

Distance and Its Icon

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The icon is the same as the prototype.

However, it is different from it.

Gregory of Nyssa

Dum silet, clamat, et dum clamat, silet;

et invisibilis videtur, et du videtur, invisibilis est.

John Scotus Erigena, *De Divisione Naturae*, III, 4

Distance, difference

The critique of distance as a purely rhetorical and by no means conceptual theme, however pertinent it may be, lacks two characteristics which have determined our remarks from the beginning. First, distance has a definition. Secondly, it is by definition undefinable. Distance can be defined through a variety of equivalent statements. To use an example among others: only alterity allows for communion and no distinction separates without in the very same moment uniting more fully. Another example: the possibility of intimacy between God and man is rendered only by incommensurability because only withdrawal enables the Father, just as the paternal withdrawal contrives for man the sumptuous freedom of a son. And finally: that which makes “God” accessible, either to legitimate or delegitimate him, offers but the idol of the spectator and confuses itself with him in a phantasmatic identification. Thus distance as di-stance indicates that only duality allows recognition, and communion advances to the same degree as does the gap across which gazes are exchanged. Di-stance: that which becomes related to me always and forever issues from me and my doubles. Only he who stands before me is with me.

The struggle with the angel is not to be equated with communion (as the negative presumes), nor does it contradict communion (as supposed by an indistinct harmony), but it prepares the benediction which fulfills it. Distance buttresses both until they are blessed. Moreover, if I am the one, the other here is God; I only render to God a benediction after I have struggled to the degree that I understand that this very struggle was a blessing for me. God’s blessing is in making me face up to Him; struggle here finds its truth in creation. The greater the gap facing the distanced one, the greater the distance

bleses. Distance can therefore display its own radicalness to the very point of a definition. In order to achieve definition, it must be recognized as undefinable, or rather, as undefined. For it creates an indefinite series of definitions which connect to one another without a closure ever being able to exhaust the subject. Neither a discursive subject nor the object of a science, distance, by definition, removes itself from definition. Indeed, it only assures the communion of terms that it itself has isolated. Of these terms, one is of immediate interest to us now, we who are speaking here. As for the other term, we can only approach it through a communion that the gap traverses the more it is a question of distance. The definition of distance itself defines us as one of its terms, and therefore repels us from the other at the very moment its attraction asserts itself. The other, intimately a stranger, disappears into its own apparition and defines itself by the indefinite. The unthinkable is neither given nor matched by any image, any concept, or by any denial of an image or a concept. A radical approach to distance itself means that one of its terms remains radically unapproachable. Such is the case to the extent that distance itself offers itself in its most defined radicalness. Thus we could speak of an asymmetry of distance: its definition involves two poles, or rather, it calls them forth and supports them. But this definition is expressed from only one of those poles — ours, the one that is in human terms defined and finite. The communicating gap causes the other part to be marked by indefiniteness, an indefiniteness which precisely designates the intimate alterity of its terms within distance. There is no third pole, dull and neutral (Levinas) which can offer itself to speak fairly of distance. Furthermore, supposing such a pole does present itself, a pole which such and such thinking hastily done in representational terms will not fail to propose, it is not distance that would be thought through such a pole. This is because distance only opens the communicating gap from one of the terms to be found in it, or rather, from one of the terms that finds its own horizon in it: distance is discovered only like a path is blazed, beginning from a site, but not like reading an itinerary on a map, in the “anyplace” of a neutralized representation. Because it displays its radical definition, distance therefore reinscribes this definition into one of its terms, subjecting it to its perspective and plunging it entirely into its constitutive asymmetry. By definition, the definition is subjected to that which is defined by it: the definition is still comprehended in distance itself; the definition is expressed only within the intimate act of listening that it illustrates and which places it in perspective from a particular site. Even in its most radical definition, distance allows itself to be represented only if representation itself is introduced into the asymmetry of distance.

Radical is the di-stance that no representation can lay out. Its definition becomes an awakening echo, that twin characteristic of distance itself. An echo of ontological difference that Heidegger was given to approaching. It seems inevitable to pose a crucial question — doesn’t distance itself, essentially and with only with a few additions (to be specified later) amount to ontological difference? Distance as di-stance only stresses the gap in order to cultivate its intimacy. Whereas ontological difference distinguishes between beings caught in their unavoidable and weighty factualness, Being, far from

being confounded with one being or an other, governs, cultivates and unveils each being. Without giving itself to be seen like a being, being reveals itself in the most trivial evidence, and by this is able to obsess us with its evident presence, its present evidence — Being itself. Being and beings only become evident through difference, a difference where the beings in their brute facticity allow the “nothingness” of Being to be discovered in them without which, however, they would not themselves be open to discovery. Beings are all the more manifested by difference since difference condenses a being’s ontological aura; difference foreshadows a being all the more by consigning it to ontic “nothingness.” The ontic and the ontological are harmoniously differentiated by difference. “Being in the sense of revealing enthrallment and being as such in the sense of refuge-seeking encounter have their being as elements that have been differentiated from the Same, that which underlies difference (*Unter-Schied*). What underlies distinction is what is originally responsible for yielding and keeping apart the between, wherein enthrallment and encounter are conjoined and mutually supported in their fluctuating relationship. The difference of Being and being as the ground of distinction (*Unter-Schied*) between enthrallment and encounter lies in the *unmasking-enshrouding* (*entbergend-bergende Austrag*) issue of both.”¹ Difference does not signal an antagonism between Being and beings so much as it definitely deepens the irreducible doubleness of their Fold (*Zwiefalt*) in order to affect a more intimate resolution. Difference: a spanning which passes from one part to the next like a bridge’s arch spans pylons. *Austrag*: *tragen* here simply replaces *the fit* so that the play of spanning goes beyond a dual (di-) exteriority (*Aus-*). The ground of difference rests less on antagonism than on an equilibrium of forces. Distance maintains the duality (di-) of masses of matter by throwing one against the other in order to arrest, in the middle of the sky and in a buttressing and immobilising shock, their respective falls (*-stance*). In the exposure of ontological difference as a re-port (*Austrag*, difference) which most fundamentally resolves Being and beings rather than polemically opposes them, we find the communion that is ultimately the aim of distance. It must also be clearly noted that difference resolves Being and beings and that these do not correspond to God, man and Father-son of distance itself. To the extent that the relation distance-difference is composed of terms unlikely to be identified with each other, does not their correspondence become all the more strangely familiar? Moreover, to speak of “relations” in relation to distance appears as incongruous as to speak of them in relation to difference, for both, one and the other, still serve and they alone serve the purpose of making possible and thinkable all relations, oppositions and correspondence — from their original resolutions (*report*, *di-stance*, *Austrag*). Does distance provide a resolution in the same manner as ontological difference?

Distance is defined, as we have seen, only by exempting it from any definition claiming to secure a neutral intelligibility and to represent distance as an attainable object. For ontological difference challenges a clear and distinct representation of its stake and its play. As to its stake: the difference between Being and beings does not offer itself to

be conceived uniformly. In it, a being can give an object to be known, an object which thus finds support in a tangible material that is available, in a word, comprehensible. Ontic being sustains representation. Being, on the other hand, “is” not in the sense that beings are; it surrounds beings with the nimbus of an invisible light which no prism can decompose into elementary colours which are as visible as is a being; Being — the pure nothingness of beings² — never ceases to disappear so long as beings appear; beings themselves only appear as long as this ability is dispensed to them by the withdrawal of Being. Being never appears except in the withdrawal which renders (in)visible being visible. In its asymmetry, difference resolves the obsessive advance of a being with the accommodating withdrawal of Being, thus resolves the irrepresentable and the representable. “We speak of the *difference* between Being and beings. The “step back” starts from what has not yet been thought, difference as such. What is to be thought is the *status* of difference. The forgetfulness which must here be thought is the veiling of difference as such, a veiling that is pondered starting from occlusion, *lethe*, an occlusion which, for its part, has withdrawn itself from the very beginning. Forgetting belongs to difference because the former comes back to the latter. It is not as if forgetting comes belatedly to obscure difference simply because human thinking would be forgetful.”³ Forgetting is not the result of some inadvertent psychological process, even less of some collective failing: it stems from the very constitution of ontological difference which only stages Being from the perspective of a being, as the irrepresentable Being of a representable being. For as the lecture *What is Metaphysics?* indicates, Being only appears when Nothingness shows itself without appearance or visibility. Indeed, supposing presence is a privileged temporality of Being, it falls to a being to concentrate presence in itself without, however, Being ever conforming its “to be” to this presence. Forgetting thus does not add itself to ontological difference but constitutes its obverse: the fateful decision to think Being as Being of a *being* provokes the forgetting of difference, since difference fundamentally already managed the forgetting of Being. Forgetting is the stake of ontological difference and as a fateful stake it strips difference of all representation, since representation, at least understood in the rigour of its modern essence, far from compensating for this forgetting or even conceptualizing it, springs from this forgetting. As for distance, it analogically displays its stake in the alternatives of misrecognition and recognition. In insuring intimacy at the price of maintaining a gap, distance always risks being swallowed up in simple absence, possibly leading to the triviality of a (non-Nietzschean, non-radical) “death of God.” The final stake for distance is its own conceptual validity: either it misses itself in a misrecognition of the gap as a wasteland of absence and is thus totally disabled by not reaching the Father in his invisibility, or it constitutes itself through the recognition that only the saving withdrawal of the Father can enable a son. Distance must surpass absence; or rather, it must arise from the very radicalness of “believing without having seen” (John 20:29) that the paternal figure of God is fundamentally presented by the absent one. Far from acting like a borderless prison in which, to become lost, distance must lead the son to inhabit it like a fatherland,

distance perpetually risks misrecognition just as difference undertakes to forget itself without surrender. That the essence of the one consists in avoiding self-misrecognition, and that of the other in a destiny devoted to forgetting, is what opposes difference and distance more than their similarity; the relation of each to their invisibility determines their entire coherence. Respect for the invisible determines the fate of difference as much as that of distance.

The game they play is played in a similar fashion against all representation and against all speech. Ontological difference can never become an object of representation. Indeed, it could do so only if difference could be summed up as a relation which representational understanding could freely set into play and then could attribute amongst other games to that of Being and beings. However, if difference were to be added in such a fashion to a representable given, it would be added to a being, thus the difference of a being. But what is the matter with this being? The being is that which is this matter; that which is thus within it, Being, appears immediately as the Being of this being. The difference works between Being and the being even before a representation of difference or its definition by the understanding can intervene. Difference, "always already there," precedes its representation because no capacity for objectification, no capacity for representation, no understanding is deployed except from the Being of a being resolved with the being in its Being.⁴ Bringing into play the wrinkle of the unfolding enfolding of Being and beings, difference commands, from the outset, all thoughts which henceforth will never stretch except to try to resolve or to resolve themselves to this resolution. Difference establishes thought and it alone assures thought's opening into the Open. Furthermore, just as it escapes representation so too does ontological difference ground the thinking which will be thought in terms of representation. The circulation of this coming before culminates in and as language. Language does not present ontological difference as one of its possible statements. However, in every possible statement difference never ceases to express itself. Language never speaks except by following behind difference, for only Resolution can open the space where speech can happen. Arising out of difference, language never presents it. However, language effaces itself in order to pronounce itself through and on difference. Distance also eludes all representation since every representable object, like every representing subject, already depends most definitely upon prior distance. Furthermore, in its paternal guise, distance by definition evades any inquisition attempting to objectify it. Indeed, in the case of distance in its paternal guise, it is precisely the inability to objectify the unthought which leads beyond the negation of the thought, precisely the irrepresentable which outwits even the negation of representation. And in addition, language with its *logia* stems from distance itself which, in dispensing language, brings it into accord with absolute praise. Unescapable yet unquestionable, language only speaks from within the distance which precedes it and language forever makes concessions to distance and recedes from all the unformulated questions it will never grant. Language, here too, does not present distance itself since language is presented in it and through it; it is received. Thus difference and

distance, in a comparable way, play their respective games vis à vis representation and language. Resolution and hyphenated di-stance seem to give to distance the very traits which ensure the indefinite definition of ontological difference. Must we, because of this, fuse them and nullify the irreducible gap of distance in the encounter with ontological difference?

Before concluding prematurely, we must return to the non-concordance we previously signalled: the main attribute of distance itself consists in not misrecognizing itself while the split of ontological difference destines it to oblivion. In fact, ontological difference only resolves Being and beings first of all from Being as the Being of a *being*, that is, by side-stepping from the outset the foremost and fundamental question of Being as such, a question perhaps targetting the relation of Being to time and hence the privileging of the present tense in ontological temporalisation:

If ontological difference which appears here is the gravest of dangers, it is so because it *always* represents Being as a being within its metaphysical horizon; thus a question about a being as a being, that is the metaphysical question, has a different orientation than the questions of Being as Being. This may be negatively expressed by saying that the question of Being as Being is not the squaring away of the Being of a being by raising it to the power of two.⁵

As much as anything else, ontological difference distinguishes Being from a being. However, this distinction does not question Being *as Being*. And difference never ceases to forget Being as long as it insists upon proceeding to question Being from the perspective of a being. Ontological difference organized according to its rootedness in its own forgetting never ceases to produce metaphysics for it supplies the essence of metaphysics. It must be noted that metaphysics certainly differs from ontological difference in that in following the folds of the “folds” without thinking the following or the folds as such, “Metaphysics would be, in its essence, the unthought secret because it is withheld by Being itself;” metaphysics would remain in ontological difference by keeping it totally “unthought.” This very unthought casts the destiny of thinking upon its metaphysical path:

Because metaphysical thinking always stays engaged with difference it is therefore not thought as such; by virtue of the uniting unity of Resolution (*Austrag*) metaphysics is, and is so in the modality of a unity, both ontological and theological. By this very lapse the essence of metaphysics becomes this inability to think the essence of difference. It is metaphysics or unthought difference because it is rerouted for the exclusive benefit of a being whose present appearance hides the very appearance and withdrawal of Being which governs it.⁶

Over and above this situation, if at some moment our thinking risks the undertaking of a step outside the metaphysical and a step towards difference as such, if “our thinking is free to wander past difference or to distinctly consider it as such,” one should not conclude on the other hand that the metaphysical has only failed by happenstance to think difference because of some regrettable contingency and that a good speculative head could easily catch up to it:

The step backwards goes from the unthought, from difference as such, towards what must be thought — that is, towards the *forgetting* of difference. A forgetting which here must be thought of as a veiling considered from the perspective of *lethe* (occlusion), a veiling of difference as such, a veiling which, for its part, has been abstracted from the very beginning (*anfänglich*). Forgetting belongs to difference because the latter is linked to the former. Forgetting does not conceal difference after the fact, as if due to some forgetful aspect of human thinking.”⁷

What comes to be the stake in contemporary thinking is the non-metaphysical thinking of difference as such; however, the stake is a task and a test for this thinking, since the passage from difference to metaphysics and to its unthought is not accidental but arose out of a historical rigour whose constraining power we barely discern. Without a doubt, ontological difference as such does not coincide with the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics; as metaphysically unthought, difference feeds into the primacy accorded to a being in the question of the Being of a being and thus ever so necessarily leads to a privileging of the beingness of a being to the point of casting it into that most perfect form, the being most filled with beingness, the supreme being. “When Being deploys itself as the Being of a being, deploys itself as difference, as Resolution (*Austrag*), it does so to the same extent that the mutual relation of the grounding and the grounding in reason are and endure, so also does Being ground the being, and the being, as being most superlatively being (*das Seindste*), grounds Being.” “The ontological constitution of metaphysics follows from the rule of difference which keeps Being as ground and being as grounded as well as being as grounding-in-reason separate from but related to each other.”⁸ Difference, once it is deployed metaphysically in the very forgetting of that which differs from it, creates and confirms the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics. Thus the more metaphysical thinking attempts to install itself in the unthought of ontological difference, the more it constitutes and is constituted by onto-theology. For as we have already seen, onto-theology pushes the question of the Being of a being towards some supreme being; onto-theology pushes to the point that it figures such a supreme being as some sort of *causa sui*. The idolatry of God is thus achieved by metaphysical means. The unthought of ontological difference thus allows for the elaboration of a conceptual idol of God that is representable, conceived from the being which accuses Being, and as the supreme being, consecrating forgetfulness. The workings of difference are subjected to the metaphysical rule of a supreme being and to

its idolatrous representation. Distance attempts to break away from idols, even supreme ones. Through its own forgetting, difference thus contributes to an onto-theological constitution which distance seeks to revoke in the name of the unthought Absolute. Even if yet-to-be-thought difference and unthought difference seem to proceed along parallel paths, in their instantiations they remain radically opposed for two very profound reasons: first, one allows the idol of a *causa sui* to be affirmed whereas the other, in light of Necessity (*aitia*), ceaselessly disqualifies such a possibility. The second and most basic reason is that another opposition grounds this opposition: difference thinks “God” beginning from the question of Being (it matters little if it does so in metaphysical or non-metaphysical terms) whereas distance dares to step back from the question of Being and claims to think the unthought in a more abandoned and thus more original fashion. If this claim cannot be justified, could it, at the very least, be formulated?

However, here we must still face ontological difference and the course of Heidegger’s thinking. In a piece dating from the same period as *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger demonstrates how the analytic of *Dasein* precedes and determines the conditions of the being which affects the Christian event — “Christianity.” In a word, the analytic of *Dasein* ontologically indicates a pre-Christian content and given for which “Christianity” is only the mark of an ontic corrective. If theology’s rigour is measured by the robustness of the ontic corrective that it imposes upon the beings it concerns itself with, then such a measurement will in turn be defined according to the gap between the ontic corrective and the ontological analytic of *Dasein*. Also, since “Christianity” never intervenes except to provide ontic variation, it is *Dasein* that constitutes the ontological invariant. “Christianity” becomes the ontic variable of an ontological invariant, *Dasein*. Theology formulates this variable and gauges its gaps just as philosophy devotes itself to the analytics of the invariant and identifies its possible avatars.⁹

Beyond the opposition of “Christianity” and theology, what seems decisive for the basic case of the question of God is stated here once and for all: God will never be able to appear in the field of the inquiry except under the mediating instances of “Christianity,” first of all, and then of *Dasein*. Without a doubt, this means that God only plays in an ontic fashion (here according to an “ontic corrective”) upon the ground of a *Dasein* which *Sein und Zeit* immediately shows is the only approach to the question of Being: the supreme being of onto-theological metaphysics only finds its hermeneutic (ontological) location in the primacy of *Dasein*, meaning only where *Dasein* exists. The question of God is thus from the outset severed from the “God” of onto-theology, but also from any being that does not exist in the modality of *Dasein*. This means that any possible God, including one outside of onto-theology, is approached only through *Dasein* according to the allotment of certain roles: God, a being, *Dasein*, the hermeneutical being of Being; God *regresses* to the rank of supreme being, that is, a being in a very restricted sense, for its beingness as being is not that of Being. Theology is thus encamped upon an ontic variable: first, submission of God to Being; second, this means that God is only a being among all those that the Being of being resolves accord-

ing to ontological difference. God is but “God;” if he is now only invoked as a supreme being, it is so as to appear as the smallest of beings all the more; “God,” bound by this second condition, is entirely subjected to a preset idolatry which by means of lengthily analysed and precisely categorized intermediaries deduces him from Being (that is, *Dasein* which preserves him) just as a being among others. Indeed, a deduction — almost in the Kantian sense of the word — rigorously links Being (and therefore *Dasein*) with “God.” What seems remarkable is the insistence and persistence of passages that declare such a reduction:

thinking which begins to think from the question of the truth of Being is a thinking that inquires closer to the origin than can any metaphysical thinking. It is only by beginning with the truth of Being that the essence of the sacred is able to be thought. It is only from the essence of the sacred that the essence of the divine can be thought. It is only through the light of the essence of the divine that that which is designated under the rubric God can be named and thought. Must we not be able to understand with care and to listen to all these words if we wish as men, that is as beings, to be able to experience a God-man relation?¹⁰

A sequence rigorously links, as conditions which bind themselves, God to the divine, the divine to the sacred, the sacred (*das Heilige*) to the whole (*das Heil*: the healed). “What is no longer whole as such puts us on to the track of the whole. The whole is a signal beckoning towards the sacred. The sacred religiously binds the divine. The divine brings God near.” Before the question of the “death of God,” there was the question of the metaphysical figure (onto-theology) that made that death possible; likewise, the question of a “return of the gods” or of a “new god” must give way to a more essential interrogation. “Where must he (God) turn when he returns if a place is not prepared for him by men beforehand (*zuvor*)? And how could a place be found adequate for God if a ray of divinity had not already (*zuvor*) begun to glimmer in all that exists?” The lacking God in effect points towards an extinction of the divine. “Not only have the gods and the divine deserted us but in the history of the world the spark of divinity has been extinguished.”¹¹ The deduction claims to deepen the question of God by dealing with divinity in general; the question of divinity only has currency as a question of wholeness (*das Heile*) which itself is not received safe and sound except through the protection assured by the Open; in turn, the Open — following a modality that expressly ignores ontological difference and its resolution — fuses earth, sky, mortals, and the divine only according to the expansive glow of Being. What the lecture *What is a Thing?* calls the *Geviert*, the *Fourfold*, would not include the divine in the entities it dispenses if God was not first of all summed up by the divine and if the divine was not to be fully understood as a being, “for God himself, if he exists, is a being, holds a position as a being in Being, in the essence of this one who comes to be according to the worlding of the the world.”¹² God must be understood to be a being and his coming (which is popularly

and metaphysically called his “existence”) depends upon the possibilities maintained by the world, and thus to offer a place—the Open—where the coming of such and such a being remains possible. Perhaps God created the world “ontically” but, without a doubt, it is the world as a living world which manages the Open that ontologically creates every aspect of the coming of God in the divine through the sacred according to the consent of the whole. The case here is no longer that of the idolatrous “God” of onto-theology. However, there may perhaps still be an idol here. That an idol is only beginning to show itself does not mitigate the idolatry. “God” exists according to the modality of a being. One can state in advance (*zu vor*) that “God” exists in the manner of a being and thus nothing could be said about him that would be an exception to the Being of being. Whether the latter is understood metaphysically or non-metaphysically does little to change the fundamental premise. Just as onto-theology produces an idol of “God” as *causa sui*, the thought of a “new beginning” will only greet “God” to the extent that it can create for him a “divine place” (*Aufenthalt* according to the commentary on the Heraclitan ethos in the *Letter on Humanism*). The gap between a metaphysical and a non-metaphysical thought of the divine matters less than their total agreement in idolatry in thinking of God as a divine being which yields the divine dignity of Being: always appears more fundamentally in “God” than as “God,” and Being thus attests to God’s being a being among others. “God” becomes the shining idol wherein Being spares us its divinity in the Fourfold.

This “God” is still an idol, the highest and most difficult to produce, the most glorious and most salutary for human *Dasein*. Without a doubt, its advent would joyously startle *Dasein*. However, it is still an idol. Before it makes its appearance, must we escape from it by risking an extreme conclusion: is not God a being that Being precedes, governs and doles out? Perhaps it is indeed necessary to be as blunt as possible while positing that Being and God are not one and that idolatry lurks in even the greatest thinkers (Heidegger but Thomas Aquinas as well¹³) when they come close to confusing the two. Perhaps we must renounce thinking about God from the perspective of Being not only when onto-theology concludes that “God is dead” and leaves no other choice for the believer, but also and all the more so when a “new beginning”¹⁴ leads to an overpopulation of “new gods” (Nietzsche) or a new “place” for the divine. Perhaps we must, with Dionysius the Areopagite, sustain our discourse with the very circularity of its reference and seriously listen to what the praise of distance offers to our thinking: that Being (but let us also note the One, or the Good, or Truth) does not offer an essential name for God and thus God only becomes thinkable once the unthought is admitted as the place, condition and measure of the Absolute. Finally, perhaps only a way of thinking that works *without postulates*, not even those of respecting the conditions it could establish for the operation of its own logic, would vaguely begin to appropriate the meaning of what it means to say: God. There’s more. What about a “God” considered as a being? Heidegger says that theology considers the “way” in which “Christianity” sublates (*aufheben*) human being and pre-Christian terms.¹⁵ No doubt. Still,

“Christianity” not only transforms the way of human being; or rather, this transformation operates first of all, before the disciple, through Christ himself, which is no small matter. As if referring to a coherent set of equivalencies, we can, of course, speak about “the divine among the Greeks, the Jewish prophets, and in the teaching of Jesus.”¹⁶ But it might be preferable to understand such equivalencies as Hölderlin understood the fraternal relation of Christ to Hercules and Dionysius as a cumulative, paradoxical and inaugural heritage (and no doubt, this is how Heidegger understood it), in which case, if the divine takes the aspect of Christ, the man-god, the “way” he affects human beings has a good chance of taking up the solemn infinity of the Incarnation: if God invested humans with all his grandness, gave himself without reserve from the depths of distance to human being — it is not only human “ways” that God assumes but humanity itself; it is not the ontic “way” of such and such a being but the basic constitution of *Dasein* which he embraces and refurbishes. *Kenosis* coincides here perfectly with recapitulation: in giving himself up to humanity and sacrificing to it all the signs of divinity, God masterfully and fundamentally takes possession of humanity as his due. If this is the case, we must ask two questions. First, is Christ, through the masterly recapitulative *kenosis*, content with an ontic and ontically thinkable event which modifies, *post hoc*, certain ontic determinations of *Dasein* (“content”) without wholly affecting its intimate constitution? Or does he, through an original and terminal coming, attempt to garner not only for a specific being (his own humanity) but also for the Being of a being an entirely new dimension? Without going into the details of this “new dimension” and its significance, nor even deciding if this first question must be answered, let us ask two further questions. First, does the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ affect ontological destiny or do they remain purely ontic events? Second, an objection to the ontological independence of God follows from the undeniable priorness of the “divine place” which would welcome him; but how precisely does God depend upon the place (according to such and such a figure of world history) humanity manages for him? In fact, an idol depends entirely upon this premise since the idol reflects it, gives it a name and finds a visual aspect in it. But Jewish pronouncements and Christian revelation both mobilize, on the grounds of a critique of idolatry which modern thought has not outgrown, an advent of God which is witnessed even though “his own received him not” (John 1:11). Far from limiting or forbidding manifestation, the fault of the “divine place” becomes its condition (as the destruction of all idols before the unthought) its characteristic (God alone can reveal himself where and when no other divine being can stay) and even its highest stake (God reveals himself by shedding divine glory). God who manifests himself as Jesus Christ does not depend on any “divine place” precisely because He casts off divinity as it is conceived by humans. Be it on the cross or in his state of being a Nazarene, what “divine place” was offered so that God could be suitably (that is divinely) received? None, and God was not suitably received. But does God want our suitable reception and does he make it a precondition of his advent? Should we not learn from God what suitability means according to the Evangelist’s meaning

when he says: “ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26)? Who can and who has the right to make decisions about the divine and the suitability of the divine, God or *Dasein*? *Kenosis*, misrecognition, and rejection repudiate the condition of a “divine place”; furthermore, they contribute to the erection of a figure of revelation as a paradox wherein humiliation and misunderstanding become the setting and the theatre of the *agape* (Spirit), of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father. The condition for the revelation of the Father in the figure of the Son, or rather, its investment and return, rely precisely upon the breakdown and collapse of any and all “divine places”: in the darkening of the sky with no hint of the blue halo that accompanies even the most minor of Greek gods, Christ dies, and trinitarian distance is revealed in this darkness. This is why the figure of revelation is equally displayed as a figure of dissimulation and thus of judgement (John, Pascal, etc.), for it appears and is received even when the most elementary conditions (“existential dimension,” “existential concept”) — “divine place” — fail. *Kenosis* imposes no conditions upon its revelation because through this revelation it gives itself and reveals nothing but this unconditional giving. Our lack of respect, in a word our “unsuitability,” even if it is based on an ontological destiny, cannot impose conditions on this giving without preconditions. For the mystery resides in this: God loves those who do not love him; God manifests himself to those that turn away from him, all the *more*, the *more* they turn away.

These two observations show that God takes his distance from the idols proposed by ontological difference and also, perhaps more simply, those proposed by Being. God withdraws in distance, in the unthought, and the undetermined and thus moves infinitely closer. Distance distances itself from ontological difference and Being which, among others, it governs. Distance itself is thus not formalizable from the perspective of difference. Can we hope, for that matter, to formalize distance through a critique of an ontological difference which still remains idolatrous? We believed so, and we tried it.

Translated by Françoise Lachance

Notes

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1 *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1957), 62–3 / *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambough (New York: Harper, 1969), 65.

On the notion of “resolution” (*Austrag*), see also 65–6, 67–8.

2 See *Was ist Metaphysik?* in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967).

3 *Identität und Differenz*, 46–7/40–1. See also “Der Spruck des Anaximander,” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), 336/ “The Anaximander Fragment,” in *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper, 1975), 50: “The forgetting of difference with which begins the history of Being in order

to find its accomplishment in it is not, however, a fault but the most splendid and grand event, an event in which the hesperian History of the world comes to be and comes to be decided. It is the advent of the metaphysical."

4 *Identität und Differenz*, 60/62–3. See "Temps et Être," in *l'Endurance de la pensée*, trans. F. Fédier (Paris: Plon, 1968), 66–67: "C'est pourquoi la pensée représentante et donatrice de raison ne répond pas plus à l'*Ereignis* que le dire simplement énonciateur." ("This is why thought representing and giving reason does not correspond to the *Ereignis* any more than the enunciating statement does."); and also *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1959), 41.

5 "Séminaire de Thor," protocol of September 4, 1968 in *Questions*, IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 237; see also 236, 240–1: "... si la métaphysique questionne bien en direction de l'Être de l'étant ('Qu'est-ce que l'étant par où il est?'), elle ne questionne pas sur l'Être lui-même." ("... if metaphysics questions toward the Being of beings ('What is the being by virtue of where it is?'), it does not question Being itself.")

6 "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot,'" in *Holzwege*, 244; *Identität und Differenz*, 69/71.

7 *Identität und Differenz*, 61–2/64, 46–7/50–1.

8 *Ibid.*, 67–8/69, 69/71.

9 *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, in *Archives de philosophie*, 69/3, Paris, 1969, 356–95.

10 "Brief über den Humanismus," in *Wegmarken*, 182/"Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper, 1976), 230. See also 169/218: "... the sacred, the only essential space of divinity which in turn grants the only dimension for gods and God only comes to the brilliance of appearance when, beforehand (*zuvor*) and in a long preparation, being is illuminated and has been experienced in its truth."

11 "Wozu Dichter?" in *Holzwege*, 294/"What

are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1976), 141, 249/92, 248/91.

12 "Die Kehre," in *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1962), 45–6/"The Turning," in *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), 49. See also 46/49: "If God is God, he comes from the constellation of Being and from within it." "Brief über den Humanismus," 161–2/210.

13 The validity of such an association does not stem so much from a few passing remarks by Étienne Gilson in *Être et Essence* (Paris: Vrin, 1972) App. 2, as in a very pertinent and serious study by J. B. Lotz, "Das Sein und das subsistierende Sein nach Thomas von Aquin," in *Martin Heidegger, Zum siebzigsten Geburtstag Festschrift* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1959), 180, where the doctor meets the conditions laid out by the thinker in that he does not misconceive (forget) ontological differences.

14 See, among other texts, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1961) vol. 2, 29, 262.

15 *Phänomenologie und Theologie*, 386; theology considers the "Existenzart" (368, 374) of "Christianity," its "Seinsart" (376), "Existenzweise" (366, 367), its "Wiessein" (384), in a word, its "Weise" (370, 372); only this "way" gives to the "pre-Christian content" a new ontic orientation harmonized simultaneously as a "re-naiissance" but dependant on the invariant of its ontological determination. One will not fail to note here that the given interpretation will be totally reversed if *Weise/Art* were to be understood in the sense of Maximillian the confessor's *tropos*. See J.-M. Garrigues, *Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), 100.

16 "Ein Brief an einen jungen Studenten," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1954), 183.