

The Fascination of the Origin. Meister Eckhart as the Neoplatonic “Hidden Source” of Heidegger’s Thought¹

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I. HEIDEGGER AND NEOPLATONISM

Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger) by J.-M. Narbonne (2001) counts in all likelihood as the most important study of the relationship between Heidegger and Neoplatonism.² It interprets Heidegger’s enumeration of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of the One among all other instances of the onto-theological constitution (*ontotheologische Verfassung*) of metaphysics as too reductive and, after all, inappropriate. Narbonne rightly points out that the Neoplatonic metaphysics (or “henologies”) are *katholou-protological* structures (according to Rémi Brague’s definition),³ rather than onto-theological ones. Within these metaphysical structures the ontological difference does not vanish; nor does the First Principle count as being—although the medievals speak about the *summum ens*. Narbonne also emphasises that in Heidegger’s *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (1936–38) we can find something more than a Neoplatonic atmosphere; in several places of this treatise one can detect genuine Neoplatonic *topoi*, as

1. This article partly derives from my PhD. thesis, *Il fascino dell’origine. Meister Eckhart Lese- und Lebemeister di Martin Heidegger*, written and discussed under the guidance of Adriano Fabris at Pisa University. Parts of this article have been discussed with Cristina D’Ancona, in relation to the *Liber de causis*, and Wayne J. Hankey, who has offered me his view about Heidegger’s Neoplatonism; I wish to express my profound gratitude to them. I also thank Loris Sturlese for some precious indications concerning the *Liber positionum*. For the careful revision of the English text I thank Wayne J. Hankey and Sara Marchesini. Any errors are of course my own. Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* and Eckhart’s *Deutsche* and *Lateinische Werke* will be cited in the notes as follows: HGA, DW and LW, followed by a Roman and an Arabic numeral indicating the volume and the page respectively. When also an Arabic numeral within brackets is present, it indicates the page of the translation, which is cited in bibliography.

2. See also K. Kremer, “Zur ontologischen Differenz.”

3. R. Brague, *Aristote et la question du monde*.

those of the ineffability of being and the doctrine of being as nothing, and finally, the idea that truth is reached through negative statements rather than through positive ones.⁴ Finally, Narbonne analyses Heidegger's attempt at opposing, even though less explicitly than one might expect him to do, a "horizontal" *Ereignis* to the "vertical" quest for the *proton*, which is peculiar to the "differentiation of level" (*dénivellation*) typical of the Neoplatonic henologies.

Narbonne's study, however, exhibits some weaknesses. First and foremost, it refers almost exclusively to the *Contributions to Philosophy*, without taking into account other crucial texts, such as *Augustine and Neo-Platonism*, on which Heidegger lectured during the *Summer Semester* (SS) of 1921 in Freiburg. The references to Neoplatonism made in this course are more numerous, wider and more explicit than those in the *Contributions*, where we can find only two explicit references, both brief and, taken in themselves, not particularly revealing if not analysed within a broader context.⁵ This is why Narbonne is forced to explain the analogies between Heidegger's *Ereignis* and the Neoplatonic "henologies" through an abstract comparison of some philosophical "systems." Therefore, the author is compelled to endorse Heidegger's ground for discussion, which implies that "henology" is nothing if not an instance of onto-theology, and the thought of *Ereignis* counts as the only alternative to metaphysical thought. It follows from this that Narbonne can only oppose "vertical" henologies to a "horizontal" *Ereignis*. Most importantly, in this way he cannot explain why the *Contributions* show the aforementioned Neoplatonic features. An answer to this question may be provided by taking into account that Heidegger's interest in Neoplatonism largely antedates the *Contributions* and lasts for long after. For this reason, when claiming that Heidegger almost completely ignored the Neoplatonic problems in the *Introduction* to his book, Narbonne seriously clouds the issue.⁶ It is therefore necessary to show where and when Heidegger met the Neoplatonic doctrines and how he interpreted them. I shall try to indicate concisely the most important passages.

First, Heidegger had access to a great many sources wherein he could read about the crucial role of Plotinus and Neoplatonism in the development of Medieval mysticism—a literature he was acquainted with since

4. J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 209–17.

5. HGA LXV 273–74 (192–93) and 376 (262).

6. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis*, 19. On the contrary, the comparison between Heidegger and Plotinus attempted by R. Schürmann, "L'hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique," seems to presuppose Heidegger's acquaintance with Neoplatonism. For a reply to Schürmann see J.-M. Narbonne, " 'Hénosis' et 'Ereignis'."

1910—as the letter Heidegger wrote to Jaspers on 6 August 1949 indicates.⁷ Nevertheless, the first important reference to Neoplatonism can be found in *Augustine and Neo-Platonism*, where Heidegger plainly declares that the problem of the relationship between Augustine and Neoplatonism is by no means a mere historical fact, but is “something in whose peculiar dimension of effect we are standing today.”⁸ Heidegger shows that Augustine’s concept of *fruitio Dei* is based on the Neoplatonic idea of “Objecthood of God [*Gegenständigkeit Gottes*],”⁹ derived from the Neoplatonic conception of the First Principle. Throughout the lecture course, he often quotes Plotinus with no mention of any specific treatise in the *Enneads*. The frequent references to the Plotinian aesthetics and theory of contemplation, however, suggest that I 6 (1), *Peri toy kaloy*, may be the most probable source Heidegger used with reference to this course. In all likelihood, Heidegger is also bearing in mind IV 8 (6), *Peri tes eis ta somata kathodoy tes psyches*, and V 1 (10), *Peri ton trion archikon yposthaseon*: in some crucial passages of these treatises, in fact, Plotinus deals with the contemplation of the One and its beauty. The two aforementioned treatises were also cited by Karl Jaspers in his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919), which Heidegger analysed in a detailed and critical review written between 1919 and 1921. In his book, Jaspers often refers to Plotinus and Eckhart; indeed, in the final section, devoted to mysticism, he makes a comparison between “the doctrine of the One in Plotinus” and “the doctrine of the ideas in Kant.” In his review, on the other hand, Heidegger maintains that Jaspers is dealing with a “theoretical” rather than a phenomenological meaning of existence, which is approximately the same imputation he raised against Augustine’s Neoplatonism in the course of 1921. Nevertheless, this criticism against Jaspers seems to be inspired by the criticism Jaspers himself raises against Plotinus’ mysticism in his *Psychologie*. Finally, in the *Natorp-Bericht* (1922), Heidegger returns to the problem of the relationship between Christianity and Neoplatonism in the same vein as he did in *Augustine and Neo-Platonism* when speaking about the Neoplatonic

7. M. Heidegger/K. Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1920–1963* 180. In the *Feldweg-Gespräche* Heidegger refers to a 1914 translation of Eckhart’s Middle High German (MHG) writings into contemporary German by Joseph Bernhart, *Deutsche Mystiker*. Band III: *Meister Eckhart*, see HGA LXXVII 158. In the *Einleitung* to his translation, Bernhart, a Catholic scholar of medieval mysticism, often refers to Plotinus and Neoplatonism as essential sources for the development of German medieval mysticism. In the *Feldweg-Gespräche* Heidegger refers also to the 1857 critical edition of Eckhart’s German writings: *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Bd.2, *Meister Eckhart*, by Franz Pfeiffer, see HGA LXXVII 159. Heidegger quotes Pfeiffer’s edition also in the SS 1927 course, see HGA XXIV 127–28 (90–91) and in the SS 1930 course, see HGA XXXI 6 (4). Evidence for Heidegger’s mystical literature can be found in F.-W. Von Hermann, “Gelassenheit und Ereignis,” 376.

8. HGA LX 173 (124).

9. *Ibid.*, 179 (130).

elements in the Medieval reception of Aristotle's thought.¹⁰ It follows from this that during these years Neoplatonism represents an important framework for Heidegger's investigation into primal Christianity and modern conceptions of mysticism (like that of Jaspers).

I shall take into account two doctrines to which Heidegger refers several times over the years: the Neoplatonic notion of *dynamis* and the Medieval doctrine of *analogia entis*. They both shed light on how deeply Heidegger was influenced by Neoplatonism. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (the crucial SS 1927 course), Heidegger mentions some Neoplatonic doctrines and texts (in particular, the *Liber de causis*), claiming that the Medieval distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* is to be traced back to the Neoplatonic tradition.¹¹ He also maintains that one of the Medieval thinkers most engaged in the question of the *essentia/existentia* distinction is Meister Eckhart.¹² Additionally, this course provides further references to Neoplatonism, the latter remaining yet silent but nonetheless greatly important. In §21, Heidegger comes back to the problem of the distinction between possibility and actuality, which he had already faced in *Being and Time* when dealing with the concept of phenomenology (§7): "Higher than actuality stands *possibility* [*Höher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit*]. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility."¹³ In §21 of the 1927 course, this distinction is evidently not conceived in an Aristotelian vein:

Temporality as origin, is necessarily richer [*reicher*] and more pregnant [*trächtiger*] than anything that may arise [*entspringen*] from it. This makes manifest a peculiar circumstance, which is relevant throughout the whole dimension of philosophy, namely, that within the ontological sphere the possible is higher than everything actual [*böher als alles Wirkliche das Mögliche ist*]. All origination and all genesis in the field of the ontological is not growth and unfolding but degeneration, since everything arising arises [*entspringt*], that is, in a certain way runs *away* [*entläuft*], removes itself from the superior force of the source [*sich von der Übermacht der Quelle entfernt*].¹⁴

10. HGA LXII 370.

11. HGA XXIV 113 (81).

12. HGA XXIV 127–28 (90–91). With the exception of the 1918–19 outlines and sketches written for the *Winter Semester* (WS) 1919/20 course *The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism* (not read), the pages devoted to Eckhart in the SS 1927 course represent the most exhaustive passage of Heidegger's texts where an explicit mention of the Dominican master can be found.

13. HGA II 38 (63).

14. HGA XXIV 438 (308). Here, Heidegger not only recalls §7 of *Being and Time*, but also §67, HGA II 334 (383): "The ontological source [*Ursprung*] of Dasein's Being is not 'inferior' to what springs from it, but towers above it in power from the outset; in the field of ontology, any 'springing-from' is degeneration."

The distinction made here between the possible and the actual is closer to the Neoplatonic notion of *dynamis* than to the Aristotelian conceptual couple *dynamis / energeia*. The passage mentioned above seems to be reminiscent of Proposition 21 of the *Liber de causis*:

The First is rich owing to itself [*Primum est dives per se ipsum*] and is more rich. . . . That thing is more rich which infuses, while no infusion upon it occurs in any way [*Illa ergo res est dives maius quae influit, et non fit influxio super ipsam per aliquem modorum*].¹⁵

The aforementioned reference to the *Liber de causis* is not the only implicit one Heidegger makes in this course. In fact, in §19, while apparently dealing with Plotinus' treatise III 7 (45) *Peri aionos kai chronoy*,¹⁶ he seems to be referring to Proposition 31 of the same book.¹⁷ This peculiar use of the *Liber* can be explained if we take into account that Heidegger could have had his attention drawn to it *via* Meister Eckhart, who often refers to Proposition 21 and, in general, to the *Liber*, both in his German and Latin writings.¹⁸ One year later, in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (SS 1928), Heidegger is still referring to the notion of "richness" of the *Liber de causis*. In *Transcendence and temporality* (*nihil originarium*) (§12) he claims that the *Dasein* has "the character of being-richer-than, of outstripping [*des Reicher-sein-als, des Über-schwunges*]."¹⁹ This outstripping pertains to the originary dimension of temporality,²⁰ indicated by Heidegger as the "*nihil originarium*". Therefore it is also a feature of the richness of possibilities of *Dasein's* freedom, as indicated in §13: "Freedom, as the ecstatic being-toward-possibilities is thus,

15. A. Pattin "Le Liber de Causis," 180–81, 48–9/62–63 (125).

16. HGA XXIV 327–28 (231): "Among ancient conceptions of time, that of Plotinus also has a certain significance, *peri aionos kai chronou* (*Enneads* 3.7), 'On the Aeon and on Time'. Aeon is a peculiar form intermediate between eternity and time. The discussion of the aeon played a great role in the Middle Ages. Plotinus, however, gives us more of a theosophical speculation about time than an interpretation adhering strictly to the phenomenon itself and forcing the phenomenon into conceptual form." Here, we can also grasp a potential reference to Proclus. In fact, it seems more likely that Proclus' thought rather than that of Plotinus can be understood as a "theosophical speculation."

17. See Pattin "Le Liber de Causis," 198, 43–48 (158): "Between a thing whose substance and action are in the moment of eternity and a thing whose substance and action are in the moment of time there exists an intermediary, and it is that whose substance belongs to the moment of eternity, while [its] activity [belongs to] the moment of time."

18. See W. Beierwaltes, "'Primum est dives per se,'" 285–300; idem, "Eckhart et *Le livre des causes*," 159–72.

19. HGA XXVI 273 (211).

20. See HGA XXVI 270 (208–09): "This oscillation [*Schwingen*] of the self-temporalizing ecstases [*der sich zeitigenden Ekstasen*] is, as such, the upswing [*Überschwung*], regarded as [swinging] toward all possible beings that can factually enter there into a world."

in itself, a swinging-over [*Überschwingen*] into possibilities.”²¹ Heidegger then relates the *Überschwung* of *Dasein*’s temporality (hence freedom) to possibility, which is exactly “higher than actuality.”²² The term *Überschwung* can be understood as the translation of *superabundantia*, used by Eckhart in his Latin sermon XXXIV, when mentioning Proposition 21, following the footsteps of Thomas of Aquinas.²³ In fact, in his *Expositio* about the *Liber*, Thomas, interpreting Proposition 21, uses the term *abundantia*, in order to indicate God’s richness.²⁴

Another source might have inspired the “Neoplatonic” passage of *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* is Émile Bréhier’s article “L’idée du néant et le problème de l’origine radicale dans le Néoplatonisme grec,” published in 1919 in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*. This article not only contains striking conceptual analogies with the Heideggerian “nothing” of the late twenties; a statement in Heidegger’s passage on possibility and actuality, in fact, seems to be a quasi literal replica of the last sentence of Bréhier’s article: “Temporality as origin, is necessarily richer [*reicher*] and more pregnant [*trächtiger*] than anything that may arise [*entspringen*] from it.” Bréhier: “... la richesse et la fécondité de son [i.e., of the first principle as radical origin] non-être s’oppose aux déterminations arrêtées et fixes auxquelles se réduit l’intelligence.”²⁵

The Neoplatonic doctrine of *dynamis* arises again in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics H 1–3. On the Essence and Actuality of Force* (SS 1931), in which Heidegger interprets Aristotle’s *dynamis* with the meaning of “force” (*Kraft*).

21. HGA XXVI 278–79 (215).

22. *Ibid.*, 280 (216). See *ibid.*, 56 (45), where Heidegger mentions “Eckhart’s ‘Nu,’” while discussing Thomas Aquinas’ conception of *scientia dei* and its *aeternitas* (*Summa theologica*, *Quaestio XIV De scientia dei*, art.IX, *Utrum Deus habeat scientiam non entium*).

23. LW IV 303. Here Eckhart, together with *superabundantia*, also employs *abundantia*, *copia* and *redundantia* or *effluxus*.

24. Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Super Librum de Causis Expositio* (par H.-D. Saffrey O.P.), 112–14. On *Überschwung*, see also HGA LXV 118 (82).

25. Bréhier, “L’idée du néant,” 475. In *Augustine and Neo-Platonism*, Heidegger seems to be well acquainted with contemporary French studies in Neoplatonism; he is also aware of the influence of Bergson’s teaching on these studies, see HGA LX 159 (115): “Augustine was subject to a renewal in the Catholic Church, in particular in seventeenth-century France (Descartes, Malebranche, Pascal, Jansenism, Bossuet, Fénelon). He remained especially at home there until the modern Catholic school of apologetics in France, which at the same time appropriated Bergsonian ideas (which, in turn, were determined by Plotinus).” D.F. Wilband, “Much Ado about Nothing,” 211–13, underlines Heidegger’s influence on Bréhier. However, Bréhier’s article, written when Heidegger was still young and almost unknown, could have influenced Heidegger himself. With reference to Plotinus’ influence on Bergson’s thought see W.J. Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France*, 106.

In light of this excursus, it may be plausible to assume that, as well as Meister Eckhart, Plotinus could be added as an author who may have inspired Heidegger's "Neoplatonism."²⁶ In fact, Plotinus speaks about the One as the "power of all things" (*dynamis ton panton*) and defines it as the "principle" (*arche*), the "source" (*peghe*) and the "power" (*dynamis*), in III 8 (30) *Peri physeos kai theorias kai toy henos* (chapter 10).²⁷ The "richness" of the *Liber de causis* appears again on several occasions. An excellent example of this can be found in *The parting* (*Der Abschied*) (§7), found in the treatise *Über den Anfang* (1941):²⁸ "In parting concealment itself does begin and disclosure can now be a gift, the giving of which never reduces the richness of the only."²⁹

In the SS 1931 course, we find another doctrine belonging to Neoplatonism: the *analogia entis*. Heidegger considers this doctrine as an unsuccessful attempt of Medieval philosophy to solve the problem of the unitary meaning of being. Moreover, Heidegger reckons Meister Eckhart as being the only Medieval thinker who does not indulge in a compromise with a doctrine "which is not a solution but a formula."³⁰ The latter statement greatly sheds light upon Meister Eckhart's particular role in Heidegger's thought. This statement, however, appears particularly surprising, since the doctrine of analogy holds a crucial function in Eckhart's metaphysics because it defines the relationship between God and the world as analogical, thus expressing the absolute ontological dependence of beings on God's being. The Eckhartian spirituality of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) and detachment (*Abgeschiedenheit*) rests entirely upon his "metaphysics of analogy."³¹ It seems reasonable to assume that Heidegger must have been aware of this. The discussion about the *analogia entis* featured already in *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy* (SS 1926), where Heidegger refers to the criticism of Aristotle made by Plotinus in VI 1 (42) and VI 3 (44) (*Peri ton genon tou ontos*, I and III).³² The Medieval

26. Schürmann had already guessed this connection, although not further developing this insight. See his "L'hénologie comme dépassement de la métaphysique," 347.

27. See C. D'Ancona, "Plotinus and later Platonic philosophers on the causality of the First Principle," 371–75.

28. This treatise deals with Eckhartian notions and particularly with "detachment" (*Abgeschiedenheit*), as we shall see better in the next paragraph. "Parting" (*Abschied*) is a concept Heidegger derives from "detachment." For a negative characterization of *Abgeschiedenheit* in *Being and Time* see HGA II 310 (357–58).

29. HGA LXX 26: *Im Abschied fängt die Verbergung selbst an und Entbergung kann jetzt erst ein Geschenk sein, dessen Gabe den Reichtum des Einzigen nie mindert.*

30. HGA XXXIII 46 (38).

31. See A. De Libera, *Le problème de l'être chez Maître Eckhart*, 59–63.

32. HGA XXII 296–99 (220–22). An excellent study on Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle is R. Chiaradonna, *Sostanza movimento analogia*.

question of analogy, however, is mainly discussed in §1³³ and §20 of *Being and Time* (the latter being devoted to the question referring to the not-univocal meaning of *substantia* in Scholasticism and in Descartes).³⁴ One year later (SS 1927 course), Heidegger makes a brief digression about Suárez' concept of God as *primum analogatum*.³⁵ And in 1943, in one of the notes written for the first edition of *On the Essence of Truth*, Heidegger refers to "the crude, unthought *analogia entis* adopted from Aristotle by the Scholastics."³⁶

Hence, in light of this, how is Heidegger's statement about Eckhart's doctrine of analogy to be understood? A possible explanation lies in Heidegger's often disparaging judgements about Neoplatonism. As we have already seen, in *Augustine and Neo-Platonism* Heidegger claims that the Neoplatonic doctrine of the First Principle prevents Augustine, and Christian thinkers in general, from grasping the facticity of Christian life (that is, the facticity of life itself). Furthermore, in SS 1926, Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle does not count as a real philosophical development;³⁷ and in *Schelling: Vom Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit* (1809) (SS 1936), when his distance from Christianity is as great as his proximity to Nazism, Neoplatonism is seen as extraneous to the western and "German" philosophy. In fact, it is conceived as a late Greek philosophy compromised with the Jewish-Christian (i.e., Eastern) and Roman thought.³⁸ In the *Contributions*, Neoplatonism is associated with Christian doctrines pertaining to creation, to God as *summm ens* and to *analogia entis*;³⁹ in *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik"* (WS 1937/38), Neoplatonism is held responsible for the lack of true philosophy in the Middle Ages. The reason for this is the link with Christianity, further causing the oblivion of the Greek philosophy, which ends with Aristotle.⁴⁰ In §132 of *Mindfulness*⁴¹ Heidegger interprets Neoplatonism as the starting point of all subsequent developments of mysticism which, in turn, is considered as "the limit set by metaphysics itself either for itself or against itself."⁴²

33. HGA II 3 (22).

34. *Ibid.*, 92–95 (125–27).

35. HGA XXIV 114–15 (81–82). In the WS 1929/30 course, Suárez is regarded as both the peak of Scholastic philosophy and, at the same time, the starting point of modern thought, see HGA XXIX/XXX 77–85 (51–55).

36. HGA IX n. a 181 (139).

37. HGA XXII 296 (220).

38. HGA XLII 49.

39. HGA LXV 273 (193) and 376 (262).

40. HGA XLV 220–21.

41. Entitled "*Mysticism*" ("Mystik"), see HGA LXVI 403–04 (356–57).

42. *Ibid.*, 403 (356).

In light of these passages, we discern that Heidegger carried on a hidden dialogue with Neoplatonism. Thus, it becomes evident how writings such as the *Contributions* contain Neoplatonic echoes and topics, even though lacking explicit mention of Neoplatonic texts and authors. I surmise, therefore, that “Heidegger’s” Neoplatonism actually is an “Eckhartian” one; moreover, Heidegger’s reticence about both Eckhart and Neoplatonism could derive from his doubtful and troubled departure from Catholicism in the first place, and then from Christianity altogether. Nevertheless, Heidegger’s debt towards his *Lese- und Lebemeister*⁴³ Eckhart was and remained great: we have now to illustrate how deep this debt was.

2. HEIDEGGER AND MEISTER ECKHART: *LASSEN* AND *GELASSENHEIT*

In 1969, during the seminar of Le Thor, Heidegger claimed: “... the deepest meaning of being is *letting*. Letting the being be.”⁴⁴ Heidegger’s remark is crucial: all along his *Denkweg*, in fact, the meaning of *lassen* (and its compounds) is tightly bound with the mystic concept of *Gelassenheit*.

If we analyse the development of the connection between *lassen* and *Gelassenheit*, we will find an important guiding principle, allowing us to point out a first map of Heidegger’s unexpressed references to Meister Eckhart. One might object that the meaning of the Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* does not correspond to the meaning of the Eckhartian one. This difference is also highlighted by Heidegger himself in the first of the *Feldweg-Gespräche* (1944), when claiming that Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* is still embedded within the metaphysics of the will.⁴⁵ According to Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* is supposed to be understood as paving the way for a non-metaphysical thought. Nevertheless, as I intend to prove, this is not the only use Heidegger made of this term: in fact, with regard to Heidegger’s use of both *lassen* and *Gelassenheit*, we may recognize his constant tendency to refer to their originary mystical meaning. Moreover, when speaking of *Gelassenheit* and *lassen*, he often refers to further Eckhartian concepts,⁴⁶ such as that of *durchbrechen* and *Durchbruch* (MHG *durchbrechen*, *durchbruch*), the “irruption,” a term Eckhart uses in his German sermons to express the *unio mystica*. I, therefore,

43. See HGA XIII 89.

44. HGA XV 363 (59): ... *der tiefste Sinn von Sein das Lassen ist. Das Seiende sein-lassen.*

45. This statement, however, does not invalidate Heidegger’s consideration of Meister Eckhart. See HGA LXXVII 109: “At the same time, there is yet a great deal to learn from him [*Von dem gleichwohl viel Gutes zu lernen ist*].”

46. The study of J. Vorlauffer, *Das Sein-Lassen als Grundvollzug des Daseins*, omits all mystical elements belonging to the concept of *Gelassenheit*. On the contrary, J. Wagner, *Meditationen über Gelassenheit*, tries to elucidate the Heideggerian *lassen* in the light of Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*, although developing his analysis on the basis of only a few writings. Perhaps, the best study of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* is W. Beierwaltes, “Heideggers Gelassenheit.”

assume that these are the reasons for the mystical echo found in Heidegger's writings, which is difficult to explain otherwise. I will now elucidate the main points which can be related to this.

We find a first significant use of *lassen* in *Being and Time* (§7), where Heidegger gives a "Greek" definition of phenomenology as "*apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."⁴⁷ *Seben lassen* means to let the beings, who show themselves, be seen. Subsequently, in §57, Heidegger speaks of "the forsakenness [*Verlassenheit*] with which it [i.e., the *Dasein*] has been abandoned [*Überlassenheit*] to itself";⁴⁸ this is the forsakenness of the *Dasein* which has heard the call of the conscience, calling "*in the very depths of its uncanniness*"⁴⁹ and "Out of the depths of this kind of Being":⁵⁰ i.e., the being of the *Dasein*, to be intended as care (*Sorge*): "... *Dasein*, in the very basis of its Being [*im Grunde seines Seins*], is care."⁵¹ Resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), which is the pre-eminent manner of disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*), is described, in §65, as "letting itself be encountered undisguisedly [*das unverstellte Begegnenlassen*] by that which it seizes upon in taking action."⁵² In §68 (section a), Heidegger affirms that the temporality of resoluteness is a form of Present conceived of as "the 'moment of vision [*Augenblick*]'"⁵³ The *Augenblick* is to be understood as "ecstasy" (*Ekstase*), the "rapture" (*Enttrückung*), in which the *Dasein* encounters (*begegnet*) his possibilities: "In the moment of vision' nothing can occur; but as an authentic Present or waiting-towards [*als eigentliche Gegen-wart*], the moment of vision permits us to encounter for the first time [*läßt er erst begegnen*] what can be 'in a time' as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand."⁵⁴ In the following paragraph (section a), Heidegger interprets the existential meaning of concern (*Besorgen*) as a *Bewendenlassen*, as letting things be involved: this *Bewendenlassen* is considered in its existential meaning as a *Seinlassen*: "Letting things be involved [*Das Bewendenlassen*] is something which we understand existentially as a letting-them-'be' [*ein "Sein"-lassen*]."⁵⁵ Still, in the same paragraph, section c, the horizontal schema of the ecstasy of the Past is defined as "that *in the face of which* it [i.e., the *Dasein*] has been thrown, and that *to which* it has

47. HGA II 34 (58): ... *apophainesthai ta phainomena: Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her seben lassen.*

48. Ibid. 277 (322).

49. Ibid. 276 (321): ... *im grunde seiner Unheimlichkeit ...*

50. Ibid. 277 (322): ... *aus dem Grunde dieses Seins.*

51. Ibid. 278 (323).

52. Ibid. 326 (374).

53. Ibid. 338 (387).

54. Ibid. 338 (388).

55. Ibid. 354 (405).

been abandoned.”⁵⁶ Concerning the Future, in §65, Heidegger claims that the anticipatory resoluteness is “*Being towards* one’s ownmost, distinctive potentiality-for-Being.” The latter is possible:

only in that Dasein *can, indeed* come towards itself [*auf sich zukommen*] in its ownmost possibility, and that it can put up with this possibility as a possibility in thus letting itself come towards itself [*in diesem Sich-auf-sich-zukommenlassen*]*—*in other words, that it exists. This letting-itself-come-towards-itself [*sich auf sich Zukommen-lassen*] in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the *future as coming towards* [Zukunft].⁵⁷

The *lassen*, then, seems to be implied in all three temporal ecstasies: *Überlassen*, *Begegnenlassen* and *Zukommenlassen*, for Past, Present and Future, respectively. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*—§12, section a (*Intentional structure and the understanding of being in productive comportment*)—the “so-called phenomenological Wesensschau,” rather than having a confused mystical meaning, is intended as having “a peculiar *character of discharge and release* [*Entlassung- und Freigabecharakter*].”⁵⁸ In this paragraph, Heidegger also discusses the Kantian concept of existence as absolute position (*absolute Setzung*), which, in Heidegger’s meaning, is the “*letting something stand of its own self* [*Stehenlassen von etwas an ihm selbst*], and indeed absolutely, as detached [*abgelöst*], set free [*freigegeben*] as ‘an und vor sich selbst,’ in and for its own self, as Kant says.”⁵⁹ He then adds:

If phenomenological interpretation is pushed far enough, we can also see in the Kantian interpretation of actuality as perception or as absolute position that here, too, use is made of the character of release and setting free [*Entlassung- und Freigabecharakter*] that proffered itself to us particularly in the intentional structure of production. In other words, the specific sense of the direction of perception and of the understanding of being that belongs to intuition also has the character of a setting free of the at-hand to let it be encountered [*freigebendes Begegnenlassen von Vorhandenem*].⁶⁰

The Kantian absolute position here maintains the same meaning Heidegger had attributed to temporality of resoluteness (that of *Begegnenlassen*) in *Being and Time*. Neither the latter, nor the SS 1927 course, explicitly mention *Gelassenheit*; nevertheless, it’s quite evident that his use of *lassen* recalls both releasement and revelation of meaning, albeit the *Dasein*’s finitude. Moreover, the meaning of *lassen* intersects with other mystical concepts and

56. Ibid. 365 (416): ... *als das Wovor der Geworfenheit bzw. als Woran der Überlassenheit.*

57. Ibid. 325 (372).

58. HGA XXIV 160 (114).

59. Ibid. 166 (117).

60. Ibid. 166 (117–18).

terms employed by Heidegger, such as those of ecstasy, rapture, “moment of vision” and depth of *Dasein*. The latter recalls the Eckhartian *Grund der Seele*, which will become more evident as we analyse the book of 1929, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

Although the term “*Gelassenheit*” doesn’t appear in *Being and Time*, Heidegger here speaks of “the forsakenness with which it [i.e., the *Dasein*] has been abandoned to itself.”⁶¹ This statement seems to recall some distiches of the *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* of Angelus Silesius, where the verb *verlassen* has a very close meaning to that of *Gelassenheit*.⁶² However, also Eckhart had used the verb *verlâzen* in the same sense of the *lassen* of *Gelassenheit*, for instance, in the German sermon *Adolescens tibi dico surge* (*Lk.* 7:14).⁶³ We can affirm that the meaning of the mystic *verlassen*, which also implies the sense of solitude and detachment from the world, recalls the Heideggerian *Verlassenheit in die Überlassenheit an es selbst*. Nevertheless, Heidegger explicitly connects *lassen* and *Gelassenheit* in *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (see concluding paragraph (45) of WS 1928/29). In this context, Heidegger claims that philosophising, “as explicit transcending,” is a *Geschehenlassen*, that is “to let occur” the transcendence of the *Dasein* in its ground. This *Geschehenlassen* of the transcendence (as philosophising) allows “the original releasement of the *Dasein* (cf. above: letting be), the trust of man in the *Da-sein* in itself and in its possibilities.”⁶⁴ This trust reveals the right attitude towards the beings and is further specified in the 1929 *Kantbuch*. In §41 Heidegger describes existence as the only possible basis of being’s comprehension and, as such, as the event of “irruption [*Einbruch*] into the totality of beings”. Existence also means the “dependency [*Angewiesenheit*] upon the being as such in the submittance [*Überantwortung*] to the being as such which is dependent in this way.”⁶⁵ Finally, existence also bears the meaning of letting the beings be (*sein-lassen*)—the meaning of irruption, therefore, being connected with that of *sein-lassen*. The comprehension of being, occurring as irruption, occurs within the “ground of the finitude [*Grund der Endlichkeit*] of *Dasein*,”⁶⁶ the latter recalling the call of conscience which takes place in “the very depths of

61. HGA II 277 (322).

62. See Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, II, 61 (*Wer sich verläßt, findet Gott*): *Wer sich verloren hat und von sich selbst entbunden, / Der hat Gott, seinen Trost, und seinen Heiland finden*. III, 219 (*Wer viel verläßt, empfängt viel*): *Laß alles, was du hast, auf daß du alles nimmst! / Verschmäh die Welt, daß du sie hundertfach bekommst*. VI, 192 (*Sich verlassen ist etwas verlassen*): *Du selber mußt aus dir: wenn du dich selbst wirst hassen, / Dann schätz ich dich, daß du erst etwas hast verlassen*.

63. DW II 319.

64. HGA XXVII 401: ... *die ursprüngliche Gelassenheit des Daseins* (vgl. oben: *Seinlassen*), *das Vertrauen des Menschen zum Da-sein in ihm und zu dessen Möglichkeiten*.

65. HGA III 228 (160).

66. *Ibid.*

its uncanniness” of *Being and Time* (§57).⁶⁷ All reveals a great deal of similarity to Meister Eckhart’s description of the *unio mystica*—the irruption (MHG *durchbrechen*) in the ground of the soul (MHG *grunt der sêle*).⁶⁸

1929 is also the year of *What Is Metaphysics?*, the famous inaugural speech Heidegger delivered at Freiburg’s University. The question about being and nothing, which is at the core of this writing, arises from the analysis of the “fundamental experience of the nothing [*Grunderfahrung des Nichts*],”⁶⁹ taking place in the “fundamental mood of anxiety [*Grundstimmung der Angst*].”⁷⁰ In the experience of nothing, man, “only for a moment [*nur für Augenblicke*]” is brought “before the nothing itself [*vor das Nichts selbst*].”⁷¹ This passage reveals interwoven references both to Saint Paul and Meister Eckhart; in fact, in *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (WS 1920/21), Heidegger discusses the “*emprosthen tou theou*,” “in front of God,” of *I Thess.* 1:3.⁷² In Heidegger’s view, the turning of the Christian to Him, rather than the mystical rapture (as it is described in *II Cor.* 12:5) represents the most important aspect when staying in front of God. However, the Heideggerian nothing of anxiety also brings to mind the divine Nothing, *daz niht*, of Eckhart’s German sermon *Surrexit autem Saulus de terra et apertisque oculis nihil videbat* on *Ac.* 9:8, where the mystical rapture of Paul is described.⁷³ Moreover, in the inaugural speech, Heidegger speaks about the “clear night of the nothing of anxiety.”⁷⁴ Again, this statement contrastingly echoes the dark night of the soul of the *mors mystica*.⁷⁵

67. HGA II 276 (321).

68. See also the SS 1929 course *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart*, HGA XXVIII 236, where Heidegger is dealing with freedom as *Seinlassen* and man as that being allowing the *Einbruch in das Seiende* to occur.

69. HGA IX 109 (87).

70. *Ibid.*, 111 (88).

71. *Ibid.*

72. HGA LX 96 (68).

73. DW III 204–31 (320–26).

74. HGA IX 114 (90).

75. The question Heidegger raises at the end of *What Is Metaphysics?* (“Why are there beings at all, and why not far rather Nothing?”; see HGA IX 122 (96)), had already been exposed in similar terms by Henri Bergson in *L’évolution créatrice*, 727–28. We have already said that Heidegger was aware of Plotinus’ influences on Bergson’s thought. Indeed, Bergson is to be understood as a further source of Heidegger’s “Neoplatonism.” I shall develop this issue in a following article, where I will show that Bergson’s influence becomes particularly evident as Heidegger develops the problem of the originary time after *Being and Time*, which becomes most evident in SS 1927 and SS 1928. In fact, in these courses, Heidegger seems to refer to the question of time as faced by Plotinus, Augustine and Bergson. See letters to Elfride (13 and 15 February 1919) in G. Heidegger (Hrsg.), “*Mein liebes Seelchen!*” 104–05, for an early appreciation of Bergson’s philosophy.

In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude* (WS 1929/30), Heidegger deals with another fundamental *Stimmung*, boredom. In §17 Heidegger argues that “awakening attunements is a manner and means of grasping Da-sein with respect to the specific ‘way’ in which it is, of grasping Da-sein as Da-sein, or better: of letting Da-sein be [*sein lassen*] as it is, or can be, as Da-sein.”⁷⁶ In fact, the attunement “leads us back into the grounds of our Dasein.”⁷⁷ This *sein lassen* corresponds to “the *release-ment* [Gelassenheit] of our free, everyday perspective—free from psychological and other theories of consciousness, of the stream of lived experience and suchlike.”⁷⁸ Heidegger’s description of this everyday perspective seems to depend upon a rather opposite meaning to the phenomenological one. In the concluding paragraph (76) the project of the *Dasein* is described as “irruption [*Einbruch*] into the distinction between being and beings.”⁷⁹ As well as in the *Kantbuch*, this irruption retrieves the Eckhartian *Durchbruch* and, in addition to this, Heidegger states that man is “enraptured” (entrückt).⁸⁰ Furthermore, in Heidegger’s view, rapture is typical of philosophizing; he also claims that “the bliss of astonishment [*die Seligkeit des Staunens*]—being torn away in ... wakeful manner [*wache Hingerissenheit*]” is “the breath of all philosophizing,” and the ancient name for this rapture is “*enthousiasmos*.”⁸¹ The use of an Eckhartian conception of *durchbrechen* is particularly evident in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (SS 1935), where Heidegger illustrates the “Greek” irruption into beings, by interpreting the first chorus of the Sophoclean *Antigone*. The *to deinotaton* of the chorus, which is the most terrible in the sense of “the uncanniest of the uncanny,”⁸² represents for Heidegger the Greek *Dasein*: “The saying ‘the human being is the uncanniest’ provides the authentic Greek definition of humanity.”⁸³ The word *deinon*, here, indicates “that uncanny ambiguity with which the saying of the Greeks traverses the opposed con-frontations of Being.”⁸⁴ In fact, the *Dasein* as *to deinotaton* is seen in terms of a violent contrast to the Being. The latter, in turn, is *das Überwältigende*, the overwhelming.⁸⁵ The Greek *Dasein* has to shatter (*zerbrechen*) against the Being:

76. HGA XXIX/XXX 103 (68).

77. *Ibid.*, 102 (68).

78. *Ibid.*, 137 (91).

79. *Ibid.*, 530 (365).

80. *Ibid.*, 531 (365).

81. *Ibid.*, 531 (366).

82. HGA XL 158 (159).

83. *Ibid.*, 160 (161).

84. *Ibid.*, 158 (159).

85. See *ibid.*, 159 (160): “Beings as a whole, as the sway [*als Walten*], are the overwhelming [*das Überwältigende*] ...”

the overwhelming as such, in order to appear in its sway, *requires* the site of openness for itself. The essence of Being-human opens itself up to us only when it is understood on the basis of this urgency that it is necessitated by Being itself. Historical humanity's Being-here means: Being-posed as the breach [*die Bresche*] into which the excessive violence of Being breaks [*hereinbricht*] in its appearing, so that this breach itself shatters [*zerbricht*] against Being. The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is because from the ground up it deals with and conserves the familiar only in order to break out of it [*aus ihm auszubrechen*] and to let what overwhelms it break in [*hereinbrechen zu lassen*].⁸⁶

This passage, in which Heidegger plays with a range of variations of *brechen*, is very close to the description of the *unio mystica* made by Eckhart in his German sermons. In particular, with the *Convescens praecepit eis, ab Ierosolymis ne discederent, etc.* (Ac. 1: 4), where Eckhart says that the spirit (MHG *geist*) of the man⁸⁷ must

transcend *all* number [*übertreten alle zal*] and break through *all* multiplicity [*alle menige durchbrechen*], and it is broken to by God [*er wirt von gote durchbrochen*]. And just as he breaks through me [*als er mich durchbrichet*], I break through him in return [*alsö durchbriche ich in wider*].⁸⁸

The parallelism is striking: Eckhart affirms that man has to break through all things, and so does Heidegger by claiming that man has to break out of them. Again, as for the former, man breaks into God and God breaks into man, so also for the latter the *Dasein* shatters against Being to let Being break into the breach of the *Dasein*.⁸⁹

The atmosphere of the 1935 course, and the way Heidegger describes the violent relationship between man and Being, bring to mind the 1933 Nazi *Rektoratsrede*, where Heidegger illustrates the *Aufbruch* of the Greek philosophy.⁹⁰ The 1930 conference, *On the Essence of Truth*, is still far from using the tone of “violent resoluteness” found in 1933 (and 1935). In 1930 Heidegger describes freedom as “the restraint of letting-be [*die Verhaltenheit des Sein-lassen*],”⁹¹ intending “freedom” as the relationship between man and those historical ways the truth gives itself. However, the essence of truth doesn't only consist in its giving: truth is, in fact, both unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*) and concealment (*Verborgenheit*). Consequently, philosophical thinking “is intrinsically discordant [*ist in sich zwiespältig*],” so that it has to be the “gentle releasement [*die Gelassenheit der Milde*], that does not renounce the concealment of beings as a whole.” At the same time philosophy has to be “the stern and resolute openness [*die Entschlossenheit der Strenge*] that

86. HGA XL 171–72 (173–74).

87. Meaning the spark (MHG *vünelin*) of the soul. See DW II n.1 75–76.

88. DW II 76–77 (288).

90. See HGA XVI 108.

91. HGA IX 190 (146).

does not disrupt the concealing [*die Verbergung*].⁹² Heidegger underlines the tension within philosophy between gentleness and stern resoluteness, which is at the core of philosophy itself: “In the gentle sternness [*milde Strenge*] and stern gentleness [*strenge Milde*] with which it lets beings as such be as whole [*ihres Seinlassens des Seienden als solchen im Ganzen*], philosophy becomes a questioning that does not cling solely to beings yet that also can allow no externally imposed decree.”⁹³ Philosophy does not profane Being, therefore it can lead into the neighbourhood of its mystery.

In §245 (“*Truth and Sheltering*”) of the *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger mentions the *Gelassenheit* as one of the manners characterizing *Dasein*’s care of the truth.⁹⁴ This passage illustrates in an already clear shape the issue of technology, which will subsequently define the framework for the development of Heidegger’s topic of *Gelassenheit*. He then comes back to the relationship between *dynamis* and *energeia* and to the topic of the richness of possibility.⁹⁵ Further, the question of originary time and its ecstatic structure is transposed into the context of *Ereignis*’ philosophy. In *Time-space as Ab-ground* (§242), the rapture (*Entrückung*) of temporalising (*des Zeitigens*) is meant to be the most originary *fascination* (*ursprünglichste Berückung*) in which the *Ereignis* takes place.⁹⁶ From the *Contributions* onwards, the conceptual pair *Entrückung/Berückung* will represent the gift of space and time which is given by the *Ereignis*. In *Über den Anfang* (1941), then, Heidegger refers both to *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit* in terms which sound “Eckhartian.”⁹⁷

As we have already said, the first of the *Feldweg-Gespräche* (1944–45) is the first occasion in which *Gelassenheit* is openly referred to Meister Eckhart. The conversation develops along a country path between a scientist, a scholar and a sage; as the path goes into the country, so the conversation winds its way into a non-metaphysical dimension of thought, named by Heidegger the “encountering region” (*Gegend*). In the word *Gegend* we have to perceive the meaning of *gegnet*, “encounter,” so that the most appropriate term to describe this dimension of thought can be recognised in the old term for *Gegend*: *Gegnet*.⁹⁸ *Gegnet* is “the free vastness [*die freie Weite*]” which “encounters” (*vergegenet*) in itself the *Gelassenheit* of man.⁹⁹ In the German sermon *In illo tempore missus est angelus Gabriel* (*Lk.* 1:26) with *wite* Eckhart means

92. *Ibid.*, 199 (152).

93. *Ibid.*

94. HGA LXV 391 (273).

95. See §267 *Be-ing* (*Enowning*), HGA LXV 475–76 (334–35).

96. See *ibid.*, 384 (268).

97. This will become more evident in the following paragraph of this article.

98. HGA LXXVII 114.

99. *Ibid.*, 122.

the vastness of the highest part of the soul (the *vernünfricheit*), which is also called the *richtuome gotes* (God's richness).¹⁰⁰ It is quite evident, therefore, why Heidegger titles this first conversation *Anchibasie*, a word the *Suda* ascribes to Heraclitus (fragment 122). In fact, at the end of their conversation, the three speakers recognise that their path (hence, conversation) has brought them in front of something unspeakable.¹⁰¹ To express this experience, the scholar recalls exactly the term *anchibasie*. He then explains that this term is usually translated into "*Herangehen*," "to approach."¹⁰² Nevertheless, the meaning of *anchibasie* is not one related to will, that is to say, it doesn't depend on human engagement. *Anchibasie* comes from the open space of the *Gegnet*, so that the *Gelassenheit* can be defined as the "countermovement of the approaching [*Gegenbewegung des Herangehens*]."¹⁰³ The relation between *Gelassenheit* and *Gegnet* is clearly developing from *Begegnenlassen*, "to let encounter," specifying the meaning of *Entschlossenheit* in *Being and Time* first, and then the Kantian concept of existence as absolute position in SS 1927 course. However, in the first of the *Feldweg-Gespräche* the opened vastness of the *Gegnet*, denoting a non-metaphysical dimension of thought, also loses its transcendental limits (in the sense of both Kant and Husserl):¹⁰⁴ as for Heidegger *Gelassenheit* comes from the *Gegnet*,¹⁰⁵ so for Eckhart it comes from God. Heidegger had already started to reject the transcendental perspective in the *Kantbuch*, when claiming that Kant had shrunk back from the transcendental power of imagination (*transzendentele Einbildungskraft*), which he considered as the ground of metaphysics.¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, on the other hand, could not consider this to be a ground; in fact:

Kant's falling-back before the ground which he himself unveiled, before the transcendental power of imagination, is—for purposes of the rescue of pure reason, i.e., of holding-fast to the proper foundation—that movement of philosophizing which makes manifest the breaking-open of the foundation [*Einbrechen des Bodens*] and thus makes manifest the abyss [*Abgrund*] of metaphysics.¹⁰⁷

In the *Feldweg-Gespräche* the figure of the *Abgrund* is replaced with that of the *Gegnet*. Both in the *Kantbuch* and in the *Feldweg-Gespräche*, the transcendental perspective is rejected as the *Dasein* is seen in an immediate relation to the dimension of the origin. The former represents this dimen-

100. DW II 233. See also DW I 121, 145 and 365.

101. HGA LXXVII 151.

102. *Ibid.*, 152.

103. *Ibid.*, 153.

104. See *ibid.*, 101–02.

105. See *ibid.*, 122.

106. HGA III 160–71 (112–20).

107. *Ibid.*, 215 (150–51).

sion with pure self-affection (*reine Selbstaffektion*), identified with the abyss of ordinary time;¹⁰⁸ in the latter, on the other hand, it corresponds to the *Gegnet*, the origin of the space-time of the *Ereignis*. In both cases Heidegger stresses the finitude of the *Dasein*; however, the relation with the origin is mystically conceived. In the *Kantbuch* the topic of pure self-affection seems to be transformed by Heidegger into the issue of Augustinian meditation about time as in Book XI of the *Confessions*. In the conversation of 1944, then, the opening to the *Gegnet* is regarded in terms of the Eckhartian *Gelassenheit*.¹⁰⁹ During the 1929 *Davoser Disputation*, Ernst Cassirer had already seemed to have realized how much there was at stake, when he asked:

Does Heidegger want to renounce this entire Objectivity, this form of absoluteness which Kant advocated in the ethical and the theoretical, as well as in the *Critique of Judgement*? Does he want to withdraw completely to the finite creature or, if not, where for him is the breakthrough [*Durchbruch*] to this sphere?¹¹⁰

In his reply Heidegger claims that “the strongest argument” for the finitude of the *Dasein* is the “infinite which breaks out [*herausbricht*] in the power of imagination.”¹¹¹ Hence, the crucial point is that in order to overcome Kant, Heidegger devises a “pre-critical” strategy referring implicitly to the mystical sphere.¹¹²

The first conversation ends with the scientist arguing that the right translation of “*anchibasis*” is “letting-oneself-go-into-proximity.”¹¹³ The scholar then adds, that this word could stand “for the name of today’s walk.”¹¹⁴ Referring back a few passages, as the scientist defined the awaiting of the *Gelassenheit* as “the countermovement of the approaching [*die Gegenbewegung zum Herangehen*],” the scholar had added: “... the counterquiet [*die Gegenruhe*].”¹¹⁵ Heidegger had already referred to the quiet wait (*ruhiges Warten*) in the 1918 note, collected into the sketches for *The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism*, where he was quoting *Is.* 30:15.¹¹⁶ This topic, however, is also an Eckhartian one, as we can see, for instance, in the German sermon *Dum medium silentium* (*Book of Wisdom*, 18:14). Here, Eckhart speaks about the

108. *Ibid.*, 198 (139).

109. On this issue see the record “Horizon” in M. Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 100.

110. HGA III 278 (195–96). We cannot exclude that Cassirer was also implying the mystical meaning of the term “*Durchbruch*.”

111. *Ibid.*, 280 (197).

112. By “pre-critical” I mean here the pre-Kantian, hence pre-modern frames of mysticism, specifically the Neoplatonic ones.

113. HGA LXXVII 155: ... *In-die-Nähe-hinein-sich-einlassen*.

114. HGA LXXVII 156: ... *als Name über unserem heutigen Gang* ...

115. HGA LXXVII 153.

116. HGA LX 329 (249).

“quiet” (*ruowe*)¹¹⁷ in which the birth of the *Logos* takes place. Furthermore, in the sermon *In omnibus requiem quaesivi* (*Ecclesiastes*, 24:11), opening with the dialogue between the eternal Wisdom and the soul, Eckhart claims that all movement of the soul aims at “quiet.”¹¹⁸ Heidegger returns to this topic at the end of *Das Wesen der Sprache* (1957), as he deals apophatically with the return of the word into silence, that is to say its return into the “sound of quiet [*Geläut der Stille*]” which is “the originary Saying” (*die Sage*).¹¹⁹ Heidegger’s reference to silence and quiet recalls some aspects of the Eckhartian mysticism of the birth of the *Logos* in the soul. This is not a single instance. In fact, the Heideggerian philosophy of language seems altogether to be modelled on the Eckhartian *Gottesgeburt*. Finally, “return” has a precise Neoplatonic meaning. In the following paragraph we shall further investigate Heidegger’s reference to Meister Eckhart’s *Gottesgeburt*.

We can find further references to the *Gelassenheit* in the 1943 *Postscript* to *What is Metaphysics?*¹²⁰ and in the 1944 outline *Die Fuge der Huld. Der Dank*.¹²¹ A further reference to the *Gelassenheit*, then, can be found in the unfinished conversation *Das abendländische Gespräch* (1946-’48).¹²² In the 1953 conference *Wissenschaft und Besinnung*, meditation (*Besinnung*) is defined as “the releasement to what is worth being asked [*die Gelassenheit zum Fragwürdigen*],”¹²³ and two years later Heidegger gives a famous speech in his native town, Meßkirch, entitled exactly *Gelassenheit*.¹²⁴ In 1959 this speech, together with a slightly modified and briefer version of *Anchibasie*,¹²⁵ is published in a volume entitled *Gelassenheit*. In these writings the “Heideggerian” *Gelassenheit* is illustrated as the only possible “ethics” for the age of technical domination. As for the *lassen*, Heidegger still produces his variations on the compounds of the root (*lassen*), as shown for instance in the *Letter on “Humanism”* (1946).¹²⁶ To sum up the development of the Heideggerian

117. DW IV 354.

118. DW III 12. See *ibid.* 16, where God himself is intended by Eckhart as *ruowe*.

119. HGA XII 204.

120. HGA IX 305 (232): “Careful thought need only restore everything to the releasement of patient reflection [*Das Nachdenken muß nur alles in die Gelassenheit der langmütigen Besinnung zurücknehmen*].” See *ibid.*, 309 (236).

121. HGA LXXV 308: “The gratefulness and the *releasement of the letting be*. Letting be: to give the *being* the portending (fore-thinking). To the being—in an essential sense [*Der Dank und die Gelassenheit des Sein-lassens. Sein-lassen: dem Sein die Vor-gabe geben (vor-denken). Dem Sein—im wesentlichen Sinn*].”

122. *Ibid.* 64.

123. HGA VII 63.

124. The speech was delivered for the 175th birth-anniversary of the Meßkirch musician Conradin Kreutzer. See HGA XVI 517–29.

125. See HGA XIII 37–74.

126. HGA IX 313 (239).

lassen/Gelassenheit, I underline the crucial role played by the *lassen* in the writings of the late period: the *Protokoll zu einem Seminar Martin Heideggers über den Vortrag Zeit und Sein* (1962)¹²⁷ and, as we have already seen at the beginning of this paragraph, the seminar of Le Thor (1969).¹²⁸

3. THE ORIGINARY SOURCE: MEISTER ECKHART AND HÖLDERLIN

The Neoplatonic themes and concepts scattered throughout Heidegger's thought due to his long-lasting *consuetudo* with Meister Eckhart dissolve, in the 1940s, into the topic of the originary source. Plotinus understands the One as source, which is *dynamis ton panton*, and the *Liber de causis* conceives it as immeasurably rich and beyond being. Eckhart inherits this Plotinian topic by means of the *Liber de causis* (and Dionysius).¹²⁹ These Neoplatonic characterisations of the First Principle combine in the Heideggerian attempt to establish a non-metaphysical form of relation with the *Ereignis* and its originary dimension. This is the reason why Heidegger's attempt to rescind transcendence and ground *Dasein's* finitude cannot be considered as final. In fact, topics and frames which are typical not only of Neoplatonism but also of mysticism and negative theology persist together throughout his thought, and these topics unequivocally beckon to transcendence. The originary source gains its peculiar shape within Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin which, at the same time, becomes a non-explicit dialogue between Hölderlin's and Meister Eckhart's spirituality. The confrontation between the poet and the Dominican master¹³⁰ will leave an enduring mark on the shape of Heidegger's philosophy of the 1940s which, however, will begin to become explicit only after the Second World War. We have now to analyse the way Heidegger structures this dialogue.

The originary source first appears in the *Elucidation* of Hölderlin's hymn "Wie wenn am Feiertage ..." (1939): Heidegger here overlaps the "Greek" images of *physis* and *chaos* with Hölderlin's Holy, aiming at showing the dimension of the beginning (*Anfang*) and of the origin (*Ursprung*).¹³¹ Then, in *Über den Anfang* (1941) the question of the origin is given a peculiar Eckhartian characterisation. In §3, significantly entitled *The detachment of*

127. HGA XIV 47.

128. HGA XV 363 (59).

129. See K. Ruh *Meister Eckhart*, 58.

130. With reference to the *Meister* see HGA LXX 26 and 278. See also Beierwaltes, "Heideggers *Gelassenheit*," 33–35.

131. In this *Elucidation* Heidegger speaks about the *Gelassenheit* "of the primordial [*Anfänglichen*]," see HGA IV 65 (87). He then says, HGA IV 66 (88): "The richness of the primordial [*Der Reichtum des Anfänglichen*] grants to their word [the word of the poets] such an excess [*Überfülle*] of meaning as can scarcely be uttered."

the beginning (*Die Abgeschiedenheit des Anfangs*), Heidegger describes the Being, as abyss, in terms of detachment:

is detachment not also a way in which the Being is? Certainly. Nevertheless, this detachment is also the withdrawal into the uniqueness of the Abyss. . . . Therefore, the principle coming from detachment is a gifting abyss, as it still gives the guarantee of the essential sway of a gift, which could never overown without the nothing.¹³²

Detachment, here, clearly assumes the features of the mystical—i.e. the Eckhartian detachment; in the German treatise *On Detachment* the latter, in fact, affirms: “. . . God has it from his immovable detachment that he is God, and it is from his detachment that he has his purity and his simplicity and his unchangeability.”¹³³

Obviously, Heidegger’s detachment pertains to the Being and Eckhart’s detachment to God. In the same paragraph Heidegger also specifies: “The atemporal is not the eternal, but the detachment of the beginning in the concealing. This is the refusal of the word.”¹³⁴ As already stated, in *The parting* (*Der Abschied*) (§7), Heidegger comes back to the “richness” of the *Liber de causis*;¹³⁵ in §21 *The beginning is the dignity of the Being*,¹³⁶ then, the dignity of the Being is also said to be the dignity of “releasement of fall in parting of concealment.”¹³⁷ *Gelassenheit* is also mentioned in §111 *Enowning, ownership, poverty* (*Ereignis, Eigentum, Armut*): “The poverty and the gift—The releasement in the essential swaying of being of en-ownment.”¹³⁸ In this treatise, *Abgeschiedenheit* and *Gelassenheit* are connected to the dimension of the *Ereignis* with its peculiar temporality (or, rather, “a-temporality”); they are also related to the richness of this dimension¹³⁹ being, at the same time, poverty (*Armut*). Again, this is another Eckhartian and mystical topic, which Heidegger will greatly develop afterwards, as he does with the “impoverished

132. HGA LXX 15: . . . *ist nicht auch die Abgeschiedenheit dann noch eine Weise, in der das Seyn ist? Allerdings. Aber diese Abgeschiedenheit ist je die Entgängnis in die Einzigkeit des Abgrundes. . . . Deshalb ist je der Anfang aus der Abgeschiedenheit ein Abgrund der Verschenkung, weil er noch die Gewähr des Wesens einer Schenkung verschenkt, die ohne das Nichts nie übereignen könnte.*

133. DW V 412 (288): *Wan daz got ist got, daz hât her von siner unbewegelichen abegescheidenheit, und von der abegescheidenheit hât er sine lüterkeit und sine einvalticheit und sine unwandelbarkeit.*

134. HGA LXX 15: *Das Zeitlose ist nicht das Ewige, sondern die Abgeschiedenheit des Anfangs in die Verbergung. Dies ist die Verweigerung des Wortes.*

135. *Ibid.*, 26.

136. *Der Anfang ist die Würde des Seyns.*

137. HGA LXX 39: . . . *die Gelassenheit des Untergangs in den Abschied der Verbergung.*

138. *Ibid.*, 132: *Die Armut und die Schenkung—Die Gelassenheit in der Wesung der Er-eignung.*

139. See *ibid.*, 64: “. . . the beginning is the richness of itself [*ist der Anfang der Reichtum seiner selbst*].”

time" (*dürftige Zeit*) of Hölderlin's *Brot und Wein*.¹⁴⁰ The poverty of the beginning depends upon his nothingness (*Nichtigkeit*), so that "this poverty is the richness of what is simple in the beginning."¹⁴¹ The 1941 treatise is rich with Eckhartian references, which appear again in *Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken"* (WS 1941/42). The latter represents the crucial text in relation to the originary source. Furthermore, Heidegger here tries to establish a "mysticism" connected with the topic of the origin as an alternative to that of Rosenberg's *Mytus des 20. Jahrhunderts*: we'll see how this effort was successful.

In WS 1941/42 course, Heidegger shows that Hölderlin's poetry is the way back to the essential origin of the Germans, which is at the same time their destiny. "*Andenken*" means, in fact, staying near the "place of the origin [*Stätte des Ursprungs*]." This Staying is a "going back to 'the source' of what is familiar and initial of one's country."¹⁴² Other images employed by the hymn, such as the feast (*Fest*) and the salutation (*Gruß*) signify, in Heidegger's view, the essence and the ground of western history and its Greek beginning.¹⁴³ They further express "the enowning [das *Ereignis*] and the beginning [der *Anfang*]."¹⁴⁴ Somewhat afterwards, Heidegger declares that the Holy (*das Heilige*) is what grounds the feast:¹⁴⁵ thus, this Hölderlinian term is connected with the meaning of "source," "origin," "beginning" as well as "enowning." The Staying in the dimension of the origin is not understood within an ordinary temporal frame; rather, it is "the moment of the only [*die Weile des Einzigen*]."¹⁴⁶ In §34 (*Repetition, 2, The holy is what is appropriate for men and gods. The sending of the jointure as letting be*),¹⁴⁷ the originary dimension of Being, as Holy, is also defined as the *Fuge* (the jointure), the harmonic connection, which expresses the "oneness and simplicity [*Einheit*

140. See HGA LXX 135, where Heidegger investigates the meaning of "heart" (*Gemüt*) in relation to the being and the Da-sein; *Armut* is interpreted by Heidegger as one of the characteristics of the *Gemüt* of the Da-sein. In the WS 1941/42 course *Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken"* Heidegger interprets the meaning of the MHG terms for *Gemüt*, i.e. *muot*, see HGA LII 153. On Heidegger's *Armut* see Beierwaltes, "Heideggers Gelassenheit," 18.

141. HGA LXX 175: ... *diese Armut ist der Reichtum des Einfachen des Anfangs*.

142. HGA LII 53-4: ... *Zurückgehen an "die Quelle" des heimatlich Heimischen und Anfänglichen ...*

143. See *ibid.*, 68.

144. *Ibid.*, 70.

145. *Ibid.*, 77.

146. *Ibid.*, 93. As we shall see, in 1943 *Elucidation of Andenken* this "only" will be related to the Neoplatonic One. The reference to the One appears already in the treatise *Über den Anfang*, see, for instance, §96 *The beginning and the simple (Der Anfang und das Einfache)*, HGA LXX 114: "The simple is neither light, nor empty, nor needy, nor fleeting. The simple is the preservation of the one—the essential swaying of Being [*Das Einfache ist weder leicht, noch leer, noch dürftig, noch flüchtig. Das Einfache ist die Behältnis des Einen—der Wesung des Seyns*]."

147. *Das Schickliche für Menschen und Götter ist das Heilige. Das Schicken der Fuge als sein-lassen.*

und Einfachheit” of the originary relationships between both gods and men with the Holy.¹⁴⁸ Referring to fragment 54 of Heraclitus, the joining (*Fügung*) is indicated exactly with the term *armonie*.¹⁴⁹ The harmonic connection is then related to the “rocking airs” (*Einwiegende Lüfte*) of the verse at the end of the second strophe of *Andenken*. This Rocking means the “letting be in the origin [*Seinlassen im Ursprung*].” And the origin is “what is ownmost to men and gods, what they bring along as their essence.”¹⁵⁰ In §44 (*What is own as the holy of the fatherland, inaccessible to theologies and historical sciences. The “highest”*),¹⁵¹ Heidegger claims that neither theologies belonging to the various Christian confessions (mentioned here as the *Deutsche Christen*, the *Bekennnisfront* and the Catholics) nor sciences (*Biologen, Prähistorikern* and *Kunsthistorikern*)¹⁵² are able to grasp the holy pertaining to the originary dimension: the *Vaterland*.

We can clearly recognize Heidegger’s attempt to pull away the issue of the Relating to the origin and the holy from the dominance of both Christian theologies and the pseudo-science of the *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, precisely, a confused mix-up of sciences such as biology, prehistory and history of art. The purpose is to transpose this Relating from both Christianity and Nazism into the poetical word of Hölderlin: in fact, only in his poetry we can find the key for understanding the mystery of the historical mission of the German *Volk*. Finally, in “Source” and “river.” *The richness of the origin* (§59)¹⁵³ Heidegger specifies the meaning of *Quelle*, hence that of the *Ursprung*, and its *Reichtum*; he interprets this by considering the following verses: “*Mäncher / Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn* [Many / Are shy of going to the source].” First of all “source” receives its precise meaning only within the context of what *Andenken* wants to express (its *Gedichtete*), which is “the One” (*das Eine*). Heidegger further argues that Hölderlin seems to be writing all his hymns with the aim of finding a word capable of expressing this One. The source is the origin of the rivers’ water; Heidegger recalls both *Der Ister* (i.e., the Danube) and *Am Quell der Donau*. “‘The source’—this is the origin of the native water, whose course reveals homeland as the soil, which has to be consecrated for the feast.”¹⁵⁴ Heidegger adds: “‘At the source’, this means the place in the neighbourhood of the origin. Living here, wants to say: to stay

148. HGA LII 100.

149. See *ibid.*, 101.

150. *Ibid.*, 105: ... *das Eigenste der Menschen und Götter, was sie als ihr Wesen mitbringen.*

151. *Das Eigene als das Heilige des Vaterlandes, den Theologien und historischen Wissenschaften unzugänglich. Das “Höchste.”*

152. See HGA LII 133.

153. “*Quelle*” and “*Strom*.” *Der Reichtum des Ursprungs.*

154. HGA LII 173: ‘*Die Quelle*’—*das ist der Ursprung des heimatlichen Wassers, dessen Gang die Heimat ausspricht als den Boden, der geweiht werden soll für das Fest.*

close to the ownmost of what's own."¹⁵⁵ The ownmost is said to be the "origin and the origin is what is inexhaustible. The pure fullness of the ownmost ... springs out of the source."¹⁵⁶ As in *Über den Anfang*, the Relating to the fullness and richness of the origin is conceived in terms of *Armut*:

Only he can be rich and use the richness who has first become poor in the sense of poverty, which is not the lack of something. ... The originary essential poverty is the courage towards the simple and originary, which doesn't need to cling onto something. This poverty discerns the essence of richness and therefore knows its laws and the way in which it offers itself. Within this the essence of richness conceals itself. Therefore richness doesn't let itself be directly owned.¹⁵⁷

This interpretation of the originary source converges and combines all the topics we have so far considered: the Neoplatonic richness of the origin, the mystical poverty and the sacredness of the *Vaterland*. Both Christianity and Nazism have their respective "origin-mythology": the former rests on a religiously conceived beginning (God as the Creator), the latter bears upon a rough "biologicistic" extraction (the Race). Heidegger's attempt to overcome these mythologies, in turn, is based upon a further mythology, developed by merging Hölderlin's poetical world with Neoplatonic and Eckhartian topics. Heidegger's myth of the originary source, the German's source of destiny, purifies the Nazi *Blut und Boden*: the *Blut* is washed away into the *heimatliches Wasser* of the German rivers, giving shape to the German *Boden*, and thus revealing the *Heimat* as *Boden*. We should now highlight what Heidegger claimed during *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"* (WS 1934/35): "*The 'land of the fathers' is the Being itself;*" which is the historical *Dasein* of the *Volk*.¹⁵⁸ Heidegger added that Hölderlin's understanding of Being is the same as that of Heraclitus, which "ruled especially the German thought and knowledge since Meister Eckhart."¹⁵⁹ With regard to the history of metaphysics, Heraclitus, Eckhart and Hölderlin are unconventional ("eccentric") thinkers. In Heidegger's view, therefore, their

155. Ibid.: *'An der Quelle', das meint den Ort in der Nähe des Ursprungs. Hier wohnen, das will sagen: Nachbarschaft halten zum Eigensten des Eigenen.*

156. Ibid., 174: *... Ursprung und der Ursprung ist das Unerschöpfliche. Aus der Quelle quillt ... die reine Fülle des Eigensten.*

157. Ibid., 174: *Denn reich sein und den Reichtum gebrauchen kann nur, wer zuvor arm geworden ist im Sinne der Armut, die kein Entbehren ist. ... Die wesenhafte ursprüngliche Armut ist der Mut zum Einfachen und Ursprünglichen, der nicht nötig hat, an etwas zu hängen. Diese Armut erblickt das Wesen des Reichtums und weiß daher sein Gesetz und die Weise, wie es sich darbietet. In diesem verbirgt sich das Wesen des Reichtums. Also läßt sich der Reichtum nicht unmittelbar aneignen.*

158. HGA XXXIX 121: Das "Vaterland" ist das Seyn selbst

159. Ibid., 123: *... insbesondere das deutsche Denken und Wissen seit Meister Eckhart beherrschte.*

peculiar role is intended as laying the ground for a non-metaphysical way of thought. This peculiar function becomes particularly evident in the first two *Feldweg-Gespräche*.

In WS 1941/42 some further Neoplatonic influences and references are revealed. In §60 Heidegger refers to the 1920-discovered sketch of the *Hyperion's* preface, in which Hölderlin deals with the question of the *Versöhnung* between finite and infinite: "... the cessation of all conflict where All is One [*wo Alles Eins ist*]" occurs in this reunion; and here beauty reigns. At the end of the outline Hölderlin mentions Plato, and Heidegger, therefore, claims that beauty as Being can be brought to the eyes "only through the *synagoge*—through the gathering upon the One."¹⁶⁰ In the *Elucidation on Andenken* (1943), largely dependent on the 1941/42 course, Heidegger investigates Hölderlin's reference to Plato more deeply:

Beauty is the original unifying One. This One can appear only if it is brought together in its Oneness as the unifying One. According to Plato, the *hen* is only visible in the *synagoge*, i.e., in the bringing together.¹⁶¹

The One at issue seems to be not only a "Platonic" One. Once more, Heidegger is dealing with Neoplatonism, as we consider what he had previously stated about the richness of the source:

Richness is essentially an origin, in which what is proper can become property. A source is the unfolding of the one in the inexhaustibility of its unity. The one of this kind is the simple.¹⁶²

This passage sounds clearly Neoplatonic. Again, we should take into account Proposition 21 of the *Liber de causis*, where the commentary on the axiom '*Primum est dives per se ipsum*' affirms: "The indication of this is its unity, not because its unity is dispersed in it. Rather, its unity is pure because it is simple in the extreme of simplicity."¹⁶³ Moreover, in 1941/42 another Neoplatonic concept related to origin and source, *epistrophe*, is used:

160. HGA LII 177: ... *nur durch die synagoge—durch die Zusammenbringung auf das Eine ...*

161. HGA IV 135 (156): *Die Schönheit ist das ursprünglich einigende Eine. Dieses Eine kann nur erscheinen, wenn es als Einigendes auf sein Eines zusammengeführt wird. Das hen wird nach Plato nur sichtbar in der synagoge, d.h. Zusammenführung.*

162. Ibid. ,133 (154): *Der Reichtum ist wesenhaft Quelle, an der das Eigene erst und allein zum Eigentum wird. Die Quelle ist die Entfaltung des Einen zur Unerschöpflichkeit seiner Einbeit. Das Eine solcher Art ist das Einfache.* Heidegger then refers to the *Armut* almost in the same way he does in the 1941/42 course. See also the 1939 writing "*Andenken*" und "*Mnemosyne*," HGA LXXV 17.

163. A. Pattin, "*Le Liber de Causis*," 180, 50–53 (125): *Et significatio eius est unitas eius: non quia unitas eius sit sparsa in ipso, immo est unitas eius pura, quoniam est simplex in fine simplicitatis.*

The walk to the source must begin with the trip on the sea. Those who have come home cannot easily leave the previous voyage behind. The voyage has to completely carry out its essence, so that it comes back *as* a voyage into the foreign, towards the return to the source and the arrival into homeland and there becoming native.¹⁶⁴

In “*Germanien*.” *Das Ungesprochene* (the notes on Hölderlin of 1943), Heidegger writes: “*The essence of history as a re-turn in the beginning*”¹⁶⁵ and, in the same year, the writing *Zu Hölderlins Dichtung des deutschen Geschickes. Zu Hölderlins Elegie “Brod und Wein”* illustrates: “The richness of the quiet of the gratefulness does not let itself become exhausted, because the gratefulness is that knowledge which has allowed the Being to return in the truth as in the concealed arrival of every beginning.”¹⁶⁶ In the 1943 *Elucidation*, then, we read: “Genuine abundance is an overflowing which overflows itself and thus surpasses itself. In such surpassing, the overflowing flows back toward itself, and learns that it is not sufficient unto itself because it is constantly surpassed. But a surpassing-itself which is never sufficient unto itself is an origin.”¹⁶⁷ The *Rückkehr* still appears in similar terms in the following years, for example in *On the Question of Being*¹⁶⁸ and in *On the Way to Language*.¹⁶⁹ There is a Silesius’ distich, entitled *The Godhead (Die Gottheit)*, which provides a transparent epitome of a tradition dating back to the Eckhartian mysticism of the Trinitarian process:

The Godhead is a spring! Everything comes out of her.
And it flows towards her: that way she’s also a sea.¹⁷⁰

164. HGA LII 183: *Der Gang an die Quelle muß mit der Meerfahrt beginnen. Die Heimgekommenen können daher die vormalige Fahrt nicht einfach hinter sich werfen. Die Fahrt muß ihr eigen Wesen voll austragen, damit sie als Fahrt in die Fremde zurückkehrt, zur Rückkehr an die Quelle und zur Ankunft in der Heimat und zum Heimischwerden in dieser.*

165. HGA LXXV 283: *Das Wesen der Geschichte als Rückkehr in den Beginn.*

166. *Ibid.*, 55: *Der Reichtum der Ruhe des Danks läßt sich nicht ausschöpfen, weil der Dank jenes Wissen ist, das dem Seyn die Rückkehr in die Wahrheit zugestanden hat als die verborgene Ankunft jedes Beginns.*

167. HGA IV 132–33 (154): *Der echte Überfluß ist das Überfließen, das sich selbst überfließt und so übertrifft. Bei solchem Übertreffen fließt das Überfließende zu sich selbst zurück und erfährt, daß es sich selbst, weil stets übertroffen, nicht genügt. Aber dieses sich übertreffende Sich-nie-genügen ist der Ursprung.* The passage about the richness of the source follows immediately. The record “*Überflusz*” of the brothers Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Bd. XXIII 218–19, claims not only that *Überflusz* was, at first, the translation of *abundantia* and then of *superfluitas*, *superfluxus*; but it also claims that in Seuse the term held exactly the meaning of “richness” (*reichtum*).

168. See HGA IX 422 (319).

169. See HGA XII 204.

170. Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, III, 168: *Die Gottheit ist ein Brunn! Aus ihr kommt alles her! Und lauf auch wieder hin: drum ist sie auch ein Meer.*

Nonetheless, Eckhart himself may be a source for Heidegger's "Neoplatonic" interpretation of Hölderlin's rivers. Pfeiffer's edition of Eckhart's German writings ascribes to Eckhart a treatise entitled *Liber positionum*.¹⁷¹ In §124 the mysticism of the Son's eternal birth (MHG *ewige geburt*) is described within the Trinitarian process: this explanation ends with the image of three rivers corresponding to the three Persons: "Therefore the first river, with its first origin, is originative of the second river."¹⁷² In sermon LVI of Pfeiffer's edition, *Nolite timere eos qui corpus occidunt, animam autem occidere non possunt* on Mt. 10:28, Eckhart intends *durchbrechen* as coming back in God, which is a coming back "in the ground, in the soil, in the river and in the source of the Godhead."¹⁷³

In reconsidering the question of the *Vaterland*, we can see a further element of the mythical geography of the German *Boden* being revealed in the 1941/42 course. The German *Boden*, in fact, is given its shape by the Danube, the "Is-ter", whose peculiar course points out towards the eastern German *Urheimat*: India. Specifically, towards the Indus river which, within Hölderlin's *Hymns*, is "the poetic name for the primordial homeland."¹⁷⁴ Heidegger then connects the *Urheimat* with the *Rückkehr* to the origin—Hölderlin's Indus with a return recalling the Neoplatonic *epistrophe*.¹⁷⁵ This is the key to understanding the limits of Heidegger's attempt to substitute the Nazi *verbum* with the poetical word of Hölderlin. Heidegger seems unable to renounce the myth of the Indo-Aryan origins, although the word is not that of Rosenberg's pseudoscience, but that of Hölderlin's verses. Furthermore, in the hidden dialogue between Eckhart and Hölderlin, the former remains a "German Eckhart" and not at all a Christian one. It is probable that Heidegger wanted to free Eckhart from Rosenberg's interpretation:¹⁷⁶ nevertheless, Heidegger did not seem to be able to free himself from the swamps of the philosophy of the origin.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, it remains quite difficult to decide whether Heidegger's

171. As we have already pointed out, Heidegger cites this treatise in the SS 1927 course, see HGA XXIV 128 (90).

172. F. Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* 670: *Alsò ist der erste rivier ursprunlich des andern riviers mit dem ersten ursprunge.*

173. *Ibid.*, 181: ... *in den grunt, in den bodem, in den river und in die quelle der gottheit ...*

174. HGA LII 185: ... *der dichterische Name für die Urheimat ...*

175. For a further example see *ibid.*, 186.

176. For Rosenberg's interpretation of Meister Eckhart's mysticism see in particular book I, *Das Ringen der Werte*, section III, *Mystik und Tat*, of his *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 226–79. Heidegger mentions Rosenberg in *Hölderlins Hymnen* "Germanien" und "Der Rhein" (WS 1934/35), where he criticizes his concept of poetry as expression of both *Rassenseele* and *Völkseele*, see HGA XXXIX 26.

177. See J. Habermas "Überbietung der temporalisierten Ursprungsphilosophie," 211–18. See also K. Löwith, *Heidegger—Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, 126, dealing with Heidegger's "Eckhartian" *Mystik*.

myth is to be understood as a competitive attempt rather than a challenge to the Nazi “science” of the *Mythus*.

We have finally to point out two significant references to Meister Eckhart made by Heidegger in this period. The first, implicit, can be found in the 1943 *Elucidation*, when writing about the topic of the return to the *Ursprung* with its richness:

The original flowing of the source flows backward into its ground. It is not only concealed by the earth, but its flowing is a self-concealing sheltering in the ground. Thus, the source remains anchored to its ground. Hence, to dwell near to the origin means to follow it backward as it is secured by its ground.¹⁷⁸

In the same year, in the *Postscript to “What is Metaphysics?”*, Heidegger writes:

Thinking, obedient to the voice of being [*gehorsam der Stimme des Seins*], seeks from being the word through which the truth of being comes to language. Only when the language of historical human beings springs from the word does it ring true. Yet if it does ring true, then it is beckoned by the testimony granted it from the silent voice of hidden sources [*der lautlosen Stimme verborgener Quellen*].¹⁷⁹

These passages are thematically close; nevertheless, in the latter, the image of the earth hiding the source is absent. Eckhart’s treatise *Of the Nobleman* could have inspired Heidegger in both cases, as the former writes that the Son, as Father’s Word, is present

in the ground of the soul as a fount of living water. But if anyone throws earth, which is earthly desire, on it, that impedes and conceals it, so that we do not perceive or grow aware of it; but the fount itself goes on living, and when they take the earth away that was thrown over it, then it appears and we know that it is there.¹⁸⁰

An implicit reference to Meister Eckhart seems therefore to be present in these passages. Evidence for this conjecture may be found in the outline “*Germanien*.” *Das Ungesprochene*, which was written in the same year (1943). First, in one of the passages,¹⁸¹ the *Stille* mentioned in the *Postscript* is con-

178. HGA IV 146 (168): *Das ursprüngliche Quellen der Quelle quillt in ihren Grund zurück. Sie ist nicht nur verborgen durch die Erde, sondern ihr Quellen ist ein sichverbergendes Bergen in den Grund. So bleibt die Quelle am Festen ihres Grundes. Dem Ursprung nahe wohnen heißt daher, seiner Erfestigung in den Grund folgen.*

179. HGA IX 311 (237).

180. DW V 113 (242): *... in der sêle grunde als ein lebender brunne. Der aber erde, daz ist irdische begerunge dar ûf wirfet, daz hindert und bedeket, daz man sîn niht erkennet noch gewar wirt; doch blibet er in im selben lebende, und sô man die erde, diu von üzwendic oben dar ûf geworfen ist, abenimet, sô erschinê er und wirt man sîn gewar.*

181. Entitled *Im Ungesprochenen wohnen*.

nected with the *Ereignis*: “Only in the *pure* saying of the *word* the *unsaid* maintains the saying-back in the silence of the enowning.”¹⁸² In another passage¹⁸³ the essence of the word is understood to:

never let itself to be thought from the meaning of being effective. “Word” as essence of both expression and announcement, also in a non-linguistic sense. Cf. Meister Eckhart. This is why the word becomes word when it remains pure from any appearance of *being effective* and *coming out*, for example as *expression* and *language*.¹⁸⁴

Although the reference to Eckhart is brief, Heidegger clearly underlines some aspects of the Eckhartian mysticism of the birth of the Logos. The Son, as *Logos*—i.e., as Father’s Word, is inner; in fact, He is conceived in the heart of the believer. At the same time He is outer, as He is “delivered” by the believer. Giving birth to the Son, the believer gives birth to the world, the Son being the *Logos* of reality. The believer, therefore, takes part in both the Trinitarian process and the Creation, as pointed out, for instance, in the German sermon *Praedica verbum, vigila, in omnibus labora*, on 2 *Tm.* 4:2:

One reads a phrase today and tomorrow concerning my master St. Dominic. St. Paul writes it in the epistle and in German it means: “Speak the word [*sprich daz wort*], speak it externally [*sprich ez her ûz*], speak it forth [*sprich ez her vür*], bring it forth [*brinc ez her vür*], give birth to the word [*gebir daz wort*]!” It is a marvelous thing that something flows out [*ûzvlüzet*] yet remains within [*inneblibet*]. That a word flows out yet remains within is certainly marvelous. That all creatures flow out yet remain within is a wonder.¹⁸⁵

In the German sermons *Misit dominus manum suam et tetigit os meum et dixit mihi... Ecce constitui te super gentes et regna* (*Jr.* 1:9), God is said to be “a word, a word unspoken [*ein wort, ein ungesprochen wort*].” Eckhart then specifies:

God is a Word that speaks itself [*Got ist ein wort, daz sich selben sprichet*]. Wherever God is, he speaks this Word; wherever he is not, he does not speak. God is spoken and unspoken [*Got ist gesprochen und ist ungesprochen*]. The Father is a speaking work, and the Son is speech working [*Der vater ist ein sprechende werk, und der sun ist ein spruch würkende*]. Whatever is in me proceeds from me [*Swaz in mir ist, daz gât ûz mir*]; if I

182. HGA LXXV 279: *Das Ungesprochene wahrt nur in der reinen Sage des Wortes das Zurücksagen in die Stille des Ereignisses.*

183. Entitled *Das Wort ist das Wirkungslose.*

184. HGA LXXV 282: ... *läßt sich nie vom Sinn als Wirken her denken. “Wort” als Wesen des Ausdrucks und der Kundgabe, auch im nicht-sprachlichen Sinn. Vgl. Meister Eckhart. Daber ist das Wort erst Wort, wenn es rein bleibt auch von jedem Schein des Wirkens und Heraustretens, zum Beispiel als Ausspruch und Sprache.*

185. DW II 93–94 (292).

only think it, my word manifests it, and still it remains in me [*sô ich ez joch gedenke, sô offenbâret ez min wort und blibet doch inne*]. So does the Father speak the unspoken Son [*den sun ungesprochen*], and yet the Son remains in him. And I have often said: “God’s going out is his going in” [*gotes úzganc ist sin ínganc*].¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, Heidegger claims that the word has nothing to do with the being effective: this topic appears, for instance, in the German sermons about the richness of God, *Homo quidam erat dives* (Lk. 16:19), deeply inspired by the *Liber de causis*. Following Proposition 5 of the *Liber*, Eckhart affirms that “ ‘God is above being [*überwesenlich*], above comprehension [*überredelich*], and above knowledge [*überverstentlich*], insofar as this is natural’.”¹⁸⁷ Thus he cannot be known and he is “without effects [*sunder werk*], that is, in his hidden stillness [*in sîner verborgenen stilheit*]. This is why he remains without names [*sunder namen*].”¹⁸⁸ A further reference to the Eckhartian Gottesgeburt can be found in a passage about the problem of the “origin of language” presented in the outline. The origin “conceals itself in the word of the answer, which resonates in the greeted conception of the hints, rich of favour, of the Being’s painful depths.”¹⁸⁹ The topic of the interior conception (*Empfängnis*) of the word is touched by Eckhart for instance in the sermon *In illo tempore missus est angelus Gabriel a Deo*, on Lk. 1:26.¹⁹⁰ In *Das abendländische Gespräch*, then, Heidegger will mention “the vastness of the space of the heart [die Weite des Herzraums],” required “to conceive the destiny [*um das Geschick zu empfangen*].”¹⁹¹

All of this will have a deep influence on the Heideggerian philosophy of language, from the Letter on “Humanism” onwards. Thus, one of the keys to understanding the meaning of Heidegger’s claim that language is “the house of being”¹⁹² can be found when considering Eckhart’s *Logosmystik*.

186. *Ibid.*, 529–30 (203–04).

187. DW III 380 (332).

188. *Ibid.*, 381–82 (333).

189. HGA LXXV 281: ... *verbirgt sich im Wort der Antwort, die in der gegrißten Empfängnis der huldreichen Winke des schmerzinnigen Seyns schwingt.*

190. DW II 229.

191. HGA LXXV 139.

192. HGA IX 313 (239).

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