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# Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing, and God

Robert Masson

Marquette University, [robert.masson@marquette.edu](mailto:robert.masson@marquette.edu)

## RAHNER AND HEIDEGGER: BEING, HEARING, AND GOD



THE IMMEDIATE GOAL of this essay is to delimit the essential difference between Rahner's philosophy of religion and Heidegger's philosophy of Being. Why is it necessary to establish the ground of disagreement between these thinkers? For one thing, it has been claimed by some that Heidegger's philosophy has had a profound effect on Rahner's thought. Louis Roberts, for example, has maintained "that Heidegger's influence on Rahner is nearly as great as Marechal's."<sup>1</sup> Rahner himself suggests that "perhaps Dr. Roberts overestimates this . . . influence somewhat."<sup>2</sup> In any case, it will be maintained here that any valid interpretation of the influence of Heidegger on Rahner must take into account the fundamental difference between them. It will be maintained that this difference is at the level of the most basic questions which each poses and therefore has ramifications which go beyond mere methodological differences. This is not intended to be a refutation to the claim that Heidegger has influenced Rahner, for he certainly has. It is merely hoped that the delimitation of the fundamental difference between their thought will make it possible to assess most accurately how the one has influenced the other. This essay, however, will not attempt such an assessment, nor will it attempt a point by point comparison of Rahner's philosophy with Heidegger's.

A second reason for delimiting the difference between their philosophies has to do with the relation of Heidegger's thought to Thomistic philosophy, and more generally to metaphysics. It is hoped that the investigation will clarify quite emphatically

<sup>1</sup> Louis Roberts, *The Achievement of Karl Rahner* (New York, 1967), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, "Forward" to *The Achievement of Karl Rahner*, p. viii.

the fundamental differences which underlie any apparent similarities between Heidegger's perspective on the question of being and the metaphysician's perspective.

The alleged influence of Heidegger on Rahner is evident, in part, in the notion of "hearing" or "attending" (*hören*) which plays a central role in the thought of both. In *Hearers of the Word* Rahner defines man as essentially a potential hearer of a word from God. The philosophy of religion must prepare for this hearing by demonstrating metaphysically that man has this potentiality. Consequently, Rahner defines theology (theology in the "positive" and fundamental sense as the reception of Revelation and not in the sense of its elaboration) as a "hearing." Theology is fundamentally the "hearing" either of an historical word from God or of his silence.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Heidegger's philosophy of Being could be defined as a type of thinking which is essentially a "hearing," or better an "attending," but as will be shown, a very different kind of hearing than is developed in Rahner's thought.

More fundamental for both thinkers than the notion of hearing, however, is the notion of "being." Rahner argues metaphysically to the notion of man as "hearer of the word" from man's *Vorgriff* (pre-comprehension) of being. Similarly, Heidegger's notion of man as a hearer is developed in his attempt to think the meaning of *Sein* (Being).<sup>4</sup> The difference between the notion of hearing in these two philosophies is ultimately grounded in the difference in the question of being posed by each. Fundamentally, therefore, this essay is concerned with the issue of being as it is developed in Rahner's transcendental Thomism and Heidegger's philosophy of Being.

It is necessary to make explicit several further restrictions of our topic. Since the essay is concerned with the point of difference between Rahner and Heidegger, and since the volume

<sup>3</sup> Karl Rahner, *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York, 1968), pp. 10-11. Hereafter: HW.

<sup>4</sup> For reasons which will become apparent Heidegger's *Sein* is translated here as *Being* (capital B). Rahner's *Sein* which for him is equivalent to *esse* is translated as *being* (small b).

and complexity of Heidegger's reflection on Being are so extensive, no attempt will be made here to give a balanced or comprehensive presentation of Heidegger's thought in itself. The primary focus of attention will be determined by the presentation of Rahner's thesis. Nor will it be possible to consider comprehensively the system of transcendental Thomism, as it has come to be called, except insofar as it is involved in the definition of man as a potential hearer of God's word. Finally, although it is hoped that this essay will help to indicate how one would proceed to investigate the relation of Heidegger's philosophy to theology, such an investigation—very involved in itself—will not be pursued.

Since Rahner has published a reflection on Heidegger's thought—although not an extensive one, and based only on the early works—it seems quite natural to consider it first.<sup>5</sup> Hopefully the consideration of that article will enable us to take an initial stance with regard to Rahner's evaluation of Heidegger, and will also serve as a general introduction to Heidegger's thought. An examination of Rahner's philosophy of religion as developed in *Hearers of the Word* will follow, with attention focused on those elements which subsequently will be shown as the fundamental bone of contention between Heidegger and Rahner. Having done this it will be necessary to re-evaluate Rahner's critique of Heidegger's thought in the light of what will be maintained is a more faithful reading of Heidegger's question about Being. It will then be shown what sense "hearing" comes to have in regard to such a question. It will not be possible to limit the consideration of Heidegger to one or two statements of his position and so indications will have to be gleaned from a number of his works. The essay concludes, contrary to the general consensus, that the philosophies of Rahner and Heidegger differ at the very level of the question asked.

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Existential Philosophy in Heidegger," trans. Andrew Tallon, *Philosophy Today*, 13 (1969), pp. 126-37. Originally published in French in 1940. Hereafter: CE.

Rahner's essay on Heidegger is brief and attempts merely to introduce its readers to the broad outlines of his philosophy. It does not attempt either a comprehensive evaluation of his thought or a comparison of it to other systems of thought. Since Rahner does restrict the scope of his article, it would be unfair to evaluate it as an extensive and nuanced interpretation, much less as necessarily representing Rahner's current evaluation of Heideggerian philosophy. Nevertheless, the essay does situate Heidegger's question within a specific context, and it does project and evaluate the possible development of Heidegger's thought from that context. Although Rahner's conjectures are only provisory, they nevertheless firmly establish the ground on which Rahner's thought confronts Heidegger's. It will be shown in the discussion of *Hearers of the Word* how Rahner moves from this ground himself. In our own re-evaluation of this essay, however, it will be shown that the ground upon which Rahner bases his interpretation of Heidegger is indeed very shaky ground. Although few of Heidegger's later works were available in 1940, Rahner's interpretation misunderstands the most essential points made even in the works which he did consider, sc. SZ, KM, WM, and WG.<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, not meant as a criticism of Rahner but as a preparation for the delimitation of the difference between his philosophy and Heidegger's.

Rahner considers Heidegger a metaphysician. As a meta-

<sup>6</sup> The following abbreviations will be used to refer to the translations of Heidegger's works:

EM-*An Introduction to Metaphysics* trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, 1961).

KM-*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* trans. James S. Churchhill (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968).

SZ-*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1966). The pagination of the German edition is given in this translation and used also in this paper.

WG-*The Essence of Reason*, trans. Terrence Malick (Evanston, 1969).

WM-"What is Metaphysics?" trans. R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago, 1970), pp. 325-61.

Intro to WM-"The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York, 1969), pp. 206-21.

physician Heidegger, according to Rahner, asks about being as such, in its totality, as that which is most general. Rahner understands this concern with being as that which is most general, as a concern about the act of being, the *esse* characteristic of all beings (*ens*). Likewise, he understands Heidegger's concern with being in its totality as a concern with *esse* as the unifying aspect under which all possible objects are able to be comprehended and summed up, and as the ultimate cause to which they can be related. Metaphysics insofar as it asks this question about being is called "ontology," and insofar as it looks for the universal basis of all being it is "theology." All philosophy since Plato and Aristotle is at its base, therefore, "onto-theological." According to Rahner, Heidegger accepts this heritage—this concern about being as such—and makes it his own. (CE, 128)

What is distinctive, according to Rahner's interpretation, about Heidegger's approach to metaphysics is that he seeks to put it on a new foundation. The whole tradition of philosophy from Plato to Hegel has conceived being in terms of *logos* and thus as correlative to thought or reason. Man was defined as the *animal rationalis* and the question of being was "interpreted from the *logical* grasp of being by thought." (CE, 130) Rahner maintains that Heidegger's originality lies in the fact that he asks the "question about being without conceiving it beforehand as *onto-logy*." (CE, 130) Thus Heidegger situates the question about being on a new plane which does not presuppose the definition of man or being in terms of *logos*, but which sees man as the place where being is "comprehended" in a more fundamental way. According to Rahner, this is why Heidegger defines his task as the establishing of a more "fundamental ontology." It is also for this reason that Heidegger wants to go back beyond the traditional starting point of metaphysics to the point of its origin with the Pre-Socratics when being was not conceived beforehand in terms of logic. (CE, 130)

Rahner maintains that this more fundamental investigation of the being question assumes the form of a transcendental

analysis. For this reason Rahner situates Heidegger within the tradition of modern philosophy which according to Rahner is essentially transcendental philosophy. As Rahner sees it, "a question is posed on the transcendental plane when it asks for the a priori conditions that make knowledge of an object possible," that is to say, when the investigator himself becomes the object of investigation. (CE, 129) Since being as such is not accessible as this or that being, and since it cannot be obtained in its pure state, the only access which one has to being is through man who must already possess some knowledge of being to raise the question in the first place. In other words, Rahner tells us, in order to ask about the a priori conditions which render possible the knowledge of being, the investigator must become the object of investigation. (CE, 129)

Rahner notes that it is important to keep in mind that Heidegger's sole concern is always with the question about being. The transcendental analytic of man, therefore, aims at resolving the question about being. It is not in any sense aimed at establishing an anthropology. The question of man is always subordinate to the question about being. (CE, 129)

Accordingly, Rahner maintains that we are able to define Heidegger's philosophy as:

the transcendental investigation of what man is insofar as he raises the question of being, an investigation that rejects the initial traditional stance in this matter—exclusively intellectual—and undertaken with the intention of providing an answer to the question of being in general. (CE, 131; printed entirely in italics)

Rahner tells us that Heidegger's transcendental investigation of man is an analysis of man as "Dasein." What does Heidegger mean by this term? According to Rahner, "Dasein" does not designate simply being-present-there (*être-là-présent*) in the sense in which one could affirm anything whatever, but rather "Dasein" is being-human itself—each of us. It is characterized inherently by the transcendence which orients man towards being, and from which derives the ability to understand oneself in a definite way, to take an

attitude towards oneself. As a consequence "existence" in Heidegger's special terminology denotes not the fact that a being is, but rather it denotes ". . . man, insofar as he is in some way the object of this free self-disposition." (CE, 131) The existential analytic of Dasein, therefore, consists in the determination of the general and formal structures which are proper to Dasein as a mode of being-human, in other words as "existence," as a state of "openness" (transcendence) to being. These structures are called "existentials." SZ is almost entirely devoted to an explication of these structures. The analysis displays itself, Rahner maintains, in two stages. The first consists in a phenomenological description of Dasein as "being-in-the-world." The second reduces this being-in-the-world to its ultimate sense as "being-in-time." (CE, 131-32)

Rahner explains that being-in-the-world describes Dasein's "existence" as Heidegger conceives it. Man is, only insofar as he is in the world. This being-in-the-world is not a secondary process by which Dasein as a closed subject in some way comes into contact with an exterior world. Rather, from the very start Dasein is already outside of itself in the world and in the things of the world. Being in the world according to Rahner, therefore, consists in the a priori possibility of Dasein to be related to the things of the world and the world itself.

Man is from the very start open to the totality of the world, and the totality of the world is, albeit under an empty form, given him right from the outset. (CE, 132)

Rahner explains that this being-in-the-world has a triple aspect which is described by Heidegger as *Verstehen*, *Geworfenheit*, and *Verfallenheit*. The first term refers to Heidegger's contention that Dasein is not present to itself by a static knowledge of properties but rather is present to itself by a stretching-ahead-of-self-toward-the-future. This "tension-ahead-of-self-toward-the-future" is "understanding, man's way of comprehending and grasping himself, of grasping and restructuring his own power-to-be." (CE, 133) Through this *Verstehen* Dasein finds itself always brought into question and



is thus present to itself. Rahner notes that according to Heidegger this stretching of Dasein towards its “subjective possibilities” must always begin from Dasein’s past—a past which has been imposed upon Dasein and of which it has no hold. This “state-of-being-thrown into this or that condition” (*état-de-jeté-dans-telles et telles conditions*) Heidegger calls “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*). Furthermore, the tension-ahead-of-self-toward-the-future from the past-into-which-it-has-been-thrown necessarily involves Dasein with the things of the world to such an extent that Dasein becomes prey to them and enslaved. This enslavement Heidegger calls “Verfallenheit.” Being-in-the-world as *Verstehn*, *Geworfenheit*, and *Verfallenheit* is summed up by the term “Care” (in German “Sorge,” in French “Sollicitude”). (CE, 132-33)

The second stage of the analysis of SZ—the reduction of Dasein to its ultimate sense—becomes evident, Rahner observes, when, on the one hand, it is noted that the proper and strict possibility towards which Dasein carries itself is the certain possibility of its own impossibility, of its death, and when, on the other hand, it is noted that to the three aspects of Care correspond the elements of human duration (*la “durée” humaine*): future, present, and past. Duration, here, does not refer to the “time” we calculate, but rather to the foundation of such time in the temporal structure of Dasein as: the stretching-ahead-of-self-towards-its-ownmost-possibility or future (sc. death), from its dependence on a past into which it has been thrown, realized in the present as a response to the attraction of the future, and the compulsion and constraint of the past. Rahner concludes, then, that for Heidegger Dasein as Care and as a being essentially towards death, is by its very structure temporal. Dasein is intrinsically finite. (CE, 133-34)

Having outlined the general structure of Heidegger’s existential analytic of Dasein, Rahner returns to the original question—what is being as such?—and discovers that SZ never directly addresses itself to this question, leaving its answer to a proposed second volume. But although Rahner is unable to

extract the kernel of Heideggerian metaphysics from SZ, he does attempt to draw from it and from indications in WM and WG some “conjectures” about Heidegger’s answer to the being question.

Dasein, Rahner observes, is a being-towards-death—a projection out of past and present towards Dasein’s future. This projection is not a property of Dasein, but rather is the very act of being-human. The original mode of the projection or anticipatory grasp is not a theoretical knowledge in terms of logic, but rather it is an experience or state-of-disposition (Tallon translates “*état d’ame*” as “state of soul”) which Heidegger defines as “anxiety.” This dispositional state reveals “nothingness” (*néant*) as the ultimate “virtuality” of Dasein, and as that in which Dasein is already engaged. Dasein’s transcendence, his passing beyond beings, is a passing to nothingness. Rahner maintains, therefore, that Heidegger appears to identify pure being and pure nothingness. Consequently, all beings as participants in nothingness are necessarily finite. Rahner observes that this view does not seem to allow even the possibility of raising a question about the existence of God. As far as Rahner can tell, Heidegger’s ontology offers no support for a pure Being positively superior as such to all finitude. (CE, 134-35)

Although it seems like Heidegger’s thought allows no room for the idea of God, Rahner notes that Heidegger, himself, denies that his analysis says anything either for or against the possibility of God. Thus Rahner maintains it is impossible until the completion of his ontology to tell for sure if it will give to metaphysics “a meaning that is either the most radically *atheist* or the most profoundly *religious*.” (CE, 137) All we can do, Rahner insists, is note that up till now the existential analytic of Dasein logically seems to be not an ontology but an *Ontochronic* (an expression Rahner attributes to Heidegger himself)—“a science which showing that the meaning of all being as such, and, absolutely, the meaning of Being, is nothingness.” (CE, 136)

Rahner does not attempt to analyze Heidegger’s thought

from the point of view of Christianity, but he does explain a little more fully what he means when he suggests that the ultimate resolution of Heidegger's philosophy will be either most radically atheistic or most profoundly religious. Heidegger's eventual ontology will lay the foundation for atheism if, as Rahner seems to think it is to be feared, the last word of its anthropology is nothingness, for then the last word of the ontology still to come must also be nothingness. On the other hand, Rahner claims that Heidegger's philosophy could lay the groundwork for a profoundly religious view if the analysis of *Dasein* in its ultimate stage discovers the infinity of the absolute as the first a priori of human transcendence, and if it discovers the true destiny of man in the choice between eternal nothingness and eternal life before God. In this case Heidegger's analysis of man as an historical being, as an essentially "finite creature," and as a temporal being renders possible an attentiveness to Revelation.

In this case, to jar man loose from the pure idea and cast him into his own existence and history, as Heidegger is doing, would be to prepare him, to make him attentive to the fact—existential, historical—of a divine revelation, would be to open him to "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," to the "Word of Life, seen, heard, touched" by human hands, "Jesus of Nazareth. . . ." (CE, 137)

This description is striking because it serves as a nearly perfect introduction to and crystalization of the philosophy of religion developed in *Hearers of the Word*.<sup>7</sup>

Rahner's aim in *Hearers of the Word* is to lay the foundation for a philosophy of religion faithful to the principles of the Thomistic tradition yet unique in that it raises a question never explicitly posed by St. Thomas. (cf. HW, 33) He suggests that the nature of this philosophy of religion could be most clearly defined by comparing it with theology. It is necessary, therefore, to ask the question about the relationship

<sup>7</sup> This similarity of Rahner's philosophy of religion and his projection of the possible developments of Heidegger's philosophy of Being suggest the value of following the argument of HW in this preliminary delimitation of the essential difference between their philosophies.

of these two sciences. The question of the relationship between sciences, however, is ultimately a question about their common foundation, and that science which serves as foundation for all other sciences and grants them their a priori attitudes and principles—whether or not these principles are self-conscious—is called metaphysics. The question of the relationship between the philosophy of religion and theology is consequently a metaphysical question. Science of any kind, however, is a human activity. Thus, the question of the relationship between the philosophy of religion and theology is ultimately a metaphysical question about the nature of man. It is what, in the previous article, Rahner called a transcendental question. (HW, 3-7)

If the question presented so far is probed deeper, Rahner maintains that a series difficulty will be discovered. “For classical Christian philosophy of religion . . . knowledge of God . . . is no static, self-contained science, but a profound element of ontology in general.” (HW, 7) But if this is true, then the philosophy of religion as ontology (or the metaphysics of being) is the same as the science in which it finds its ground. The question of the philosophy of religion is thus a question about the “self-establishment of metaphysics.” Ultimately, therefore, “the question about the philosophy of religion becomes the question as to why man pursues metaphysics and being, and how human metaphysics can reach up to God.” (HW, 8)

If this philosophy of religion is to be truly a “philosophy” and not a “theology” there can be no question of its justifying or explicating a revelation from God. On the other hand, if theology is to be truly “theology” and not “philosophy,” then the philosophy of religion cannot a priori reduce revelation to merely what is discovered by reason. To establish itself the philosophy of religion must ask if there is any “reason” to suppose that man is a potential hearer of a divine revelation. The asking of such a question is a purely philosophical venture, but as such it lays the foundation for theology—the actual hearing of the revealed word—by pointing out to man whether or not he should seek such a revealed word in history. Rahner

proposes that, in fact, it can be shown that man by his very nature is a potential hearer of a possible revelation from God in history. (HW, 7-27)

Rahner describes the method which he chooses to achieve this end in terms very similar to those with which he described Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein. Rahner proposes:

to sketch the outlines of a metaphysical analytic of man with reference to the capacity to hear the word of God which is addressed to man as the revelation of the unknown God allowing the history of man to appear. To put a question metaphysically, however, is to put a *question about being*. (HW, 32)

Rahner's pursuit of this question about the being of man establishes the three propositions of metaphysical anthropology that constitute the essence of his philosophy of religion: 1) that "man is a spirit (a characterization which stamps his whole being as man) and thus has an ear that is open to any word whatsoever that may proceed from the mouth of the Eternal" (HW, 67); 2) "that man is that existent thing who stands in free love before the God of a possible revelation . . . (and who) is attentive to the speech or silence of God in the measure in which he opens himself in free love to this message of the speech or silence of the God of revelation" (HW, 108); and 3) that "man is that existent thing who must listen for an historical revelation of God, given in history and possibly in human speech." (HW, 161)

These three propositions and the philosophy of religion which they constitute are based on Rahner's notion of being as that which is revealed to man through a preconceptual, non-thematic grasp, but which at the same time is hidden from man because of his finitude. It is at this level where the essential difference between Rahner and Heidegger emerges, so this is where the present essay will find its focus.

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Rahner begins his analytic for the being of man in a manner that appears to be similar to Heidegger's posing of the ques-

tion about being. Metaphysics asks about the being of that which is. It “enquires into the ultimate reasons, into the final cause of reality. . . .” (HW, 33) This questioning is unavoidable. “We are compelled to ask: What is the ‘being’ of that which is?” (HW, 34); and it is precisely as men that we are compelled to do so. Rahner develops this notion more fully in *Spirit in the World*.<sup>8</sup> There he observes that man questions, and that this questioning is irreducible because every question presupposes a placing in question. Rahner maintains that man necessarily questions because being in its totality is given to him only as something questionable. For Rahner the ontological implication of the fact that man necessarily questions is the conclusion that man exists as the question about being in its totality. Thus, the question about being as posed by man is the point of departure for metaphysics.

Since nothing can be asked about the totally unknown, Rahner observes that the fact that man poses the question about being attests to an a priori grasp of being in general. Thus Rahner believes that he is able to deduce from man’s existence, as “the question about existence,” the familiar Thomistic teaching that “human thinking is always accompanied by an unexpressed knowledge of being [*esse*] as the condition of all knowledge of the existing individual.” (HW, 36)

Rahner proceeds further to note that being can obviously be questioned only insofar as it is known. From this Rahner deduces the Thomistic position that knowability is the most fundamental note of being. “A thing which is, and the possible object of a cognition, are one and the same, for the being of that which is, is knowability.” (HW, 38-39) This implies, Rahner argues, the Thomistic position that “being is knowing and being known in their original unity.” (HW, 44) The sense of knowing here is not that of reaching from something inside to something outside but is rather conceived as a presence-to-self.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York, 1968), pp. 57-78. Hereafter SW.

For Rahner, therefore, “the essence of being is the being-present-to-itself of being or the luminosity of being to itself as “subjectivity.” (HW, 37-44)

Rahner argues, furthermore, that although man can deduce the unity of being and knowing from the fact of his existence as the question about being, the questionability of being as such—that is to say, the fact that man *has* to raise the question, the fact that he is not absolute self-presence—rules out any form of pantheism or “debased idealism.” Man “has being,” but is not pure absolute being itself. Man is finite. From this fact Rahner argues to the Thomistic notion that being is “analogous.” By this term Rahner means to suggest that the “attribution of being itself is an interiorly variable quantity.” (HW, 47) In other words, the degree of self-presence or self-luminosity varies from being to being. A finite being *is*, therefore, only to the degree that it “has being,” only to the degree that it has a potentiality for self presence. (HW, 45-52)

But what is this being as such which Rahner conceives as self-luminosity and as analogically attributable to all beings? Furthermore, what is man’s relation to being? Rahner suggests that the answers to these question can be discovered by an analysis of the act of judgment. In every judgment a predicate is affirmed of a subject. Furthermore, insofar as the judgment is true, it is itself affirmed of something that is in itself independent of the passing of judgment. By this process man establishes the object of his judgment as something different from and independent of his judgment, and therefore as different from and independent of himself. In this way man constitutes himself as a subject opposed to an object. As subject he is able to return to himself by turning out towards (that is to say, by objectifying) the objects with which he is initially one. It is only through this process that man is able to comprehend himself as a subject who subsists-in-himself and who is free (i. e., of that which stands against him).

Now the question which Rahner poses is this: what is “the ultimate cause of the possibility of man, in his subsisting-in-himself, taking a position distinct from the things he handles

in conscious thought-judgment"? (HW, 56) He argues that in essence this question is only another side of a more familiar problem in Scholastic philosophy. In every judgment a thing is affirmed as a "this" or a "that." This is also true of human activity considered more generally. Man always deals with this particular thing or that. The ability to take hold of this or that particular thing presupposes the ability to comprehend it under a general concept, that is to say, the ability to elevate the perceptions of the senses to the level of the concept. This is what in Thomistic epistemology is called "abstraction." To ask about the condition of possibility of human subsisting-in-self, therefore, is to ask about the possibility of abstraction. (HW, 53-57)

Rahner describes abstraction as the ability to "loosen away from" or to detach the "thisness" (in Scholastic terminology the form or quiddity) from any example of a particular "this." "Abstraction is thus the recognition of the non-restriction of the 'thisness' that is given in the particular sense." (HW, 58) Now in order to elevate the sense impression of a particular "this" to a recognition of a non-restricted "this," the intellect must grasp the particular as "limited." But to recognize this "limit," it must already have grasped it in reference to a "something more." This "something more" is what Rahner means by "being in general." The grasping in terms of this more is what he means by the preconcept (*Vorgriff*).

In each particular cognition it [the intellect] always reaches out beyond the particular object. and thus grasps it, not just as its unrelated, dead "thisness," but in its limitation and reference to the totality of all possible objects. . . . The pre-concept is the condition for the possibility of the universal concept, of the abstraction which in turn is what makes possible the objectification of the datum of sense perception and so of conscious subsisting-in-oneself. (HW, 59)

Rahner argues that the object of this *Vorgriff* cannot be an object like those which are made known through the *Vorgriff* itself. Thus it would appear that to an extent Rahner's position



is similar to Heidegger's who, as was shown, holds that "Being" is not like beings. It is in the further elaboration of this a priori grasp that Rahner seems to consciously distinguish his position from Heidegger's. As was seen previously, Rahner believed that Heidegger's Dasein as a transcendence to being is essentially a transcendence to nothingness. This alleged notion, as it was elaborated in WM, was based on the argument that negation can only be grounded in a prior comprehension of "nothingness." Here Rahner argues that just the opposite is the case—that the notion of negation is derived through man's *Vorgriff* of an absolute "having being" and that the concept of non-being is derived from the notion of negation.<sup>9</sup> Why?

Rahner argues that human cognition is related to that which *is*, and not what *is-not*—at least insofar as all knowledge begins in sense perception. He maintains that, if the knowledge of the limitation of the objects of knowledge can be explained in terms of a *Vorgriff* of being as positive, there is no need to posit a transcendence to nothingness. But, Rahner continues, it has already been shown that beings *are* to the extent that they "have being." They are grasped not in terms of nothing but in terms of a *Vorgriff* of the perfection of pure "having being." Rahner maintains that this can be deduced from the fact of the question of being, from the judgment, and from the freedom of human activity. "To the extent that judgment and free action are necessarily part of man's existence, the pre-concept of being pure and simple in its own intrinsically proper infinitude is part of the fundamental constitution of human existence." (HW, 63) Since Rahner has already ruled out the possibility of pantheism, that being which has being absolutely must be God himself. Thus Rahner claims that:

God is posited, too, with the same necessity as this pre-concept. He is the thing of which is affirmed absolute "having existence."

<sup>9</sup>I do not mean to suggest that the arguments we considered in *Hearers of the Word* were intended as a direct answer to Heidegger's analysis. Rahner appears to be speaking much more generally. But it also seems that Heidegger's position, as Rahner understands it, is among those which he believes his arguments refute.

It is true that the pre-concept does not present any object at all along with itself. But in this pre-concept (as the necessary and ever already actualized condition for every human cognition and every human action) the existence of an existent thing of absolute "having being" (that is, of God) has already been affirmed if not presented. In the pre-concept the cause of his specific possibility is unknowingly affirmed. (HW, 63-64)

Thus Rahner claims that from the very movement of the human intellect we are able to establish the existence of God.

Granting this, it is not difficult to see why Rahner rejects any metaphysics which claims that negation must be grounded in a transcendence towards nothingness. Because of the *Vorgriff* of absolute being, the subject is able to perceive finite beings as limited. Negation is thus derived from the comprehension of a "less" or "limit" in terms of a "more" or "full." The concept of non-being is thus also derived from the *Vorgriff* of *esse absolutum*.

Non-being does not precede negation, but the pre-concept relative to the unlimited is in itself already the negation of the finite, to the extent that, as condition for the possibility of its cognition, and through its rising above the finite, it reveals, *eo ipso*, its finitude. The affirmation of the thing that is in itself unlimited is therefore the possibility for negation, and not the other way around. Thus we are not required to assume a transcendence relation to non-being, which, preceding all negation and providing its foundation, would have to disclose the finitude of an existent thing for the first time. Positive unlimitation of the transcendental horizon of human knowledge automatically displays the finitude of all that does not fill up this horizon. (HW, 62)

These analyses lead Rahner to the conclusion that man by nature is a spirit who is able to affirm the existence of God, and furthermore, because of the analogy of being, he has the potentiality for a more extensive knowledge of God. "Man is the absolute receptivity for being pure and simple." It is not possible to pursue Rahner's existential analysis further. In the discussion which follows, he argues that although being is luminous, man's grasp of it is necessarily limited because of his own finitude. He argues, furthermore, that God as absolute

being must be conceived as a free spirit who could reveal more about himself to man if it was his divine will to do so. Because of the very nature of man's receptivity as a composite of body and spirit, the place of such a free revelation would have to be human history and the mode would have to be the sensible word (understood in its broadest meaning as either word or act). Man, therefore, has a potentiality for "hearing" such an historical word if God speaks. Furthermore, the philosophy of religion can show man his need to look for such a word in history.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful to summarize. Rahner maintains that Heidegger is essentially a metaphysician concerned with establishing a new, more fundamental ontology through a transcendental analysis of man as the one who necessarily poses the question about being. As far as Rahner can tell, however, Heidegger's analysis seems to lead to the conclusion that man transcends towards nothingness. In *Hearers of the Word* Rahner is also concerned with carrying out an existential analytic of man as the one who necessarily poses the question about being. Like Heidegger he appears to maintain that man is able to raise the question about being because man already has a comprehension of being as such. Like Heidegger he appears to maintain that the being of which man has a pre-comprehension is distinct from all other beings. But unlike Heidegger (as Rahner understands him), he maintains that the ultimate sense of being is not nothingness but rather God, grasped in the movement of all human affirmation, whether in act or deed, towards pure and absolute "having-being." As such, God constitutes not only the object of human activity, but also more significantly, the condition of its possibility. As a composite of body and spirit man possesses the potentiality to receive a further revelation from God if one is given. Man is thus a potential "hearer" of a divine word.

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Rahner's evaluation of Heidegger's ontology in the article discussed and his implicit refutation of Heidegger's alleged

“nihilism” in *Hearers of the Word* presupposes that Heidegger, like Rahner, is asking about “being as such, under its most general and total aspect.” It presupposes that “by most general is meant, ultimately the simple fact of being, *esse*, characteristic of every *ens*,” and that “by most total is meant *esse* again as the unifying aspect under which every possible object can be grasped, summed up, and related to its ultimate and unique explanation.” (CF, 128) Rahner, therefore, is asking about “beings as beings” or “being as being” (*ens qua ens*), just as Aristotle and St. Thomas. The difference is that he founds his metaphysics on a transcendental analysis. What is more significant to our discussion is that he presupposes that Heidegger’s problematic is, and must be, the same. As Heidegger’s thought has developed, however, it has become increasingly clear that his understanding has emerged out of what he believes is a very different question.

In the “Introduction” to WM (written in 1949), Heidegger notes that the science which traditionally has been called metaphysics has always asked about being as beings, or about being (the totality of beings) as being. The asking of this question, as Rahner noted, has led according to Heidegger’s analysis to two distinct pursuits. The one seeks to understand, that is to say, to *represent*, that which is common to all beings—their beingness, or in Thomistic terminology *esse*. This study is called “ontology.” The other seeks to understand the beingness of being in terms of their cause or sufficient reason—which for Rahner is *esse absolutum* (God)—and it is called “theology.”<sup>10</sup> Both questions ask about beings, or in terms which Heidegger would insist are misleading, about finite being. Heidegger argues that he is asking a very different question. He is not asking about being but about Being itself as distinct from beings. Thus it will be maintained here that Heidegger’s question about Being (it will be helpful to use a capital “B” to designate Heidegger’s “Sein”) is different from Rahner’s question about being.

<sup>10</sup> Here “theology” refers to a branch of metaphysics, not to the Church’s explication of Revelation.

In *An Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger attempts to introduce the question of Being as he understands it. He maintains there that because metaphysics, in the ordinary sense of the term, is concerned only with questioning beings as beings (*ta physika*), it can be called a “physics.” If philosophic thought is to have a solid foundation, however, it is necessary to go beyond questions about being to the question about Being itself (*meta ta physika*). As he saw it in 1935, “even in the doctrines of being as pure act (Thomas Aquinas), as absolute concept (Hegel), as eternal recurrence of the identical will to power (Nietzsche), metaphysics has remained unalterably ‘physics.’” (EM, 14) Heidegger believes that the question of Being which he asks is not at all the same as the question which metaphysicians through the ages have asked.

Although this position is more obvious in these later works, it has been the direction of his thought from the very beginning. As his problematic has developed it has become clear that it is not a question of Heidegger giving up metaphysics or gradually disengaging himself from the metaphysical understanding of being. Rather, it is a question of a difference, there from the beginning, between his problematic and that of the tradition, gradually becoming more explicit.<sup>11</sup> It is at the level of the very question asked where the difference begins to emerge between Rahner’s question about *esse* and Heidegger’s question about Being itself.

It is just this difference, however, which is overlooked if the existential analytic of *Dasein* proposed in SZ is interpreted, as Rahner interprets it, as an attempt like those of Kant, Descartes, or any modern metaphysician to put metaphysics on a new foundation. It is true, of course, that in the introduction to SZ Heidegger describes his task as the establishing of a “fundamental ontology” through the “*existential analytic of Dasein*.” (SZ, 13)<sup>12</sup> He also suggests, however, that “funda-

<sup>11</sup> The analysis here does not wish to deny that there has been a “turn” in Heidegger’s thought; but the fact that there has been a “turn” does not mean that his problem has essentially changed. The fundamental question remains the same even though the questions asked have changed.

<sup>12</sup> Italics here and in all following quotes are Heidegger’s unless otherwise stated.

mental ontology” is fundamental not because, as Rahner suggests, it bases the knowledge of being on a new foundation or because it asks the question about beings in a new way but because it asks a question which is more original than any such question about beings. The aim of SZ is not to lay the basis for an answer to the question about being, nor to ask the same question in a new way, but rather “. . . to work out the question of Being . . .” itself. (SZ, 1) Thus, when he says further that “our provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being,” (SZ, 1) this should be understood to suggest not only that “time” will help to answer the question of Being but primarily and more significantly that time will indicate the very sense of the question itself. It is easy to assume that Heidegger is only polemicizing against Neo-Kantians when he says that it is necessary “to raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being.*” (SZ, 1) It becomes clear as he progresses, however, that he is speaking to the whole metaphysical tradition.

What are the indications of this thesis in SZ—the principal work that Rahner considered in his essay? In the first place, Heidegger speaks of the need for a “destruction of ontology” and the “history of ontology.” (SZ, 19-27) He explains that the need for destruction “is essentially bound up with the way the question of Being is formulated. . . .” (SZ, 23) Is it to be supposed that Heidegger intends a complete denial of the philosophic past? No, for he insists that the aim of the destruction is positive, as well as negative, and that it can achieve this aim only if it starts within the history of thought. But how begin from a destruction? What is the aim of the destruction? He seems to hint—and seen from the perspective of Heidegger’s later works it is a hint difficult to miss—that fundamental ontology will begin from a rediscovery of an original beginning though a destruction of what has followed from it.

. . . taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to *destroy* the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at

those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—the ways which have guided us ever since. (SZ, 22)

In the pages which follow Heidegger states that this forgottenness of Being applies alike to the Greeks, the Scholastics, Decartes, Kant, and Hegel. Now Rahner had maintained that Heidegger wanted to go beyond the traditional starting point of Metaphysics because he sought a foundation for ontology which did not conceive “being” beforehand in terms of logic. This is true, but only half true. Heidegger is seeking not merely a new foundation but is seeking a new foundation in the asking of a new question. It is because a new question is asked that his ontology is more fundamental.

But how precisely is the question of Being as Heidegger understands it different from the metaphysician’s notion of being? What is the meaning of the word “Being” in the phrase “the question of Being”? The problem which the metaphysician confronts with SZ, as Rahner noted, is that Heidegger never gets to the task of defining the sense of Being—at least from a metaphysical point of view. What then can be discerned about the question of Being from the SZ analysis?

For one thing, it has already been noted that to ask for a metaphysical definition, or even the grounds for one, from SZ is apparently contrary to Heidegger’s intention. It seems that what ought to be sought is Heidegger’s understanding of how the question should be asked. How? He maintains that the clue to how will be discovered, as Rahner observed, by examining Dasein, the place where the question is asked, and seeing in this examination that “time” is the ultimate transcendental horizon for the question of Being. The existential analytic of Dasein could, then, be called “transcendental” but not in the sense that Rahner gives to the term. In seeking an understanding of Dasein’s comprehension of Being Heidegger is proposing to lay the basis for a question which he maintains that Kant never posed. Heidegger wants it to be understood that the question which guides him has been ignored and forgotten in metaphysics and ontology. The term of that question—Being

—should not be understood in terms of the history of philosophy and so not as a “transcendental philosophy” in the traditional sense. Rahner’s contention that Heidegger is essentially a transcendental philosopher is thus very misleading if not altogether incorrect.

What, then, does Heidegger reveal about the term of his inquiry in SZ? First, he tells us that Being is “that which determines beings as beings, that on the basis of which beings are already understood. . . .” (SZ, 6) Although—or perhaps because—Being is that which determines beings and is common to them all, Heidegger insists that Being is not a being or in any way like beings.

The Being of beings “is” not itself a being. If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophic step consists in not *μῦθόν τινα διηγείσθαι*, in not “telling a story”—that is to say, in not defining beings as beings by tracing them back in their origin to some other beings, as if Being had the character of some possible being. (SZ, 6)

Heidegger makes the same point when he says:

Being as the basic theme of philosophy is no class or genus of beings, yet it pertains to every being. Its “universality” is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every being and every possible character which a being may possess. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple.* (SZ, 38)

This transcending, however, is not an abstraction, nor does Heidegger propose to seek it through abstraction. Rather, he intends to “work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely.” (SZ, 1)

A further indication of what Heidegger intends to interrogate in the question about Being can be found in his analysis of the word “phenomenology.” The term originates from two Greek words: *φαννόμενον* and *λόγος*. Heidegger maintains that *φαννόμενον* signifies that which shows itself in itself or manifests itself as itself. “Accordingly the *φαινόμενα* or ‘phenomena’ are the totality of what lies in the light of day or can be brought to light—what the Greeks sometimes identified simply with *τὰ ὄντα* (beings).” (SZ, 28) For Heidegger, however, this



“showing-itself-in-itself, signifies a distinctive way in which something can be encountered.” (SZ, 31) Heidegger maintains that the real meaning of the second term, *λόγος*, has been covered up by later interpretations of it as reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground or relationship. He argues that the word originally meant to make manifest what one is talking about. It is a “letting something be seen.” Phenomenology thus means to let be manifest or un-hidden that which manifests itself. What then does phenomenology let be seen? Heidegger argues that:

Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground. (SZ, 35)

What can this something be? Heidegger argues that it is **Being**.

Yet that which remains *hidden* in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets *covered up* again, or which shows itself only “in disguise,” is not just this or that, but rather the **Being** of beings, as our previous observations have shown. This **Being** can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no questions arise about it or about its meaning. (SZ, 60)

This analysis of the meaning of “phenomenology” is not meant merely as a digression into the nature of Heidegger’s methodology. Rather it intends to reveal a basic characteristic of Heidegger’s understanding of **Being** which gets developed already in his conception of phenomenology as the only adequate way to do fundamental ontology. That which shows itself is the **Being** of beings. **Being** as a “showing-itself is not just any showing itself.” It is not just something like appearing. **Being** is the foundation of any kind of appearing at all. It underlies all beings. Behind this showing-itself (**Being**), there is nothing else. Yet it is the character of this showing-itself, that it can be hidden and forgotten while one gazes on the beings it lets be manifest. (SZ, 36-37)

Heidegger is thus seeking the meaning of the **Being** of beings.

Although Being appears to be correlative with the beings which it manifests, it is also distinct from them. It is not in any sense a being, or like beings. For this reason one cannot speak about Being in any way like one would speak about beings. Nor can Being be thought of as proceeding from a being. It is a "pure transcending" which is beyond beings. But note, Heidegger does not say Being is a *transcendent* (noun), for example, a transcendent Being. He rejects as missing the issue any question which like the one posed by Rahner seeks to trace beings to a cause (i. e., God). This is why Heidegger insists that his thought does not speak either for or against the existence of God. From the perspective of his question the problem of God does not arise. Since Rahner, however does not note the difference between his question (the metaphysical question) and Heidegger's, he is not able to see how Heidegger can claim that the analysis has not prejudged the God issue. Heidegger, however, is not seeking to determine the source of beings, but the meaning of Being itself. Being is that manifesting by which beings are "present" to Dasein. Although Being manifests itself in its manifesting of beings, in the coming-to-presence of beings, it remains itself concealed. It remains itself a *manifesting*, not a *manifested*. Being needs therefore, to be brought from concealment to non-concealment. The analysis of Dasein as the place where Being is revealed, and also forgotten, shows that this comprehension takes place through the temporal structure of Dasein and thus suggests that "time" is the clue or horizon through which the meaning of Being can be questioned. SZ has not thought Being, however, merely by giving this clue or discovering this horizon. Heidegger concludes his analysis insisting that "the dispute in regard to the interpretation of Being cannot be straightened out, *because it has not even been begun.*" (SZ, 437)

It can be surmised from this that Heidegger would argue that the trouble with Rahner's evaluation of SZ is that it has not even recognized the question. It completely misses the point.

Rahner's principle criticism of Heidegger, however, is not based on the analyses of SZ so much as on the arguments of

WM. According to Rahner the conclusion of these arguments seems to be that the ultimate sense of being is “nothingness.” This criticism again misses the real issue. It is true that in WM Heidegger proposes to understand Being in terms of the problem of “Nothing” (*Nichts*). Heidegger’s use of this term, however, is carefully nuanced and should not be equated with some sort of metaphysical “nothingness.”

WM was originally written as a lecture for an audience composed mostly of scientists. It proposed to introduce a question which the sciences as such do not consider, namely, the metaphysical question. It must be noted from the start, however, that Heidegger is defining metaphysics as he conceives it, not as it has been conceived historically.

Heidegger maintains that the sciences consider that which-is and nothing more. He claims that the “and *nothing* more” is intrinsic to the sciences’ conception of their subject matter. But how conceive this Nothing without representing it as some thing? The question, “What is Nothing?” seems to demand the illogical reply that, “Nothing is this or that thing,” when it is known perfectly well that Nothing is not any thing. To avoid this “logical” problem Heidegger suggest an examination of the off-the-cuff definition of Nothing as the negation of the totality-of-what-is. This could perhaps be reasonably maintained if the totality-of-what-is could be known or conceived in itself, but it cannot. Thus another impass has been reached. It is not an inescapable impass. Even though the whole of what-is in its totality is not accessible in itself, “it is equally certain that we find ourselves placed in the midst of what-is and that this is somehow revealed in totality.” (WM,333) How is it revealed? Recalling the analysis of SZ, Heidegger maintains that the totality is grasped on the level of “disposition,” and that this grasp is revealed in moods such as boredom or the joy felt in the presence of a loved one. This dispositional awareness constitutes an essential mode of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. As Rahner noted, it is not just a matter of feeling but the ground for the possibility of any knowledge of beings. Unfortunately this awareness of the totality-of-what-is still does

not tell anything about Nothing, for it is a revelation of and absorption in the totality-of-what-is. It appears to exclude any revelation of the opposite, that which absolutely is not, namely, Nothing. Heidegger maintains, however, that there are moods, although perhaps rare, which reveal Nothing itself. Such is the mood of profound dread (*Angst*). Heidegger's description of this mood is classic.

In dread, as we say, "one feels something uncanny." What is this "something" (*es*) and this "one"? We are unable to say what gives "one" the uncanny feeling. One just feels it generally (*im Ganzen*). All things and we with them, sink into a sort of indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears; rather, in the very act of drawing away from us everything turns towards us. This withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread, this is what oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this "nothing."

Dread reveals Nothing.

. . . Dread hold us in suspense because it makes what-is-in-totality slip away from us. (WM, 336)

The experience of dread witnesses, then, what Heidegger describes most evocatively as the failure of all "'Is'-saying ('*Ist*'-Sagen)." (WM, 336)

Heidegger concludes from this analysis that negation does not precede or ground the grasp of Nothing, but on the contrary, the grasp of Nothing precedes and grounds negation. Nothing is revealed but not as any thing, and not as the negation of any or even all things. This grasp of Nothing is not just an interesting but irrelevant fact. Science, our knowledge of what-is, knows what-is only in distinction from what-is-not (i. e., Non-being or No-thing). Similarly, SZ and KM argued that knowledge of beings (what-is) is possible only because *Dasein* can pass beyond that which-is. What is the term of this passing beyond? It is not any thing, not what-is-in-totality, but rather Nothing—that is to say, no thing. Nothing turns out to be one with Being as such. It is to Being as not any thing that *Dasein* transcends, and it is Being as Nothing which makes the revelation of what-is possible.

Nothing is neither an object nor anything that "is" at all. Nothing occurs neither by itself nor "apart from" what-is, as a sort of adjunct. Nothing is that which makes the revelation of what-is as such possible for our human existence. (WM, 340)

Here is the essential difference between Rahner's notion of Being and Heidegger's. Rahner maintains that the subject can know beings only because it sees them within the horizon of a "more." This seeing within the horizon of a more is possible because the subject already grasps (though non-thematically) absolute being in the direction of all human thought and activity. He claims, therefore, that negation and the concept of non-being are derived from this grasp of the limited as limited (i. e., partially negated) in terms of absolute being. What is most important is that he claims that these observations constitute the basis for a proof of God's existence.

Heidegger, on the other hand, does not maintain as Rahner suggests that *Dasein* transcends toward nothingness. Rather, he argues that *Dasein* transcends (the term is misleading) to Being as no thing. Heidegger claims that a metaphysical analysis such as Rahner's leaves unasked the question about the meaning of Being as different from beings and as that "different" which makes the revelation of beings possible. Rahner had argued that the knowledge of beings demands as its condition of possibility a *Vorgriff* of an absolute being. Heidegger maintains to the contrary, not that knowledge of beings must be explained by nothingness but that it can be explained sufficiently only by the recognition that *Dasein* grasps Being as different from beings. In the later works Heidegger comes to the realization (the famous "turn") that it is not just that *Dasein* grasps Being as different from beings but rather that *Dasein* itself is grasped—grasped in the "event" of the ontological difference. Still it is the ontological difference which opens up the world of beings and Being to *Dasein*.

Rahner uses the term "ontological difference" in *Hearers of the Word*, and in *The Thomist Spectrum* Helen John claims

that Rahner is aware of the ontological difference.<sup>13</sup> It appears from what has been seen here, however, that in a metaphysical context that term must have a very different meaning than Heidegger gives it. Heidegger would argue that to think the meaning of this difference in terms of being—even in terms of a supreme absolute having-being—is an extrapolation which has avoided the real question that needs asking. Such thinking represents Being as a being instead of probing the meaning of Being as such. It assumes an answer to the question which Heidegger wants to pose. WM, therefore, does not propose that man transcends toward nothingness. Rather it suggests that before we ask about the possibility of Dasein transcending to something, we ought first to ask what is Being as such, as different from beings. The reflection on Non-being or Nothing was intended, like the analysis of Dasein in SZ, to serve as an introduction to the question about Being as Heidegger understands it. How, then, phrase the ground question of metaphysics? Heidegger suggests the formula: “Why is there any being at all—why not rather nothing?” (WM, 345)

The implications of this formula are developed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. It should be clear by now that for Heidegger the phrase “rather than nothing” is not a mere explication of the question, “Why are there beings?” Rather, it indicates that the question asked is *not* a question about beings. It is a question about Being as such, for it “remains unclear what is to be thought under the name ‘Being.’” (EM, 26) Heidegger claims that “here we are asking about something which we barely grasp, which is scarcely more than the sound of a word for us. . . .” (EM, 27) Intrinsic, then, to the question “Why are there beings rather than nothing?” is the question “How does it stand with Being?” It is “indispensable that we make it clear from the very outset how it stands at present with Being and with our understanding of Being.” (EM, 27) In asking this question Heidegger does not propose to define Being, for, as he insisted even in SZ, Being

<sup>13</sup> Helen James John, *The Thomist Spectrum* (New York, 1966), p. 168.

is not a thing and therefore cannot be defined. Rather, he claims that the question “How does it stand with Being?” seeks to rediscover for its own what the word “Being” says. It does not seek meaning in a statement but in a question and in a questioning attitude, through which Heidegger hopes to recapture or retrieve the beginning of our “historical-spiritual existence.” (EM, 32) Heidegger insists again that “fundamental ontology” in SZ did not designate a branch of philosophy which deals only with a doctrine about beings (i. e., their cause and nature) but rather signified “the endeavor to make Being manifest itself, and to do so by the question ‘how does it stand with Being?’ (and not with beings as such).” (EM, 34) Heidegger maintains that the very asking of this question is the only way to experience the sense of Being. In asking it Being is manifested even though in a way which is at once both totally indeterminate and highly determinate. (cf. EM, 60) The question of Being, therefore, does not seek something which we know, or can know—except by questioning.

The true problem is what we do not know and what, insofar as we know it *authentically*, namely *as* a problem, we know only *questioningly*.

To know how to question means to know how to wait, even a whole lifetime. But an age which regards only what goes fast and can be clutched with both hands looks on questioning as “remote from reality” and as something that does not pay, whose benefits cannot be numbered. But the essential is not number. . . . (EM, 172)

This last statement perhaps raises more questions than it answers. How does one know Being questioningly? How does one think Being as such, that is to say, as different from beings? It is just this question that focuses Heidegger’s reflection in his later work, and it is in reference to this question that the sense of “hearing” or “attending” is developed. A thorough and adequate examination of this problem would demand more attention than it is possible to give it here, but some idea of what sense “hearing” can have in regard to Heidegger’s

question of Being can be indicated by pursuing the analysis of EM a little further.

In Rahner's summary of Heidegger's thought it was observed that Heidegger opposes any consideration of the Being question in terms of *logic*. In our analysis of WM it was shown that the reason Heidegger opposes the domination of the question of Being by logic is that logic as understood today is a science which deals with the consideration of beings. In the third section of the fourth chapter of EM Heidegger considers the relation of Being and thought. In that discussion it becomes clear that Heidegger opposes logic because there is a more primary sense of *λόγος* which is the ground of what we now understand by the term. This more primary sense of *logos* is what ought to determine our thought. In the development of this notion the sense of "hearing" is presented.

Heidegger maintains that logic as the science of thought is today understood as the science of statements. Thinking, in this view therefore, is determined by the statement. *Logos* means "word" or "discourse" and *legein* means "to speak," as in *dialogue* or *monologue*. Heidegger argues, however, that for the Greeks *logos* originally meant "to gather" or "to collect." Heidegger cites examples from Homer and Heraclitus to illustrate his point and claims that the sense of these passages can be understood only if we understand *logos* as originally denoting the collecting collectedness of Being as that which manifests beings.

*Logos* characterizes Being in a new and yet old respect: that which is, which stands straight and distinct in itself, is at the same time gathered togetherness in itself and by itself, and maintains itself in such togetherness. (EM, 110)

*Logos* is thus, according to Heidegger, originally understood as Being itself insofar as it is the gathering together of all that is. " *Logos* here signifies neither meaning nor word nor doctrine, and surely not 'meaning of a doctrine'; it means: the original collecting collectedness which is in itself permanently dominant." (EM, 108)



Heidegger notes that there is one text, however, which seems to contradict his theory. In Fragment 50 a connection is made between *logos* and "hearing" which seems to suggest that *logos* is something "audible" (i. e., a word or speech): "If you have heard not me but the *logos*, then it is wise to say accordingly: all is one." (EM, 108) Heidegger argues that Heraclitus is not referring here to a hearing of "words" but to a hearing or attending to that which makes words possible, namely, an attending to Being itself. Only in this way can it be explained why men are described by Heraclitus as uncomprehending when they confront the *logos*. Heidegger maintains that properly understood Fragment 50 says "do not attach importance to words but heed the *logos*." For Heidegger, then, "True hearing has nothing to do with ear and mouth, but means to follow the *logos* and what it is, namely, the collectedness of beings itself." (EM, 109)

Thus by "hearing" Heidegger once again refers us to the Being question. There can be true speaking and hearing only in an attending to Being itself. As Heidegger sees it, this attending is in fact the origin of the definition of man in terms of *logos*. The definition is not accomplished by "seizing upon any attributes in the living creature called 'man' as opposed to other living creatures." Rather "being-human is *logos*, the gathering and apprehending of the Being of beings: it is the happening of that strangest of all, in whom through violence, through acts of power . . . , the overpowering is made manifest and made to stand." (EM, 143) "Hearing" for Heidegger, therefore, defines the essence of man as "existence," as the place where Being is manifested and is thus quite different from Rahner's notion of man as a "hearer."

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It is unfortunate that Heidegger's notion of the type of thought proper to Being cannot be pursued further.<sup>14</sup> This

<sup>14</sup> See William J. Richardson's *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague, 1963), to which the thesis presented here is much indebted.

essay, however, was meant only as a preliminary delimitation of the essential difference between Rahner's thought and Heidegger's, and this aim has been reached. It is at the very level of the question asked that their philosophies confront each other. It seems necessary to stress that this difference is prior to, although not separate from, the question of methodology. I say this because Thomists who attempt to evaluate Heidegger's philosophy often seem to suggest that the real difference between their metaphysics and Heidegger's phenomenology is that the latter, because of the limitations of his method, cannot pursue the question of being as far as the metaphysician can. This interpretation seems to imply that the limitations of this methodology are due primarily to epistemological presuppositions. Rahner, for example, does not seem to feel that there is any reason why, if he wanted, Heidegger could not advance his thought beyond fundamental ontology to the question of God—which, of course, is what Rahner does as a follower of Aquinas. But this interpretation presupposes that, although Heidegger's method is different, his question is the same.

It has been shown here, however, that the question is not the same—or at least Heidegger does not believe it is the same. The question of Being as Heidegger experiences it is a question about Being as such. It is a question about that “manifesting” by which beings are manifest. It is not a question of representing the “beingness” of beings either in terms of what is common to them or in terms of the being (absolute or otherwise) that is their cause. In fact, the question of Being is not a question of representing any thing. It is a question about that which is not a being, which cannot be thought (represented) as a being, but which nevertheless is manifested as the manifesting of beings. It is a question, which as far as we have followed it here, finds its resolution in the questioning itself—man *attending* to Being. If this is true, Heidegger's notion of Being is not so much determined by his method, as his method is determined by the question itself. Heidegger does not make the metaphysical move beyond Being to God, because he

believes that such a move originates from a radical misunderstanding of **Being**.

Does this mean that, if one accepts Heidegger's analysis, one must forsake the problem of God and consequently the philosophy of religion? Although it seems clear that one would have to forsake the metaphysical "Gcd" and the philosophy of religion as Rahner understands it, it is not at all clear to me that one would have to forsake either God or theology, although both would have to be thought through at a much more fundamental level.

ROBERT MASSON

*Loyola College*  
*Baltimore, Maryland*