



God and Difference*

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Abstract

This text begins a research project concerning those thinkers who associate the discussion about the possibility of thinking about God with the problem of difference. The main question of these considerations is this: How does God appear on the differentiated horizon, while torn by difference always conceived in a defined manner? If difference is inevitably inscribed in thought, then how is God inscribed in difference? These questions lead to another: How does difference rule in reflection on divinity? In other words: How far does the way that difference is conceived affect how we reflect upon the deity? When looking for answers to these questions, we take the first step towards Heidegger. Owing to the special status of ontological difference and the trace it leaves on thinking “on the horizon” of difference, it is with this that we begin movement toward differentiation as such. The question about God and the difference in Heidegger’s thought in this text takes the following form: How does God appear in a sphere divided by the difference between Being and beings? How does ontological difference mark the conception of God?

Keywords: God, difference, ontological difference, beings, Being, Beyng

Słowa kluczowe: Bóg, różnica, różnica ontologiczna, byt, Bycie, istota Bycia

In his lecture titled *The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger poses a famous question whose significance reinforces its impact: How does God appear in philosophy?¹ The persisting allure of inquiring into “what is higher than all else,” tied to the power contained in the response proclaiming an ultimate

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¹ “We can properly think through the question, How does the deity enter into philosophy?, only when that *to which* the deity is to come has become sufficiently clear: that is, philosophy itself. [...] But assuming that philosophy, as thinking, is the free and spontaneous self-involvement with beings as such, then the deity can come into philosophy only insofar as philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature,

God over the Christian one, casts a shadow (or, as some may prefer, shines a bright light on the horizon) upon this field known as philosophical reflection upon God. By the same token, the matter of how God appears in philosophy led Heidegger to ask how God appears in the sphere of ontological difference. The attempt to conceive of God in terms of a region torn by the difference between Being and beings meant that philosophical thought on divinity has long been tied to how we conceive of difference.

The bond between God and difference appears in philosophy through the oft-reiterated logic of inquiry, which makes difference the fundamental question. Replacing ontological difference with another concept of difference,² Jean-Luc Marion simultaneously formulates a conviction of “the dominant role that phenomenology has always assigned to difference.”³ At the same time, in awarding the question of difference this special status, phenomenology went beyond the horizon marked by ontological difference. Freed from the control of difference between Being and beings, Heidegger’s question was expressed in philosophy thus: How does God appear on the differentiated horizon, while torn by difference always conceived in a *defined manner* (also as ontological difference)? If difference is inevitably inscribed in thought, then how is God inscribed in difference?

The question about God leads to another: How does difference rule in reflection on divinity? In other words: How far does the way that difference is conceived affect how we reflect upon the deity? Yet this logic of inquiring into divinity can be upended! Taking our cue from Emmanuel Lévinas, we may ask: If there do exist divine powers, then how ought we conceive of difference so that “the Gods, dwelling upon the world’s heights, find their place in philosophical discourse”?⁴

The opportunity revealed in Lévinas’s question to upend the logic of inquiring into the place of the deity within the horizon of thought established by difference has special significance here. In the research project beginning with this article, I will less be investigating how a specific difference differs than the *ways in which* philosophy of difference lets God appear in its realm. In asking *how difference* differs, we thus step toward the question of *how differences* differ. This meditation will free reflection on God from the reign of certain interpretations of difference (e.g. from ontological difference), not in order to subject it to the domain of another difference (e.g. agathological difference, such as we find in Józef Tischner’s philosophy), but so that it can operate in a space illuminated by a *multiplicity* of interpretations of difference. Operating in a realm of many interpretations of difference and a constant shift in points of view allows us to pose questions about *how* the leap between differences (into another concept of difference) modifies *how* God emerges in philosophy. The intent around various interpretations of difference also allows us to open a space for

requires and determines that and how the deity enters into it.” M. Heidegger, *The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics*, [in:] *Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh, Chicago 1969, pp. 55–56.

² According to Marion, “the play of call and response marks a difference without compare.” See: J.-L. Marion, *Being Given. Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. J.L. Kosky, Stanford 2002, p. 295.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 294.

⁴ E. Lévinas, *Proper Names*, trans. M.B. Smith, Stanford 1996, p. 80.

contemplating *how* various interpretations of difference affect the way we conceive the relationship between divinity and man and his world.

Reflection on divinity liberated from the influence of ontological difference still feels the power of its effects. Heidegger is one of many philosophers of difference, and yet it is generally where difference becomes a foremost subject of thought, where questions concerning God in philosophical discourse are preceded by a question of how the difference might be conceived, that we find a trace of his responses to the capability of conceiving God. Regardless of how accurate we find Heidegger's onto-theological critique, or how insufficient and inconclusive we find his thinking on "the last God" emerging from Being, there can be no doubt that ontological difference – though it may "enclose" God (reduce the deity of God) in a horizon marked by Being – remains present in philosophy. Jacques Derrida stresses that his *différance* would be unthinkable without ontological difference.

Difference thus became a "thinking point." The dominant role phenomenology (but also hermeneutics, structuralism, etc.) gave to difference emerges in an oft-reiterated double question: *whence* and *how* does difference differ? The logic of inquiring into difference, passed down to us by phenomenological tradition, presupposes the antecedence of a question about a "place" from which difference emerges with regard to the question of *how* difference differs. In effect, the history of phenomenology still goes into creating the ever-running debate on the originary difference – the one preceding all the others, "without compare."⁵

I do not intend to join discussions which difference is ultimately the condition of the possibility of differentiation. The aim of the present paper will be to show that it is possible and cognitively fruitful to shift the point of gravity from questions of *whence* to questions of *how* difference differs, or in fact, as we shall see, to questions of how *differences* differ. This article is a first step in this direction. In submitting questions about the effects of raising a particular difference to the level of a difference that establishes thinking beyond the issue of origin, we are not questioning the importance of dispute around the location of the origin. Yet this dispute ceases to be of critical importance to us.

The question of the originary difference

Let us return to the issue of the originary difference, setting aside for now our further considerations of *how* differences differ. The question of the originary difference inevitably contains ambiguity, held in how we conceive of origin – the metaphor of the "origin" can point to what is first, or what is most essential, as well as what is most fundamental, the condition for all else, or finally, what is closest to the truth.⁶ Furthermore, these various strategies of comprehending "origin" do not correspond in one

⁵ J.-L. Marion, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁶ On the ambiguity of the metaphor of the source found in the framework of the phenomenology of source experience, see Barbara Skarga in her excellent metaphysical essays: B. Skarga, *Kwintet metafizyczny*, Kraków 2003, pp. 7–9.

point: we might imagine that what is most “originary” bars access to the truth seen as evident (as Michel Henry demonstrates) or cannot be reduced to a basic principle (as Derrida’s *différance* seems to be).

The question of *where* the originary difference “happens” in human thought contains a great deal of ambiguity. My investigations will be drawing from this concept of origin, which sees a condition for the possibility of difference in what is at the origin. The originary difference holds a special essentiality, as it is the basis of differentiation as such. If thinking is inextricably tied to difference, conditioned by the necessity of separating one from the other (an x different from a y), then in delving into the originary difference we are exploring the condition for the possibility of difference, and thus for thinking as such. Thus, asking about the originary difference is revealed for us as a question about such a difference that is the basis for the existence of all differences that can be conceived, and furthermore, a difference that gives significance to all others, so to speak.

As we know, Heidegger makes the difference between Being and beings the originary difference. We should note, however, that in *Sein und Zeit* – a work in which Being emerges as quite different from beings (Being of beings is itself not a being⁷) – the very concept of Being is not yet central; it is eclipsed by thoughts focused on the examination of beings. In his paper of 1936–38, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Heidegger – leaving the difference between beings and Being to reflect on the essence of Being – confirms the constant presence in his thinking of a distinction between what (as he says) he conceived “ever since *Being and Time* [...] as the ‘ontological difference’.”⁸ Reflection on ontological difference is also found in his book on Nietzsche,⁹ yet it only resounds with full force in the *Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics*,¹⁰ as if the attempt to reflect on difference as such and the decision to fix it in the center of study, allowing for difference itself to be considered in terms of perdurance (*Austrag*), required some time.

It is not insignificant that in this lecture, the question of difference is accompanied by the question of how God appears in philosophy. Divinity is enclosed in a horizon strung between ontological difference; it “enters into philosophy through [...] perdurance.”¹¹ God is inscribed in ontological difference whether he is conceived in metaphysical terms as the Highest Being, oscillating between Being and beings, the cause behind every being, Being, and ultimately, even himself, or, as in *Beiträge*, if he emerges from Being. With this decision, the difference between beings and Being,

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Stambaugh, New York 1996, p. 9.

⁸ M. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz, D. Vallega-Neu, Bloomington 2012, p. 197. Further references to *Contributions* will be marked as “C.”

⁹ “We cannot withdraw from the differentiation of Being and beings [...] Everywhere we go we are continually moving on the path of the differentiation, a path that carries us from beings to Being and from Being to beings.” M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 4, trans. D.F. Krell, San Francisco 1987, p. 183.

¹⁰ “Thus, we think of Being rigorously only when we think of it in its difference with beings, and of beings in their difference with Being. The difference thus comes specifically into view [*So kommt die Differenz eigens in den Blick*],” M. Heidegger, *Identity...., op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

embracing everything that can be thought, including God, becomes the fundamental difference, the one that opens the field to the thinkable, and also governs this field.

Toward the fundamental difference

The delay found in Heidegger's thought in "introducing" God to the "space" of thought, divided by ontological difference and the period of time between the publication of *Being and Time* and *Contributions to Philosophy* and *The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics* is not insignificant. This distance is inscribed with the *decision* that makes ontological difference the fundamental difference. Addressing how God appears in the frame of the horizon divided by ontological difference, Heidegger also incorporates God into his thinking. Bringing God into the sphere of difference, he raises the originary difference to a difference structuring the horizon of the thinkable.¹² The originary difference becomes the fundamental difference, the basis for all reflection, including reflection on God. The fundamental difference, a condition for human thought, sets out strategies of openness to the thinkable. The ontological difference as a fundamental difference governs the sphere of thought it marks off: what is given to thought, including God, must "speak" to how it situates itself in the horizon divided by difference, and on which side of the difference between beings and Being it finds its place.

The power of thought based on the fundamental difference is that it accepts the challenge of considering what can be thought, as if going back to the beginning and starting over. Thinking from within the fundamental difference gives what is conceivable a new structure, allows for a new meaning to emerge, in other words, a "new opening," allowing us to look differently at man, the world, and God. The above terms, "new opening," structure, and new meaning, inevitably indicate the ability of fundamental difference to create a new order of thinking and the aspect of governance and rule, and thus, at one point, it is *arche-ic* (alluding to the meaning of *arché* whose trace is found in the concept of *archon*). The fundamental difference rules, structuring thought in a specific way; it is the basis that organizes the horizon of every particular thought, bringing order into the realm of the thinkable, not only in terms of particular philosophical projects, but also in the scope in which philosophical theories help create the shifting horizons conceiving the world, man, and divinity in European culture. Perhaps every religious/philosophical thought, if it is to be a thought of a certain structure, consciously or not, inevitably derives from this fundamental difference.

¹² Ontological difference has this status even though the leap into the essence of Being (*Seyn*) described in *Beiträge*, which requires a man to leap into his essence changing in history (*Da-sein*), modifies its gravity, shifting the stress onto the difference between man in his present state and his essential being. Without a leap into man's essence (*Da-sein*) Being, despite its distinction from beings, is still seen as united with beings. Yet the leap does not annihilate or question the gravity of the ontological difference as such. I have analyzed this issue elsewhere. See: K. Mech, *Logos wiary. Między boskością a racjonalnością*, Kraków 2008, pp. 351–353.

Reflecting on the question of *whence* difference differs is inscribed in the history of the debate over “the kingdom of difference.” It is not my intention to delve into whether it is worth conjuring up a few ideas (decisions) for reflection within the fundamental difference. Martin Buber speaks of two fundamental strategies by which man opens to the world: one is the relationship of the I–Thou bond, and the other the objectifying I–It relationship. Paul Tillich, in turn, makes the originary fact that gives importance to all others the passage to the essence, allowing beings to exist, and bearing an aspect of duty, grounding what exists to existence, facticity conceived as a state of decline, an alienation from the essence. Meanwhile, Michel Henry makes the fundamental difference between originary phenomenality, an internal process of self-experience of absolute life (life experienced in immanence), by which I am given to myself, and externality, to which not only the external world belongs, but also makes up the content of my intentional experiences. We ought also to mention the internal difference of Jean-Luc Nancy (much closer to Derrida’s *différance*), which is a “fracture” of meaning prior to the speech that articulates it.

We should mention once more Jean-Luc Marion’s distinction between the call that comes from one who gives and the response of a man who allows the giver to appear in a certain shape. I would also like to recall the agathological difference of Krakow philosopher Józef Tischner, who, separating good and evil, places what exists in the “light” of the undefined horizon of goodness. Other thinkers’ decisions “on difference” have led them to discover an originary difference they have elevated to a fundamental difference, confirming the dominant role given to difference in phenomenology (and beyond).

We want to free how we think about divinity from the rule of every concrete interpretation of fundamental difference. Searching for how differences differ presupposes the possibility of going beyond every interpretation of difference that permits thought. Yet the movement that allows us to go beyond a concrete difference cannot escape from what was transcended in that movement. This means that the search for how *differences differ* makes concrete difference its point of departure, and at the same time makes every inquiry into the fundamental difference subordinate to the possibility it can be transcended.

Back to... ontological difference and the question of Being

Owing to the special status of ontological difference and the trace it leaves on thinking “on the horizon” of difference, it is with this we begin movement toward differentiation as such. We ask once more: How does God appear in a sphere divided by the difference between Being and beings? How does ontological difference mark our conception of God? Without lingering on analyses of the God of metaphysics conceived as the Supreme Being, we shall inquire into Heidegger’s ultimate God, the “highest instance of withholding.” Asking how God emerges from Being not only sends us to what is differentiated by difference, but above all, to differentiation as such.

Ontological difference divides and distinguishes between being(s), and thus, what is “available first-hand” to man, and Being, which facilitates this accessibility of beings. Through difference, beings and Being are “set apart from each other, separated, and nonetheless connected to each other.”¹³ Ontological difference, differentiating beings and Being, does not do this without giving them a connection. This is an essential moment in Heidegger’s understanding of difference. Ontological difference is not absolute in the sense of absoluteness that beings and Being are so far untied/severed, that a “yawning chasm” of indifference opens up between them, best expressed by the concept of radical or absolute alienation.¹⁴ The power of differentiation is not exhausted in its capacity to untie, to sever beings from Being; ontological difference establishes a link between what has been divided; it holds the possibility of sending Being toward beings. In sending itself, Being gives itself (*Es gibt*) to beings. What does it mean that Being gives itself? In giving itself, Being allows beings to continue; through Being, a beings are permitted to presence (*Anwesen als Anwesenlassen*), and being essential means lasting (*Wesen heißt Wahren*). Beings are grounded in Being, the ontological difference separates Being, at the core of beings, from beings, which are grounded in Being.

But this is not where it ends. In giving beings lastingness, Being allows them to be beings *for* man. Through Being, beings last, becoming something that stands opposite man. Beings can emerge in their Being opposed only because Being opens the horizon of conceivability before man. From this point of view, Being can be identified with man’s openness: it is the very openness of *Dasein* to what can be revealed.

The horizon of conceivability could not be open without speech; being only becomes revealed to man with the speech that names it. Yet inquiring into the speech that names beings sends us again toward Being, or more precisely, to the links between speech and Being. Why? Because Being does not only give beings lastingness, but also sends itself to man as *logos*.¹⁵ *Logos* belongs to Being; it can be heard and spoken by man. This means the place where meaning is born is not exclusively man, but Being. Only in man can the *logos* of Being speak up. The link between Being and thinking and the naming of Being will return in our reflections when we delve into the bond between man and God. The meaning of Being speaks up in man and reveals itself through man. Moreover, speech, being a gift belonging to the horizon of openness, permits beings to “show themselves to be seen.”

In sum, we might say that through Being, which gives itself as a *logos* of Being, speech is possible, and with man’s speech it becomes possible to describe, judge, and finally, search for reasons. Being gives beings lastingness (a foundation), depiction and divisibility.

Inquiring into ontological difference is not, therefore, merely about what is divided by difference; it is also a question about the “place” where Being “transverses” onto beings. There is no “space” between Being and beings that might separate

¹³ M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 4, p. 155.

¹⁴ On the distinction between radical and absolute alienation, see: B. Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego. Studia z fenomenologii obcego*, trans. J. Sidorek, Warszawa 2002.

¹⁵ On this point, see: K. Mech, *Logos wiary, op. cit.*, pp. 328–330.

one from the other, but “Being is presenced [...] as it transverses onto beings.” One would like to say that what comes from Being transforms into what departs toward beings; to use language with religious undertones, it is a conversion of Being into beings. Heidegger calls the “place” in which Being converts into beings the perdurance (*Austrag*).

The perdurance, “dividing” Being and beings, has the nature of a fundamental resolution, which simultaneously introduces their differentiation. And yet, though Being and beings are differentiated/severed, they do not fall apart; one transverses the other. Perdurance severs them so that “transversing and descent hold together.” The etymology of *Austrag* points toward this moment of transversing, sending Being toward beings, and yet holding together. *Austrag* alludes to the word *tragen*, meaning transfer, carrying, supplying, and resolution. Acknowledging perdurance to be the place between Being and beings, as well as the transversing of Being onto beings, Heidegger says: “Being in the sense of unconcealing overwhelming, and beings as such in the sense of arrival that keeps itself concealed, are present, and thus differentiated, by virtue of the Same, the differentiation.”¹⁶ Perdurance is the place where Being and beings are differentiated and united – perdurance joins Being and beings, preventing beings from transversing Being.

Being’s transversing onto beings does not leave Being intact. With this transversing Being conceals itself, and with it, the ontological difference conceals itself. Marion goes so far as to claim that, in giving itself to beings, Being vanishes, self-destructs – “giving the nothingness of beings, it gives no less than Being itself.”¹⁷ Thought, which makes beings a subject of thought, forgets about Being, and forgetting about Being, forgets about ontological difference. Forgetting about difference is not strictly a human weakness: it is grounded in the way in which Being arrives. It is because the vanishing of Being occurs that Being, in giving itself to beings, conceals itself at the same time, and the forgetting of Being becomes a constant possibility of thought.

Ontological difference and the first question of God

It should not escape our attention that perdurance, as a place of Being transversing onto beings, is like a bridge that goes only one way. Being which is given to beings is incapable of “returning to itself.” Yet let us inquire into the possibility of moving in the opposite direction. Is it possible for beings to overwhelm Being, and if so, under what conditions? And also – when is it not possible? What does difference forbid, lest it be forgotten?

Let us begin with the latter question. The prohibition concerns God, how He was conceived by metaphysics, as the most presencing entity, and also the cause of Being. We now approach the issue of the metaphysical grounding of Being by the God of metaphysics. Such an attempt to ground Being changes how we conceive

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Identity...*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁷ J.-L. Marion, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

of perdurance. Forgetting the impossibility of the Supreme Being transversing the other side of the difference results in the creation of metaphysics as onto-theology. A deeper discussion of Heidegger's critique of onto-theology goes beyond the scope of our analysis, and I have attempted it elsewhere.¹⁸ We shall content ourselves by saying that onto-theology, acknowledging God to be the Supreme Entity, and also the cause of Being, incidentally presupposes that that it is possible to move from (the Supreme) Being to being. And thus, metaphysical thought, seeking to make Being in God comprehensible as a cause of Being, forgets ontological difference. Perdurance, the bridge for crossing one way, allowing Being to arrive at being, also prevents their intermingling, their limitless hopping from one side of difference to the other.

Metaphysics – acknowledging God as the cause of Being – is caught in a bind: on the one hand, it conceives of perdurance as “the seat of the essence of the difference between Being and beings” (C, 88), and on the other, as a place where Being and beings orbit one another, grounding each other. Being is the foundation for beings, and God, the most presencing entity, the cause of Being. In other words, “the fact that Being has withdrawn from beings, and beings have first of all (through Christianity) become mere things made by another being. The Supreme Being, as cause of all beings, took over the essence of Beyng. These beings, formerly made by a creator God, then became the dominion of humanity, inasmuch as beings are now taken only in their objectivity” (C, 88).

Forgetting difference holds other consequences. The path from being to Being is forbidden, and the attempt to cross it through God, conceived as the Supreme Entity, gives rise to crisis of metaphysics. This crisis leads to the realm of metaphysics being ruled by such a God who is foreign to man. Heidegger is often quoted as saying the God of metaphysics conceived as a *causa sui* is a God to which one may not pray; one cannot make sacrifices and dance before Him. The way in which philosophy has conceived of God predetermines his link with man. In reducing God to the most presencing being (entity), metaphysics divorces him from man.

Yet why does the bond between man and God break down? This question engenders another: Why is the God of metaphysics, the most presencing entity, so alien to man? It is not because the God of metaphysics is unlike the punishing and sometimes consoling God of religious faith? And, finally, who is man to experience the misery of alienation? The answers to these questions are hidden in the place where Heidegger situates man and God (unlike the God of metaphysics, and unlike the Christian God) on the horizon divided by the ontological difference.

The question of God, once again

The basic resolution concerning how God and man are conceived in the framework of the space divided by ontological difference first leads us toward how man is conceived. Man is a being, but his “native land” is not among beings, but in the realm

¹⁸ On this point, see: K. Mech, *Logos wiary*, pp. 340–342.

of Being. Belonging to Being, he is called to abandon being, to cross the ontological difference and place himself on the path of inventively thinking (*Er-denken*) Being (*Sein*) in its very “core,” where there lies the essence of Beyng¹⁹ (*Seyn*); at the same time, an “encounter” with God is possible. God and man (the essence of man, though not the present man experiencing the misery of being abandoned by Beyng) situate themselves on the same side of the ontological difference: they emerge from the essence of Beyng (*Seyn*); “Beyng: the ap-propriation [*Er-eignung*], reached in strife, toward the en-counter [*Ent-gegnung*] of gods and humans” (C, 381).

In the realm of Beyng (*Seyn*) the en-counter (*Er-eignung*) of the proximity of God and man is possible insofar as man locates himself near the eventuating, historically changing truth of Beyng, where the arrival of God is possible.

Whence comes the thought of Beyng?

Yet what is the meaning of Heidegger’s thesis that God and man have to be conceived on the horizon of ontological difference as emerging from Being and belonging to it? We return to the issue of the possibility of crossing from beings to Being. A being who makes a leap into Beyng is a man. Here is “the uniqueness of that being, the human being” (C, 237), who is the only being capable of inventive thinking of Being. How does this occur? The bridge that is perdurance now leads from beings to Being, opening before thought capable of “inventive thinking of the truth of Beyng [*Seyn*” (C, 45). Thus, thinking is possible which, untainted, according to the “law” of perdurance, crosses ontological difference in both directions. What is thinking that can leap into an event of the presencing truth of Beyng? We should stress that our response will not be confined to how human thinking finds its place in the realm of Beyng. Inventive thinking of Beyng also marks out the path leading to the place where man will mentally “experience” the proximity of God emerging from Beyng. In other words, spending time near the place of the arrival of God is possible in a horizon that is open and marked by the inventive thinking of the truth of Beyng.

What, then, is such thinking, whence does it come and to where does it strive? Let us begin with whence this thinking comes whose task is to reach the truth of Beyng. Heidegger’s diagnosis is all too familiar: the present man experiences the misery of being abandoned by Beyng. “Humans are so dazzled by objectivity and machination that beings are already withdrawing from them; and withdrawing even more are Beyng and truth, wherein all beings must originally arise anew and appear strange” (C, 88). Becoming a stranger to Beyng, man “*retains* the remote proximity to Beyng in this foreign realm” (C, 387). The thing is, in essence we belong to Beyng; thus “what must eventuate is what opens being to us and places us back into being and in that way brings us to ourselves” (C, 46).

Inventive thinking holds a *call* (it is a response to a call) to *transform* thinking, to abandon calculating and rational thought, reducing beings to objectivity, allowing a being to be technically processed without limitations. This is also a call to reject

¹⁹ Following the conventional translations of Heidegger, Being (*Sein*) in contrast with beings is written with a capital letter, while Beyng (*Seyn*), or its essence, is written with a “y.”

thinking, entirely forgetting about Being and showing the grounding of beings in the sole realm of being.²⁰ This is why inventive thinking of Being (*Sein*) in terms of the essence of Beyng (*Seyn*) is only the beginning of the process, merely “preparing the future ones” of the “last God” (C, 8). The call to *liberation* from “mere beings” (C, 364) thus means evoking a transformation of thinking that allows one to turn from beings, leaving metaphysics and crossing (or leaping) to where the truth of Beyng is historically presenced.

Inventive thinking is “the path toward Beyng,” and thus must reach where, Heidegger says, it receives its “essence from Beyng” (C, 363). Man’s leap “into the essence of Beyng” (C, 6), into the event of Beyng, from which God and man may emerge as near one another, is also a leap into the essence of man.²¹ By the same token, man is not only capable of understanding Being (as *Dasein*), as Heidegger’s analyses showed beginning with *Sein und Zeit*, but is also called to leap into his essence (*Da-sein*). In Polish, not without cause, owing to its capability to unconceal the truth of Beyng, *Da-sein* is rendered as “open-Being.” Heidegger says that the point is “to be appropriated over to the appropriating event. That is equivalent to an essential transformation of the human being: from ‘rational animal’ (*animal rationale*) to *Da-sein*” (C, 5).

What is inventive thinking of Beyng?

What, then, is inventive thinking of Being beyond the fact that it is a leap into the essence of Beyng? How does it situate itself in the space divided by ontological difference? Firstly, inventive thinking of Beyng (*Seyn*) does not stop at Being (*Sein*) as it emerges from perdurance. Thinking of Being in contrast with beings is still too burdened with the link that occurs between Being and beings, in other words, that Being gives itself to beings, becoming their foundation. This thinking, asking about the Being of beings, is forever straying from the path leading toward the truth of Beyng (*Seyn*) embraced by Being (*Sein*) as a thing most general, abstract, and ultimately hollow, which remains common to all beings and, parenthetically speaking, Heidegger defines as beingness (*Seiendheit*). Inventive thinking of Beyng, leaping past ontological difference, leaves questions concerning the Being of beings and inquires into the truth of Beyng in its (most originary) historically changing singularity, its uniqueness as an event.²² At the same time, inquiring into the truth of Beyng,

²⁰ “The more exclusively thinking turns toward beings and seeks for itself a foundation that *is* most eminently (cf. Descartes and the modern era), all the more decisively does philosophy withdraw from the truth of Beyng” (C, 134).

²¹ “When the Gods and humans come into en-counter through the plight of Beyng, humans are cast out of their previous modern Western position. They are posited back behind themselves in completely other domains of determination, wherein neither animality nor rationality can occupy an essential place, even if the subsequent establishment of these properties in actual human beings might have its justification” (C, 377).

²² At any rate, we might ask how it is possible to express the singularity and uniqueness of Beyng in a natural language, which inevitably tends toward generality. Abandoning the attempt to create a special language for expressing Beyng, Heidegger does not give a satisfying response to how the singular and unique can be communicated in a language whose concepts are general in nature.

inventive thinking about Beyng prepares space for the arrival of the last God, “wholly other than past ones and especially other than the Christian one” (C, 319).

In the chapter *Inceptual Thinking (Projection)*, Heidegger states that “the inventive thinking of the truth of Beyng is essentially pro-jection” (C, 45). We shall not be pursuing this notion in detail.²³ Suffice to say that inventive thinking is inquiring into and naming the concealed truth of Beyng, which, in drawing near to it, opens a horizon of thought and locates itself in openness. This thinking, which opens the horizon for the possible arrival of God, which is, as Heidegger states, “the necessity of meditation on oneself” (C, 40), is “asking a guiding question” (C, 366) to the truth of Beyng, “a leap into its essence and thereby into Beyng itself” (C, 36).

Who are they, the lone ones capable of inventively thinking God? Asking is the “essence of philosophy.” Inventively thinking Being is “the naming of the essence” (C, 362), helping “the Gods out into Beyng” (C, 362), readying the locum of the Gods – all this transpires in the scope of philosophy. Philosophy is the “first and most extreme meditation on the truth of Beyng and on the Beyng of truth” (C, 37). On the path to closeness to the last God steps the philosopher who can investigate Beyng. Heidegger says: “neither in ‘personal’ nor in ‘massively shared’ ‘lived experience’ does the God still appear. The God appears uniquely in the abyssal ‘space’ of Beyng itself. All previous ‘creeds,’ ‘churches,’ and the like cannot in the least become the essential preparation for the encounter of God and the human being in the midst of Beyng” (C, 330). In his dialectic of the absolute spirit, Hegel puts philosophy above religion; Heidegger utterly discards religious faith as a path to God. *Contributions* holds the thesis that the true believers are the philosophers, but their faith is not in some God. The faith of philosophers is an enduring inquiry into the truth of Beyng, a trust that philosophical questions about the truth of Beyng make sense, that asking contains a response, and the consciousness that no response is final, given “once and for all.”

This is why knowledge of Beyng is not a collection of statements, but “steadfastness in the question-worthiness of Beyng, and Beyng maintains its unique dignity in such a way that it bestows itself seldom enough in withholding as the hidden event of the passing by of the decision regarding the advent or absconding of the Gods in beings” (C, 123). At the same time, a philosophical inquiry into Beyng is not a spontaneous play of liberties, but it is determined by what is asked. Heidegger says: “The more genuinely the way of inventive thinking is a way to Beyng, the more unconditionally is it determined by Beyng itself. Inventive thinking does not mean thinking up or arbitrarily devising; instead, it refers to that thinking which, in questioning, stands up to Beyng and challenges Beyng to attune the questioning through and through” (C, 69).

²³ On this matter, of special note is a work by Łukasz Kołoczek titled *Być, czyli mieć. Próba transpozycji projektu “Przyczynów do filozofii” Martina Heideggera*, Kraków 2016. This book is a critical (and at times negative) point of reference for the present paper.

Where does meditating on Beyng strive toward?

The aim of asking about and naming Beyng is marked by the idea of returning to the origins, to the place of the originary bond between Being and thinking. Inventive thinking of Beyng strives toward its own origins, to a place from where inventive thinking derives, where it crosses paths with Beyng and the thinking that emerges from it, where they are the same thing, yet differ from one another. This is a special “place”: it is where a place of their identity and difference occurs, which Heidegger calls an event (*Ereignis*): “into the realm from which man and Being have already reached each other in their active nature,”²⁴ they are “passed on to ownership [*Zueignen*].” As the *Contributions* show, inquiring thinking of Beyng that reaches this place opens a “space” Between, while placing itself in an opening realm, which “consigns [*übereignet*] God to the human being by assigning [*zueignet*] the human being to God” (C, 23). In other words, the “space” Between, strung between man and God, is the “space” of their potentially reaching one another, where the essence of man (*Da-sein*) and God “become recognizable to one another.” This means that inventive thinking of Beyng has reached a place where the “event of the nearness” of God and man is possible, where the question of the possibility of the last God’s arrival is resolved. The last God and the essence of man emerge from Beyng, the possibility of their “meeting”: “un-opposition and appropriation” occur in the lap of Beyng: Beyng as the origin “which first *de-cides* and *ap-propriates* Gods and humans.”²⁵

What is the ultimate role thinking plays in preparing for the arrival of God? A long road leads to the place of the “meeting” between man and God, inquiringly thinking into the truth of God, attuning himself to traverse the open “space.” There the question of whether God is drawing near or moving away is resolved. Inventive thinking of the truth of God extracts it from its concealedness, marks the path to the unconcealing of the essence of Beyng. Essential thinking opening the horizon so that it places itself in what it has opened becomes a presencing truth of Beyng. In other words, inventively thinking the truth of Beyng, projecting oneself on what it in its very naming and asking opens, turns one into a presencing essence of Beyng, a place for unconcealing the truth of Beyng, and at the same time, a space for man and God to relate.²⁶ The proximity of man and God can strictly occur “within” man’s thinking, in the space Between opened by thinking: here man’s thinking, so to speak, occurs as an epiphany of the very truth of Beyng. The thinking of the essential man (*Da-sein*), “the essential occurrence of Beyng as the event” (C, 12), is self-presencing Beyng. This is why Beyng and God need man,

²⁴ M. Heidegger, *Identity...*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁵ “The land that comes to be through and as the way of the inventive thinking of Beyng is the between which appropriates *Da-sein* to the God. In this appropriation, the human being and God first become ‘recognizable’ to each other, in their belonging to the stewardship and neededness of Beyng” (C, 69).

²⁶ “The inventive thinking of Beyng, the naming of the essence of Beyng, is nothing other than the venture of helping the Gods out into Beyng and making available to the human being the truth of what is true” (C, 362).

for only man can unconceal, that is, bring into the open the concealed truth of Beyng, and with it God which needs Beyng to be deified.

God and human thinking are only different modes of Beyng. Through exerted thought a clever man on the path to inventive thinking of the truth of Beyng can leap into his essence; God and man can appear as different (un-opposed), and as co-belonging to Beyng. Using a language that tends toward metaphysics – which Heidegger questions, as we know – we might say that the “space” of man and God relating to one another (un-opposed and ap-propriated) is situated in the extreme immanence of the soul, where there occurs thinking liberated from the rule of thought focused on beings.

The discovery of an open place for the arrival of God in the inventive thinking of Beyng in the immanent field encourages questions concerning the capability of the “event” of transcendence in immanence. Is it possible to conceive of God occurring in the horizon of Beyng which does not fall within the space Between opened by thinking of Beyng? By this I mean a God who, as more than Beyng, in his difference with Beyng (otherness), would go beyond Beyng and all forms of thinking tied to the essence of Beyng, while remaining Other, sending himself into that “space.” The question of the Heideggerian God contains the question of his possible transcendence.

God from Beyng²⁷

God and transcendence

It is time to pose questions about the last God, who occurs from Beyng. We must strenuously assert that the “event of Beyng” is not a place of the manifestation of divine Transcendence, which, going beyond Beyng, remaining external to it, would also send itself into the “space” Between, thus “transposing the human being” (C, 12). The last God is not *above*, *higher than*, does not *transcend* Beyng, yet it does differ from it. Heidegger clearly states that transcendence, even when it is no longer conceived as the “God of Christianity” (C, 21), or in the form of “‘ideas’ or ‘value’ or ‘meaning,’ something for which one cannot live or die” (C, 22), and thus when “is understood differently” (C, 255), as *transcendence* (*Überstieg*), is a way of understanding that makes “the essence of *Da-sein* all too easily distorted by this determination” (C, 255). Heidegger’s message is clear: the essence of man and transcendence remain in opposition, even mutually exclude one another; transcendence conceals the essence of man (*Da-sein*). Why is that?

²⁷ We should note that the present article does not address the relationship between God and Beyng; focusing on what occurs between man and God, it does not explore the emergence of God from Beyng. Yet even a cursory glance at this issue allows us to state that, while the last God, quite different from the Christian one, does not recall a personal God, a God who wants and does not want, who is a “volitive” center, we easily find a “personal” dimension in Heidegger’s analyses of Beyng. Beyng hides, needs something, sends itself, etc. This “movement” of a personal nature, which we ought not to reduce too easily to the metaphorical quality of Heidegger’s language, deserves a separate study.

In seeking the reasons for Heidegger's diagnosis, I refer to his research on transcendence, published in *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*.²⁸ There Heidegger conceives transcendence, first of all, epistemologically, as something that transcends human knowledge, conception, and so forth. Transcendence (not necessarily religious) is something *more than* (*plus quam*) what man is capable of saying, experiencing, conceiving; it extends beyond a broad reckoning of human cognitive abilities, and by the same token remains outside the immanent field of consciousness, the soul, spirit, and the like. Epistemological transcendence is based on an external (transcendence) – internal (subject) opposition, and thus, on a concept of the subject that presupposes a border between the subject and transcendence. Yet according to Heidegger, this thinking is stuck in the “shackles” of the metaphysics of presence, a vision of the subject that sees him as something like a receptacle, a subject trapped inside its interior, yet always present for itself. Departing from the vision of the self-present, “receptacled” subject, Heidegger necessarily also questions transcendence opposed to immanence thus conceived. In place of transcendence, self-transcending movement appears, which precedes the constitution of subjectivity as such. The transcending movement is “the original shaping of the subject”: the subject would not be himself if he did not transcend, his “articulations of being arise from [primal] transcendence.”²⁹

Secondly, transcendence can be understood as what goes beyond nature in the sense of the Greek *fizis*. If nature is a special “collection” of conditional, or, as Heidegger says, contingent beings, transcendence here is what is unconditioned, not of this world, and yet conditions this world. Transcendence with regard to the world is what is radically different, incommensurate. Yet here as well, transcendence is conceived as a “relational concept,”³⁰ not in relation to Beyng, but in relation to conditional beings (*fizis*), and thus remains beyond the horizon marked by inventive thinking of Beyng. Transcendence as stepping beyond carries a trace of what it transcends; in both cases, according to Heidegger, it is conceived as standing across from all-transcending, excessive entity, and thus, in essence, metaphysically.

The final limit of onto-theology is thus less set by Heidegger's critique of the God of metaphysics, but by this moment of reflection, in which transcendence is rejected as inevitably conceived in relation to beings. In other words, the limit of metaphysics is less marked by questioning the possibility of legitimizing the existence of God (as Kant did) than by questioning transcendence in any form, as external, as yardsticks and points of reference, as a *meta* with regard to the order of facticity. As Heidegger says: “Beyng itself bears in itself its own measure, if a measure is still needed at all” (C, 12).

In short, Heidegger's God is not a transcendental God who crosses into the realm of Beyng, “changing” its face. The last God, the one who, so to speak, administers

²⁸ M. Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 26, Frankfurt am Main 1975. This work is made up of the Marburg Lectures of 1928. In English they have been published as *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. M. Heim, Bloomington 1984.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 161.

Beyng, does not have the power within it to break open of openness like thunder from the clear blue sky, to reveal its true dimension, not contained in the horizon drawn by the openness of Beyng.

Does the Heideggerian critique of transcendence finally resolve the issue of the possibility of thinking transcendence in relation to Beyng, and as such, transcendence which, in transcending Beyng, might not be conceived as “excessive entity” with regard to what it transcends? I shall leave this question unanswered.

Withholding and intimation

Heidegger’s God is no transcendental God, transcending Beyng and sending himself toward it, and manifesting himself in the space Between opened by thinking. The last God belonging to Beyng and not going beyond it can emerge from a place where the truth of Beyng comes to be, in the frame of the open horizon enduringly supported in the openness by human questioning and naming Beyng. This concept of God requires man in order to be deified.

Heidegger says this: it is man who opens the “space” Between, the realm of possibility of man and God relating to each other. God can reveal (or give) himself to man only within the limits of the openness of the open, relative to the horizon whose limits of openness are marked by the shape of inquiries into Beyng. This is why Heidegger’s God is a God “measured” to the horizon opened by man (*Da-sein*), which occurs through inventive thinking of Beyng attuned to his essence. The last God is the God for *Da-sein*.

And yet the possibility of the arrival of God in the framework of the horizon opened by man does not determine the matter of their possible link. Although thinking reaches the place where the “event of nearness” is possible, where God and man are entrusted to each other, the nearness of the last God is the most remote distance, and man’s uncertainty is a way of drawing near to what is remote. What kind of God is the last God, whom Heidegger calls “the highest figure of withholding”?

I would like to call attention to two related concepts around which Heidegger’s idea of the last God orbits: *withholding* and *intimation*. What is an intimation? Heidegger says it is “the law of the last God” (C, 323), marking the intimation which is “denying itself in refusal” (C, 374). The last God(s), “not out of ‘religion’; not as objectively present; not as expedients of the human being” (C, 399), “reveals itself [...] in the intimation [*Seine Wesung hat (...) im Wink*]” (C, 325). Heidegger’s God reveals itself by giving an intimation, yet this is not a verbal intimation given by a personified God, some variant of *logos*, the voice of a reminder or an invitation to converse. The term *Wink*, translated as “intimation,” and its verb form as “intimate” (*winken*), means a nod, a hand gesture, a bat of the eye. Yet this is not a gesture of invitation; it is a trace of God’s passing by, “the passing by of the last God [*Vorbeigang des letzten Gott*]” (C, 327). What is concealed in this play of metaphors between withholding and intimation? In other words, what is concealed between the last God passing by and giving intimations of withholding and the man summoned this time to “the originary turning [*Kehre*] in the event” (C, 323), the “leap into the appropriation [*Ereignung*]” (C, 323)?

The misery of abandonment... once again

Let us begin with man. The path of the originary turning that opens before us, in which, more than elsewhere, we feel Heidegger's reading of the mystics, is "the great stillness of the most concealed self-knowledge" (C, 323). This is "the shortest and steepest path" (C, 323), grounded in the law of "the great individuation in *Da-sein*" and "the solitude of the sacrifice" (C, 323). The image Heidegger gives us is not a record of a road that has been traveled (by Heidegger or someone else, e.g. Hölderlin); it is more of a non-searching entitlement, a prophecy of a future time. On this path man must again experience the misery of abandonment by Being, now many-times enhanced. The experience of the "most extreme" misery of abandonment means the necessity of a new return to a path leading toward the Beyng underway, near the passing-by of the last God. Those who stand before the challenge to "find, traverse, and build the *way back* out of the experienced abandonment by being" (C, 325), Heidegger calls "on the way back": "Without the sacrifice of these who take the way back [*Rückwegigen*], the possibility of an intimation of the last God would never dawn; they are the true fore-runners of the future ones [*Zukünftigen*]" (C, 325).

There is no need for a more detailed discussion of the Future Ones who will come after the arrival of the Returning Ones, waiting in "sacrificial restraint" (C, 313) to hear/see the "call of the extreme intimation" (C, 324), "before the passing by of the last God." It is they who are "witnesses to the stillest stillness" (C, 313), his passing by. Suffice to say, the intimation opens "restrained awaiting" (C, 317) the messianic horizon of the future, demanding of the Future Ones "a long presentiment of the last God" (C, 325), restraint in being near the possibility of resolving "the absconding and nearing of the last God" (C, 313).

God of a future time

We would like to pose one more question to Heidegger. Is the last God more than merely the most extreme withholding? In other words, does the intimation given by the last God, the highest form of withholding, fulfilling itself as extreme withholding, which creates "the emptiness of privation and austerity" (C, 303), fulfill itself as radical negativity, recalling the most extreme forms of negative theology, or does it contain a trace of positivity? There can be no doubt of the "presence" in the intimation of the power of withholding. The essence of Beyng includes concealedness, which is the withholding of unconcealing oneself, and the last God belonging to Beyng is the highest figure of withholding. Radical withholding is radical concealing, a radical *no* towards thinking that strives to unconceal what is hidden, so radical that withholding is, if we may use this word, absolute concealedness, "conceal[ing] what is most concealed" (C, 317), withholding withholding itself.

And yet Heidegger, in speaking of an intimation given by the last God, speaks of withholding that *hesitates*: "the hesitant withholding is the first and highest lighting up of the intimation" (C, 306). He says that "in the essence of the intimation lies the

mystery of the unity of the innermost nearing in the most extreme distance” (C, 323). The intimation merges withholding and hesitation. Let us look toward this “hesitating” trace of positivity the intimation contains. Let us begin with the fact that in the intimation God “loses Himself” in His withholding, in His *no* to every thought’s attempt to reveal Him. Yet the intimation, the sign of a radical withholding, leaves to human thinking “the emptiness of privation and austerity” (C, 303). Withholding is such a lack which is a “fact” of consciousness. The conscious lack becomes an emptiness which is not only a lack: it contains a minimum of positivity; it is “not the mere non-satisfaction of an expectation or wish [*einer Erwartung und eines Wünschens*]” (C, 301); it is an emptiness open to *something more*.

Let us go one step further. Heidegger uses a language of internal contradictions. Emptiness is the “plight of the abandonment by Being” (C, 302), but also “the fullness of what is still undecided” (C, 302). Thought has reached a place where it experiences the misery of abandonment, though it is also the misery “of the abandonment by being, but this as already transposed into the open and thus as related to the uniqueness of Being and to its inexhaustibility” (C, 302). Shifting into the open, which remains a misery that must be endured, is also a “disposition of the most originary belonging” (C, 302) to a place where “the concealment of that which [...] is called God” (C, 302) is resolved. Inevitably, we recall the words of St. Thomas that crown each of his five paths leading to God.

The intimation withholds itself, hesitating, and thus “grants the possibility of bestowal and appropriation” (C, 303). The possibility of resolving “whether the God is moving away from us or toward us” (C, 302) is shifted to the future. This is why “sacrificial restraint” (C, 313) is expected of the Future Ones, because the possibility of the arrival of the last God, who sends the Future Ones to the future, remains open. The call to the Future Ones: endure where you are (Heidegger says – occupy it), which “makes possible a bestowal as an essential possibility” (C, 303). To the “experience” of abandonment by the last God belongs – I use words foreign to Heidegger here – a *hope* for the “intrusion of the absconding and nearing of the last God” (C, 313) open to the future. Here is the hope that the “time of Gods” will not pass us by, and “restraint and reticence will be the most intimate celebration of the last God” (C, 317).

How to vividly express what transpires between God and man in Heidegger’s thought? Here is a window whose openness is limited by the shape of the frame. Man tries to stand as near as possible to what is outside, but is incapable of leaning out past the line of the window frame. Moreover, owing to the darkness outside, he can see nothing beyond the window. He leans toward the window and endures in waiting. What for? For something that may appear in the window to be illuminated by the inner light.

Conclusions

Do analyses of Heidegger's ontological difference allow us to move from problematics focused on the question of *how* (a concrete) *difference* differs toward a response to *how differences* differ? Yes and no. It would probably be hasty and premature to generalize the research devoted to ontological difference on other projects of fundamental difference. Yet we do not remain incapable of drawing some vital conclusions, which are not strictly formal in nature.

The most obvious conclusion that leads to the next is the following: ontological difference thus divides the "space" of what is thinkable (into Being and beings) so that the possibility of a meeting between God and man is situated where the truth of Beyng lies. Regardless of how much the last God withholds Himself from man, His possible nearness to man must be grounded in shared belonging to Beyng, and this is only possible when God and man find themselves on the same side of ontological difference. The last God does not "visit" beings: one searches for him there in vain. Metaphysical attempts to think God as the most existing Entity, which is the ground for Being, beings, and for its own self, concluded with the creation of a God of ontology alien to man and the final downfall of metaphysics.

Furthermore, the possibility of man staying on the side of Being is tied to his inner transformation. Man is a being who is called to abandon beings, to transcending the ontological difference through thought and crossing over to Beyng, where his essence "resides." Man's thinking and Beyng belong to one another, human essential thinking "comes near the essence of Beyng," emerges from it. The message sent to man is thus as follows: the possibility of staying near to God will only be granted him when, freed of beings, inventively thinking the emerging essence of God, he leaps into his essence (*Da-sein*), where the arrival of the last God is possible.

God from Beyng, and man from Beyng. God and man find themselves on the same side of ontological difference, where they are entrusted with the essence of Beyng and the essence of man. Their mutual dis-opposition and ap-propiation occurs in the "space" Between, which opens on the path of the inquiring inventive thinking, a leap into the event of Beyng. What else is this inscribing God and man into the "space" divided by difference, situating God and the essence of man on the same side of difference? This is a question that engenders another. How does placing God and man on opposite sides of the "space" separated by difference alter our way of thinking about them?

With this question we evoke the meditations of Jean-Luc Marion, who, in place of ontological difference, puts the "distance of praise" on the one hand, separating man and his world from God, and on the other, a difference grounded in giving, between the call and the human response. But moving toward Marion opens a new prospect for research that is beyond the scope of this article.

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