosophy is commonly divided into two periods. The first period, marked by the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, is characterized through the lens of Heidegger's attempt to develop a fundamental ontology based on an analysis of *Dasein*, the human being. The second period, known as the "turn," follows Heidegger's realization that his attempt to reveal being through the analysis of *Dasein* was flawed, prompting him to approach being from a different perspective. *Being and Time* was well-received by the philosophical community in Germany, and Heidegger intended it to be the first part of a larger project of discovering the true foundation of reality, that is, a "new" foundation of philosophy that returns to the being itself. Heidegger described the status of Western philosophy as a forgetfulness of being, wherein the investigative emphasis is placed on "what" being is rather than on being itself, the "is" of being.

In simple words, since the time of Plato or Aristotle, Western philosophy was primarily focused on the history of the entity ("what" it is), which led to the forgetting of being. *Being and Time* aimed to reverse this historical process of forgetfulness by analyzing a particular kind of being and its representation. We, as human beings, are such beings and analyzing ourselves involves analyzing our being "there" or "here" – *sein* "da." Heidegger referred to this attempt as fundamental ontology that intended to reveal being through the study of man within his own existence. Being-in-the-world (*in der Welt sein*), as a concept, implies that *Dasein* is always thrown, together with its context and circumstances, into the world of entities. Heidegger identified this as a "fall" (*Verfallen*). He aimed to reverse this "fall" by studying the existential layer and returning to the fundamental, the ground, and to pure being, transitioning from the represented ontic state of the falling to the ontological state of existence represented by *Dasein* – the human being.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "being" to refer to the German words *Sein* or *Seyn*, even though I am aware of the differences between these terms. For more information on the word *Sein*, especially in the context of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy* and the old German form of *Seyn*, please refer to the extensive *Translator's Foreword* in the English translation of this book by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly: Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), XXII–XXIII.

<sup>2</sup> I understand the word *Dasein* to mean human being, despite the fact that its etymology suggests other meanings. See, e.g.: "In everyday German language the word 'Dasein'

Heidegger tried to put this project in the context of the ontological difference that exists between entity and being.

Heidegger considered his own philosophical strategy of *Being and Time* to be problematic, since it gave the impression that he was still operating within the philosophical tradition he criticized.<sup>3</sup> First of all, according to Heidegger, the analysis of the human being did not lead to the discovery of being itself. In the second half of the 1930s, after publishing *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger changed his approach and underwent a unique “turn” (*Kehre*), leading him to reject fundamental ontology in favor of something he enigmatically referred to as the “event-enowning” (*Ereignis*)<sup>4</sup> of being. This “turn” marked the second stage in Heidegger’s thought, departing from transcendental and horizontal thinking prevalent in *Being and Time* and opening up philosophical thinking to being itself. The objective of this project was to grasp being in its own essence, which should come out of its concealment, and reveal the “event.” Heidegger describes this process in his enigmatic work *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, which remained unknown until its publication after the author’s death, in 1989, even though it was written between 1936 and 1938. The book remains one of Heidegger’s most mystifying works.

It is *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* that will be the primary source for the present paper; yet, I will refer to his other works

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means life or existence. The noun is used by other German philosophers to denote the existence of any entity. However, Heidegger breaks the word down to its components ‘Da’ and ‘Sein,’ and gives to it a special meaning which is related to his answer to the question of who the human being is. He relates this question to the question of being. Dasein, that being which we ourselves are, is distinguished from all other beings by the fact that it makes issue of its own being. It stands out to being. As Da-sein, it is the site, ‘Da,’ for the disclosure of being, ‘Sein.’”, <https://iep.utm.edu/heidegge/>. It seems to me that *Dasein* as human being is legitimate. An excellent illustration for this can be a fragment from the book *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*: “If man is only man in the ground for metaphysics is rooted in the question concerning the Dasein in man, i.e., concerning his innermost ground, concerning the understanding of Being as essentially existent finitude.” Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 161.

<sup>3</sup> See: Alberto Rosales, “Zum Problem der Kehre im Denken Heideggers,” *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung* 38: 241–262; Jean Grondin, *Le tournant dans La pensée de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: PUF, 1987), 250–251. Both of these authors see the failure of Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology from the first period in the problem of truth and the radicalization of the notion of finiteness.

<sup>4</sup> The problem of translating the German term *Ereignis* is an issue in itself that requires a separate study. There are two translation proposals for this term in English. The first one is the word “event” which is commonly used in English. The second one is proposed by Parvis Emad who created the word “enowning.” In my paper, I accept Emad’s proposition.

as needed to present a comprehensive view of the issues at hand. I argue that Heidegger achieves the possibility of opening up to being itself with the help of the enigmatic “passing of the last god,” who is fundamentally distinct from the gods or divinities of the past. In Heidegger’s conception of the last god, there is no reference to the divinity of faith, and there is no problem of faith *per se*. Rather, there is a “theological” problem (*theos* plus *logos*), which remains concealed by Heidegger as “onto-theo-logy” – the god/divinity connected with being (ὄντος ὄν) and the logos of knowledge.

## Disclosure of Being

The disclosure of being from enowning is a process that Heidegger describes in *Contributions* as essential swaying (*Seyn west*). It is important to remember that he uses the verb *wesen* only in reference to being. The verb translated as “to hold sway” is obsolete in the German language, and Heidegger attempts to restore that word in the sense of its context in philosophical language. In the past, German *wesen* was the equivalent of the verb *sein* – to be, and Heidegger links *wesen* with “being.”<sup>5</sup> Generally, *wesen* has been retained in past forms of the verb *sein* as *war* or *gewesen*.<sup>6</sup> However, in contemporary German, it is mostly used as the noun *Wesen*, which means essence, referred to as *essentia* in the scholastic tradition. This form of the entity of being is explicitly used by Hegel, who claims that the entity has ceased to exist, its time has ended, and it has become an essence

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in der Metaphysik*. Gesamtausgabe, Band 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1983), 76–77; Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford-Maiden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 53.

<sup>6</sup> It must be pointed out that the German *Gewesen* refers to the past in the meaning of previousness – “has been.” This is very important, because it gives the sense of connection with “Being.” Whatever was, in a sense, still “is,” although, obviously, it is not now present. Presence is something quite different, just like the past, which Heidegger discusses with reference to the root of the term *Vergehen* (*-heit*). Thus, the past (and indeed the future too) is related to the “transition,” i.e., the process of decreasing and increasing. Previousness does not have this aspect, so in a sense it always is, even though it refers to a particular character of “is,” or being. The aspect of *Gewesen* as previousness and its relations to the past (and thus to time) is discussed by Kamil Sipowicz: Kamil Sipowicz, *Heidegger: degeneracja i nieautentyczność* (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2007), 47. See especially footnotes 14, 15, 16.

that no more “is” but has remained as “something.” In this sense, for Hegel, the grasping of existence is always belated, because in the dialectic process, we can only explore what has already passed, what has become the past, or in other words, what has transformed from “is” to something that “was,” that is, to essence-*Wesen*. This meaning is reflected in the past form of the verb *sein* – the aforementioned *gewesen*.<sup>7</sup> Whatever exists – and primarily, whatever will exist – is subject to the process of becoming and existing, which Hegel understood as a dialectical process of transition from thesis to antithesis to synthesis.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger uses the verbal function of *wesen*, which is no longer used in German. As a verb, it should be translated as “to hold sway,” because it refers to the presence or appearance of something. This is significant because it is closely related to the word *das Anwesen* and its derivatives: *die Anwesenheit*, *abwesen*, *das Unwesen*, which alludes to “presence,” “appearance,” or their opposites.<sup>9</sup> Thus, essential swaying must refer to making present, appearing, or becoming, while also pointing to the dynamic character of the phenomenon with the used verbal form.<sup>10</sup> In brief, Heidegger presents his critical assessment of traditional philosophy based on forgetting its ground, its proper foundation. In language, this is manifested in the discontinuation of the verbal form *wesen* in favor of the static, non-dynamic nominal form *Wesen*. Thus, according to Heidegger, it is possible to approach the whole history of philosophy as a process in which there was a transition from the verbal form *wesen*, expressing movement, to stability and constancy expressed by the noun *das Wesen*. Philosophy has become the metaphysics of entity (actually, its static, constant essence – *das Wesen*), abandoning the reflection on being, the process of being, *sein*, *wesen*, that is, on the swaying

<sup>7</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 337.

<sup>8</sup> “Die Sprache hat im Zeitwort Sein das Wesen in der vorgangenen Zeit “gewesen” behalten; denn das Wesen ist das vergangene, aber zeitlos vergangene Sein”. Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Zweiter Teil (Berlin: Meiner Verlag, 2003), 3. See Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 337.

<sup>9</sup> Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Parvis Emad, *On the Way to Heidegger's “Contributions to Philosophy”* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 29; Constantino Esposito, *Die Geschichte des letzten Gott in Heideggers “Beiträge zur Philosophie,”* *Heidegger Studies* 11 (1995): 41. As usual, in the case of *Contributions* quoting longer fragments is quite risky, because the text is semantically very “dense.” Still, I would like to point to Heidegger's use of the nominal form of the verb *wesen* in the form of *Wesung*, which means making present, ownmost, holding sway. Heidegger writes about it as follows: “Wesung heißt die Weise, wie das Seyn selbst ist, nämlich das Seyn. Das Sagen ‘des’ Seyn. Das Seyn west als die Notschaft des Gottes in der Wächterschaft des Daseins.” Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Gesamtausgabe, Band 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994), 484.

and presence of entity. Metaphysics has become the reflection on the “what” of what is, and not on the “is” of what is.

## The Way to Disclosed Being

According to Heidegger, the swaying of being is the core of and the return to “authentic” philosophy; it is the key to building a proper ontology that will overcome the metaphysical crisis of the false (ontic) approach to what is the beginning, ground or foundation of all reality. The philosopher emphasizes that the swaying of being (since it is a being that holds sway or is present) is performed through a sign (*Wink*). This process is called the enowning (*Ereignis*) and is disclosed to human being-*Dasein*. In this, we can see a clear distinction between entity and being.<sup>11</sup> For Heidegger, entity is the expression of departing from and forgetting being. However, this forgetting is not absolute, as even in forgetting the visage of being is revealed flashing through the entity though remaining hidden. This view is based on Parmenides’s postulate of the unity (identity) of being and thinking, strongly emphasized by Heidegger: when we think and express “thinking,” we think and express being.<sup>12</sup> For example, phrases such as “entity is departing” or “entity is forgetting” refer to being, since the “is” used in these phrases expresses “being.” But in this very thinking (and expression), being is hidden, camouflaged, or disguised as a link or a connect occurring in a sentence. Heidegger suggests that we should see the primacy of being over entity, the primacy of concealed being whose essence lies in remaining in this state and which can only be disclosed by the proper approach to what entity really “is.” We can understand it as the process of disclosing being or making it come to light, which is the dynamic enowning, acceptance, authenticity of “is” and also the authenticity of human being as *Dasein*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Esposito, *Die Geschichte des letzten Gott*, 41–42.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 432–434; see Esposito, *Die Geschichte des letzten Gott*, 40–41; Franz-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Das Ende der Metaphysik und der andere Anfang des Denkens. Zu Heideggers “Kehre,”* *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 104 (1989): 48–54; Franz-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wege ins Ereignis. Zu Heideggers “Beiträge zur Philosophie”* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1994), 64–84.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 255–256. We must understand authenticity properly, then. Heidegger uses the term *Eigentlichkeit*, which in German is related to the

This process also involves the relationship with one more important element, as according to Heidegger, it holds sway or is ownmost in a sign (*Wink*). The function of the sign seems to be unquestionable, because the sign is necessary. It seems to be the essential sway of being itself. Being is revealed in (or through) a sign, although being remains closed, concealed, and in the sign being stimulates *Dasein* to reflect (not as intellectual reflection, but as a motivation to think and ponder) and to experience itself. The sign is also something like a beckon or a summoning gesture, so it includes some dynamism, which manifests itself in calling the last god, even if it is unclear whether the last god is coming nearer or moving further away from it.<sup>14</sup> The sign is the experience of evanescence: with the help of the sign, man recognizes and realizes that entity conceals being, or we may say, that being hides itself behind entity, which seems a complete abandonment of being.<sup>15</sup>

## Philosophy and Renewing Metaphysics

Focusing solely on entity, which, according to Heidegger, is characteristic of European metaphysics, has resulted in the obscuration of being itself as the ground and foundation and in permanently blocking access to it. Entity became the sole object of philosophers' interest because it became "something" as the ground, and the question of "what is entity?" has ignored the fact that entity first and foremost "is," that is, has ignored the being of entity.<sup>16</sup> As we

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root *eigenen*, i.e., all that is included in enowning, owning, or property. The English term authenticity does not include this relationship at all. Still, I use it, following K. Sipowicz, who explains in detail why he suggests using this term with reference to Heidegger's thought. Thus, authentic *Dasein* would mean *Dasein* that is gifted, enowned, and actually (*eigentlich*) existing (i.e., ontologically) in contrast to the ever-present inauthenticity of *Dasein* in an ontic (i.e., entity) context. Cf.: Sipowicz, *Heidegger*, 9–13. In English, authenticity is related to value, for example W. J. Richardson writes: "So I suggest that Heidegger does propose authenticity as a value. And he has two main ways of defending or justifying this value to us [...]." William J. Richardson, *Heidegger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 168 (see more on pages 168–172).

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 385, 409.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, "On a Divine Wink," in *French Interpretations of Heidegger: an Exceptional Reception*, ed. David Pettigrew and Francois Raffoul (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 169.

<sup>16</sup> Susan M. Schoenbohm, "Reading Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy: An Orientation*," in *Companion to Heidegger's "Contributions to Philosophy"*, ed. Charles

know, this forms the core of Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics, which turned out to be the metaphysics of entity (as entity) or the discussion of the essence (*essentia*) of entity.<sup>17</sup> However, Heidegger argues that metaphysics should focus on the being of this entity, recognizing the significant difference between entity and being, because if the entity "is-exists," entity and being must be two distinct things.<sup>18</sup> Traditional metaphysics failed to acknowledge this difference, reducing being to entity: "In the entire history of metaphysics, i.e., in all of thinking up to now, 'Being' is always grasped as beingness of beings and thus as these beings themselves. As the result of philosophy's asthenia in differentiation, still today all 'thinkers' begin, as it were, by equating Being with beings."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, according to Heidegger, this confusion and the resulting focus on entity is the key issue in historical metaphysics and affects its character.

Heidegger proposes a different approach to philosophy and metaphysics, suggesting that all focus should be on being, which discloses itself when the "observer" is attentive. Furthermore, in order to be whole, being must become "ripe." Ripeness implies the possibility of giving and gifting.<sup>20</sup> This is the exhaustion of the finitude of being, and being itself reveals an intrinsically inner finitude. This finitude is not a limitation or imperfection, but rather it combines the beginning and the end, representing the completeness of everything. The finitude of being is the most fundamental experience of *Dasein* in which the entire dimension of the finitude of being is disclosed to humanity through the sign of the last god. Being appears as absolute, total possibility, and the finitude of this possibility does not "limit" it. With reference to being, finitude must be understood as the possibility of "is" in

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E. Scott, Susan M. Schoenbohm, Daniela Vallega-Neu, Alejandro Vallega (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Einführung in der Metaphysik*, 95–96.

<sup>18</sup> For Heidegger, the difference between entity and being is key and constitutes an expression of his understanding of transcendence. See, for example: Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 318–330. In English translation, the ontological difference is expressed by the terms Being and beings. I use the terms being and entity.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 187. Cf. the original text: "In der ganzen Geschichte der Metaphysik, d. h. überhaupt im bisherigen Denken, wird das 'Sein' immer als Seiendheit des Seienden und so als dieses selbst begriffen. Noch heute geht bei allen 'Denkern' die Gleichsetzung von Sein und Seiendem und zwar auf Grund einer Unkraft des Unterscheidens aller Philosophie gleichsam voran." Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 266. I decided to translate the term *Seiendheit* (beingness) as *entity* or even *essence*, because Heidegger points out to the historical entanglement of metaphysics in the distinction between the essence and existence, which may be better highlighted in my version. Cf.: Richardson, *Heidegger*, 16. See an interesting discussion in: Emad, *On the Way to Heidegger's*, 138–140. The author suggests the use of neologisms *is-ness* and *being-ness* in English.

<sup>20</sup> See David Crownfield, "The Last God," in *Companion*, 224–225.



itself, the possibility of being, and this finitude encompasses all possibilities concerning the future. It also encompasses the possibilities of “being no longer,” which Heidegger refers to as the revelation of “the most concealed essence of Not and Not-yet and No-longer.”<sup>21</sup> This is a pivotal moment in Heidegger's metaphysical thinking, as it is connected to his specific perception of non-entity and nullity, leading to a strong critique of the nihilism present in philosophy.

The totality and wholeness of being must include all possibilities, including the possibility of “negation” in the temporal sense, that is, that which has been has already passed and is no longer (does not exist). But that is not all, because the aforementioned totality and completeness of being must also include what will happen in the future, that is, what is not yet. In fact, from a temporal perspective, what has already been and what will be are the same, because both the past and the future contain the same form of “is not.” We must also remember that for Heidegger, being is not a static eternity, a constant “present” that exists in an unchanged form beyond time. On the contrary, for him the sense of the temporality of being, which is approached specifically in opposition to the temporality of beings, seems to be the proper turn towards being itself. Being is unknowable, but articulated. In order to grasp what this means properly, it is necessary to grasp the nature of possibility. Possibility is limited by consistency (i.e., something is possible only if it is internally consistent), and the latter involves opposite, temporally opposed states. In this sense, the possibility of being must include both “is” and “is not,” which fully reveals the dynamic character of being. At the same time, Heidegger emphasises that “not” is not to be understood as exclusion or absolute negation, as, for example, in Hegel's thought. Hegel distances himself from the understanding of negation as a constant antithesis in a dialectical relationship.<sup>22</sup> According to Heidegger the “not” plays the role of a “positive” complement to being and is not the absolute negation of its content. Heidegger refers to the notion of nothing, which in the metaphysical tradition was associated with non-being and the negation of being, that is, with something harmful, empty or destructive: “[...] the nothing is always grasped as a non-being and thus as something negative. If, moreover, one sets the ‘nothing’ in this sense as the goal, then ‘pessimistic nihilism’ is complete; and the contempt for all sickly ‘philosophy of the nothing’ is legitimized.”<sup>23</sup> He presents an insightful critique of this view, which is deeply rooted in metaphysics.

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<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 268, 410.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 265.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 187.

## Nothing and Being Itself

Heidegger understands “nothing” in a unique way.<sup>24</sup> First, for him, nothing is not negative; it is not an exclusion or a lack of “something.” Nor is it the goal of activity or thought. He sees “nothing” in the dynamic of being-nothing as the vibration of being itself, which leads to the conclusion that “nothing” exists to a greater degree than any entity. An entity is static, closed to possibility (because it is a possibility that has been realised). In the tradition based on the metaphysics of entity, non-entity has been identified with nothing, and both (non-entity and nothing) are taken to be complete opposites of entity; hence they are the representatives of emptiness, non-existence, lack of content; they are the exclusion of “something,” in other words “not-something,” and hence they are nothing. This is the traditional approach to nothingness. Heidegger’s thinking goes in a completely different direction. Referring to a fragment of Hegel’s work, he develops his own thought, pointing to the proper or original (in his view) meaning and place of nothing. According to Hegel, “pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same.”<sup>25</sup> According to Heidegger, Hegel understands this “sameness” of being and nothing as the inversion or reflection of the same content. Nothing is therefore the complement of being. Heidegger emphasizes that metaphysical (i.e., traditional) thinking prevents a proper understanding of the meaning of nothing, which is clearly visible even in Hegel’s thought quoted above. This is because Heidegger’s notion of nothingness goes beyond all that the previous tradition included in the content of entity, seen in relation to non-entity (i.e., to nothing). In this tradition, entity is positive content, and nothingness, as its absolute negation, shows a complete lack of content, and is therefore recognised as a path of falsehood. “Nothing” is an absolute impossibility. But in order to get a proper understanding of nothingness, we must first change our way of thinking about it, and this is exactly what Heidegger proposes. He suggests that we erase entity from our thinking about “nothing” and stop referring to nothingness as its opposite and complete negation, and instead think of being “in order to be strong enough to experience the ‘nihilating’ in be-ing itself, which for the first time actually sets us free into be-ing and its truth as the most sheltered gift.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Richardson, *Heidegger*, 154–156.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 59; see Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 266.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 188.

Assuming this stance, we should comprehend nothing/nothingness in a distinct and appropriate sense, not as the absolute opposite of being (analogous to the traditional approach of nothingness/nullity in reference to entity), but as something that is connected with it, that is, as the content that represents being. Non-being and being complement each other, and Heidegger emphasizes that the moment of the essential sway of being and non-being is essentially the same – they are two “sides” of the same, “one and other.” The dynamism of being compels a positive understanding of nothingness and the being as being or as something “one,” (it) must encompass “everything,” and therefore also includes nothingness, which is something “other” than being. The “other” was traditionally always contrasted with one and indefinite, seen as an absolute negation of entity. The perspective adopted by Heidegger leads to a different conclusion: all the derivatives analyzed here, such as nothing, “not,” or “other,” are merely different aspects of being, and thus nothingness is of a positive nature, as it belongs to being.<sup>27</sup>

Heidegger posits the affirmative nature of nothing/nothingness in the context of the enowning of being. The “differentiation” between being and nothingness can occur, because without it, being could not be enowned. Truth is concealed, and enowning reveals it in the aletheic sense, as the disclosed content of being that holds sway.<sup>28</sup> Simultaneously, the bestowing being also exhibits “refusal” and rejection. Heidegger refers here to the twofold ripeness (fullness) of being to en-own and of *Dasein* to accept this enowning of being within itself: “Fullness is pregnant with the originary ‘not’; making full is not yet and no longer gifting, both in counter-resonance, refused in the very hesitating, and thus the charming-moving-unto in the removal-onto. Here [is] above all the swaying not-character of be-ing as enowning.”<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the most pertinent commentary on this fragment of *Contributions* should emphasise the need to grasp the proper meanings of being and nothingness in relation to enowning (*Ereignis*), and ultimately what Heidegger ascribes to being and nothingness. In English, it should be clarified that the term “differentiation,” which I use to refer to the relationship between nothingness and being is not the most accurate translation of the German term *Unterscheidung*, as this term encompasses meanings that cannot easily be derived from the English word “difference.” I refer in particular to the semantic content of the German verb *scheiden*, which conveys notions of dividing, dissecting, separating, departing, and even divorcing. The prefix *unter-* means something that is underneath, at the base, and the foundation.

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 267.

<sup>28</sup> Richardson, *Heidegger*, 81–83.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 189.

Thus, *Unterscheidung* denotes first and foremost something that is divided or separated from within, separated internally, but not externally. Therefore, it should be noted that it is not Heidegger's intention to separate being and nothingness in the sense of two "elements" independent of each other. For when being is in the process of dissecting or deciding, it is subject to an internal fragmentation, which, however, does not exist in an ontological sense. Enowning as a gift discloses being itself to *Dasein*, which is specially prepared for it. According to Heidegger, nothingness and "not" are integral parts of this disclosure and enowning. The swaying of being is its "dissecting" – revealing it in its extremity, while nothingness is the "outcome" of this process and a positive element of the resulting relationship that arises from the dis-section. This process reveals the true (disclosed) structure (content) of being.<sup>30</sup>

## The Ontology of Being

Contradictions such as one and many, entity and non-entity, something and nothing force *Dasein* to make a decision, a distinction: one or the other. This distinction, dissection, or division may seem empty, but according to Heidegger, it is only so from the perspective of the ontic philosophical tradition, that is, from the perspective of the entity. A sharp ontic gap should be visible in the fact that thinking contrasts entity and non-entity, or as in Plato's thought, the only truly existing being is the idea, which is eternal, necessary, and true, as it is the only being with a complete positive content of being itself. For Plato the idea is unchangeable, so any alternative as a result of its division or separation must be an ontic absurdity. Therefore, the idea by its very content excludes its (positive) division – there is no "the one–the multiple" alternative, no dynamism, no possibility, so that the static ontic image of the idea is also transferred to thinking. Thus, thinking is always about "what is," about entity – τὸ ὄν, and if thinking were to progress further, through anamnesis, it would discover the eternal world of ideas (the sphere of noesis) and thinking would see the idea as "the most true entity" – as οὐτὸς ὄν. So, thinking cannot refer to nothing or to a non-entity in a positive way (i.e., in terms of content), because for the mind,

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<sup>30</sup> See: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 99–101.

nothing has only the aspect of emptiness as a negation of entity, that is, it is something devoid of content or the lack of any "is." This is more or less the philosophical tradition that Heidegger calls ontic. However, he highlights another philosophical moment based on the distinction between onticity and ontology. Accurate knowledge of τὸ ὄν must refer to the original meaning of the word, expressed by the Greek participle "ὄν" used here. It means "to be something," so entity is the designation of what something is, and being expresses the proper, original "participial" sense, that is, dynamism and activity, not stasis or stability. This is the basis for the identification of entity understood as the static and objective (or nominalised) form of the verb "to be," expressed in Greek is expressed by the grammatical article added to the participle (τὸ + ὄν).

According to Heidegger, the European metaphysical tradition has taken an ontic direction, focusing on entities. However, there is another differentiation of "is," which includes something unique that is contained in the ontic content and constitutes the basis for entities as such. The focus should be on "τὸ ὄν" alone, on the very "being." Being, as a dynamic state of continuous "is," of existence, seems to Heidegger to be *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of entity, for entity as such (i.e., entity as entity), and thus, also *conditio sine qua non* for any onticity. The dynamism of being (or, in Heidegger's language, be-ing) requires a different approach to its fullness. Being is one, and being "includes" everything else, including its opposition, not as a negation, but as an affirmation. Heidegger writes: "But this seemingly most general and emptiest distinction is the most unique and fullest decision. Therefore, for this distinction we cannot presuppose, without self-deception, an indistinct representation of 'be-ing,' however such exists. Instead: be-ing as enowning."<sup>31</sup> In this passage, Heidegger connects decision and enowning with being. "Decision" is an English translation of the German word *Entscheidung*. There is a kind of tension between the terms *Unterscheidung* and *Entscheidung*: a distinction that leads to de-cision or dis-section, which ultimately produces a sentence. The decision and enowning refer to being, and the fundamental (key) aspect of being, which is present/ownmost in the enowning, is revealed in the decision. The enowning of being is a unique, unrepeatable de-cision, experienced as thought by *Dasein*. Therefore, decision leads to the enowning of being, and the key to this seems to be the distinction or differentiation made by the intellect, thanks to which the intellect grasps the difference and turns to the affirmative expression of nothing. As we know, for Heidegger, nothing or "not" is revealed as the dynamic completion of being, which, from the perspective

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<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 189.

of reason, differentiates between two extreme moments of being's dynamic, that is, "yes" and "no." This allows for being to be grasped in full, bearing in mind the reservation oft-repeated by Heidegger that being will never disclose itself fully or completely; in other words, it will always remain partly concealed. This dynamics of being takes place between opposites, so "not," "nothing," or "not-being" participate in a vibrant movement initiated through the event of being itself. For Heidegger, event is a constant "hesitant refusal," and "not" brings the state of suspension-vibration between one and the other. The nature of "not" is disclosed in being as event; "not" is the effect of the opposing vibration of movement, causing the disclosure of the swaying nature of nothing (nothing becoming ownmost) as a positive moment in the dynamic content of being.

Hence, Heidegger wants to attribute nothing to being: it is the basis of disclosing/event of being, complements it and constitutes its necessary moment. Thus, to disclose being in the event also means to disclose nothing – the "not." In this sense, Heidegger writes metaphorically about the fullness of being: "In the fullness, in the vigor for the fruit and the greatness of gifting, there lies at the same time the most hidden and most sheltered essential sway of the not, as not-yet and no-longer."<sup>32</sup> The whole event, that is, the gift of *Dasein* with the truth (disclosure) of being, reveals the sense and meaning of nothing. Nothing is not only a negation of entity in being; nothing is required in the essential sway of being, in which fullness or ripeness is achieved through a sign (*Wink*). The ripeness – as mentioned above – is the readiness to give. Finality, the ultimate finitude of being, is disclosed in this as the revelation of the sign of the last god.<sup>33</sup>

## A Sign of the Last God

Heidegger's thinking refers to being itself. He criticises the earlier metaphysical tradition whose object was entity as entity (*ens inquantum ens*). In that tradition, "nothing" is seen as the opposite, the absolute exclusion of entity – it is its logical negation. Heidegger stresses that in the realm of the proper, other question as part of another beginning, contesting the positive

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 288.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 410; Crownfield, "The Last God," 225.

nature of nothing cannot be justified. In his view, for philosophical reflection to be accurate, it must involve insight into "the most essential finitude of be-ing." To enter this realm, one needs to be prepared to accept the last god. Heidegger calls this process connected with this attitude "the long-term in-king of the last god," this state being the effect of a specific situation: entity, the traditional God, and everything connected with him must be rejected.<sup>34</sup>

According to Heidegger, the God of tradition is mostly the God of Judeo-Christian monotheism. But for him, such a God has died. The death of God reflects the state of the metaphysical and religious tradition and all the "-isms" connected with it. Monotheism, theism, or even atheism are the effects of the conceptualisation and a philosophical/metaphysical approach to the God of the religions.<sup>35</sup> For Heidegger, the bankruptcy of this tradition is an obvious fact. The God of the religions, the revealed God, the only Creator of the world has been logicised and reduced to the content of entity. Thus, God has been linked to entity. Obviously, such a God has died, has lost his importance, left mankind and man. He is dead just like the entire metaphysics of entity.<sup>36</sup> Heidegger diagnoses: "With the death of this god, all theisms collapse. The multitude of gods cannot be quantified but rather is subjected to the inner richness of the grounds and abgrounds in the site for the moment of the shining and sheltering-concealing of the hint of the last god."<sup>37</sup> He assigns the fundamental historical role to the last god. The last god ends the previous "history" and initiates another beginning (*andere Anfang*) – in fact, he is part of another beginning, an entry into another history. This entry, related to the passing of the last god as a "unique uniqueness," opens history to new possibilities and gives man the possibility of being as a disclosed possibility. Heidegger emphasises that the last god brings the previous history to its absolute end, but does not exhaust it, only transforms it into a closed, past history. He uses the word *Verenden* to describe this state. In English, it means "to finish" or "to end," but at the same time, it implies certain inexhaustibility, so that the term signifies something connected in an infinite process of approaching the end. Thus, the metaphysics of entity gives way to the metaphysics of being, and the last god announces this breakthrough. It is the breakthrough of disclosing/revealing of being that must always be connected with the completion of the history of entity. The disclosure of being opens "other" possibilities; it also opens up proper history for man as *Dasein*. The disclosing being includes

<sup>34</sup> Crownfield, "The Last God," 218; Robert S. Gall, "Faith in Doubt in the End," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73 (2013) no. 1: 30.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 288–289.

<sup>36</sup> Greisch, "The Poverty of Heidegger's 'Last God,'" 247.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 289.

the fullness of absolute possibility with all the positively approached contents, as well as the openness to the possibility of “what is,” “what is not,” “what is not yet” – all of which is connected with transition and movement.<sup>38</sup>

The last god gives a sign to such a move, such a transition. He passes by *Dasein* and reveals to him – through a sign – this openness to possibility. History occurs, it reflects movement, transformation, and readiness to disclose being (its truth). The disclosure of being in history is enowning, gifting *Dasein* with the truth, that is, what is un-concealed, aletheic in its essence, that is, in entity. The preparation and readiness of history to enowning being is the transformation and readiness of man, connected with the coming of the last god. Heidegger writes: “Preparation for the appearing of the last god is the utmost venture of the truth of be-ing, by virtue of which alone man succeeds in restoring beings.”<sup>39</sup> In the original, we read: “Die Vorbereitung des Erscheinens des letzten Gottes ist das äußerste Wagnis der Wahrheit des Seins, kraft deren allein die Wiederbringung des Seienden dem Menschen glückt.”<sup>40</sup> The truth of being returns happiness – or rather, according to the original, gives it again (*Wiederbringung*), makes man happy (*glückt*), which means that it happily restores to man the lost (covered, concealed) entity. This “returning” may imply that the coming of the last god positions man in the proper “what is,” constituting the extreme (highest) risk (*Wagnis*) of the revelation of the truth of being. Through this gift to man, the truth of being leaves itself and becomes present and unconcealed. It is disclosed as truth in the appearance (*Erscheinens*) of the god, and the god is the last, because man must deal with being in itself, prepared and ready for its disclosure and for the “acceptance” in evanescence of the last god – last in the meaning of finality and completeness of his “testimony” and sign. The last god also discloses the truth of being to man, which seems to be decisive for him, because he receives his own entity. His own entity is restored to him, the awareness that he is something, and in this context, the realisation of being-there (*Sein da*), that is, the transformation into the essence in which being has been disclosed – transformation into *Dasein*. Man with this attitude encounters being through the passing/evanescence of the last god.<sup>41</sup> Heidegger points out that the greatest nearness of the last god occurs in the situation of refusal-resistance.

<sup>38</sup> Crownfield, *The Last God*, 221.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 289; see Sean J. McGrath, *Heidegger. A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Michigan-Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 117.

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 411.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy, *On a Divine Wink*, 170.



Heidegger assumes that the truth of being is revealed in the other beginning and disclosed in several degrees of difficulty. Thus, this “revealing” is a quasi-mystical path that needs to be traversed in philosophical experience, which ultimately leads to the proper foundation, but also to the construction of a proper “pose” by the philosopher.<sup>42</sup> In Heidegger’s view, the essence of truth can be understood as “the clearance for concealment,” because he interprets truth “aletheically,” that is, as non-forgetting, a reminder, or the uncovering of what is covered or concealed. The sign (*Wink*) is revealed here, originally pointing to the relationship between divinity and being, and fundamentally to their association – the disclosure of aletheic divinity and being. According to Heidegger, the metaphysical tradition understood the truth of being as a ground, which led him to assume that in the proper understanding, the truth of being must be *Ab-grund*, translatable as abyss. However, identifying the truth of being with the abyss does not provide much explanation. The meaning becomes clearer when we delve deeper into the German original, which better reveals the meaning of the term “abyss” (*Abgrund*). The key seems to be that in German, “ab-“ usually means “un-,” but it can also be used to emphasise the activity with which it is connected. For example, we have “ab-arbeiten,” which originally means to execute, handle, or process something, but can also convey the idea of slaving away or working extremely hard. The primary dictionary definition of *Abgrund* is abyss or chasm, but when “ab” is connected with ground, it could also mean “to prepare a good, solid ground.” However, this is only one possibility. Another interpretation is the opposite process – separation from the ground, getting rid of the foundation, remaining without ground, and in a way, becoming immersed in the open abyss. The role of the last god could therefore be reduced to the following: through passing by *Dasein*, the last god gives him a sign, which in turn leads to a groundlessness-abgrund. And this opening to the truth of being should be understood.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Karol Tarnowski, “Der letzte Gott,” *Aletheia*. “Heidegger dzisiaj” 1, no. 4 (1990): 348, ed. Piotr Marciszek and Cezary Wodziński.

<sup>43</sup> Emad, *On the Way to Heidegger's*, 37–40.

## Conclusion

“Giving” the sign and “leading” to groundlessness seem to be at the heart of Heidegger’s understanding of the role of the figure of the last god as an explication of metaphysical radical thought, expressed as Heidegger’s “divinity of the other beginning.” The figure of the last god has to be presented against the background of several of Heidegger’s thoughts presented in this article. I want to refer to the title as the path to being itself, as a transition from the metaphysics of entity to the ontology of being, and the last god plays a key role in this process. Through the passing of the last god, we are in a sense stripped of the foundation and become immersed in the “abyss” of “something” that is non-grounded or groundless. In this sense, it is ultimate and near the end.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, this “something” is disclosed but at the same time always concealed, grounded yet not grounded by anything else, holding sway in the aletheic event-enowning. The last god seems to be the sign of this process as the path to being. We receive such a sign during the passing of the last god, and the path to being itself seems to be open.

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<sup>44</sup> See D. Crownfield, *The Last God*, 222–223.

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