

Patterns of Triunity in Heidegger's Time and Being: Contexts of Interpretation

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In the vast and ever-growing world of Heidegger studies, it seems to the present writer that proportionately little attention has been devoted to one of Heidegger's key late works, the essays contained in the collection *Time and Being*.¹ Yet the project for which *Being and Time* was supposed to clear the ground is precisely the questions that Heidegger dealt with most openly and uneliptically in the essays contained in this slim volume. The argument in what follows is that in this most direct attempt to “think Being without referring to its being grounded in beings”² Heidegger advances and risks his most direct answer to the question of Being which has haunted his work from the earliest days of reading Brentano on the senses of “being” in Aristotle. He tries to set this cardinal question free from the endlessly misleading language of metaphysics by way of a new style of speaking and thinking. He is of course absolutely clear that he is venturing back into the tradition in its most powerfully metaphysical snares and is also aware that he may be accused of again “doing metaphysics”—but this is a risk he is prepared to take in order to set out the very kernel of his thinking about Being. So meticulous a writer as Heidegger did not title his essay “Time and Being” without the suggestion that it related to the very heart of his mature thought on this question. The risk involved is to do this without the web of speculative exploration characteristic of some other work, notably the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*.³

One of the things which has continually struck the present writer is that this endeavour takes Heidegger back into a set of themes that bear a remarkable likeness or analogy to the most central concerns of some of the medieval thinkers—notably in this instance, to the key concerns of Thomas Aquinas in his

¹ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). German: *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemayer, 1969). Hereafter referred to with both English and German pagination as TB; ZSD.

² TB, 2; ZSD, 2.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999). German: *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Klosterman, 1989).

treatment of God, Trinity and Creation as set forth in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*. In particular our interest will focus on the notion of subsistent relations at the heart of the notion of divine trinity.

Let it be said immediately and without ambiguity that there is here no contention of direct influence of one on the other, but attention is drawn to similarities which become evident as the two, so far apart in both history and intention, bend their most strenuous thinking to the central questions and concerns about Being. In particular I will try to point out that for both writers, the notion of trinity is essential to the attempt to say these most ultimate matters. What does tie these otherwise very disparate writers together is the endeavour to say something about what is ultimate for speculative thought.

Heidegger is acutely aware that in these matters he is thinking in engagement with the tradition of thought about Being: “Thinking remains bound to the tradition of the epochs of the destiny of Being.”⁴ Whether or not he succeeds in this endeavour without thereby being drawn back into “metaphysics” is a question that for the moment can be set aside.⁵ What I hope to do is to present in a rather simple way, some notable correspondences between Heidegger’s treatment of these questions and that of Thomas Aquinas on matters that are at least analogous to Heidegger’s concerns. It is possible that this juxtaposition may be enlightening in both contexts.

Trinity

It is sometimes said of the medievals that they had no properly developed understanding of the concept of relation, but rather followed the Aristotle of the *Categories* in understanding it as an accidental predicate of substances or subjects. This might be true if we were to neglect, doubtless at our peril, the doctrine of the Trinity. Such neglect is one of the effects that follow from an unimaginative separation, in reading the medieval speculative thinkers of their purely philosophical views from the richer elaborations occasioned by speculative reflection on and explication of theological doctrines. This theology of the Trinity is in fact a highly sophisticated theory of subsistent relations that resolves the question of unity and trinity in the godhead. It does not prove the doctrine, but it does provide an understanding of what is held by faith for which *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding)—the goal of theological thinking—was a search. In brief, the kernel of Aquinas’s understanding of the Trinity was that the one divine essence is nothing other than the subsistent relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁶ We are no doubt familiar with the

⁴ The importance of this essay for Heidegger’s later thought is clearly indicated for example by Werner Marx in his own reappraisal of Heidegger and the Tradition, trans. Theodor Kisiel and Murray Greene (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971). See especially xxxvi-xlii. No fewer than 18 of the 44 footnotes refer to *Time and Being*.

⁵ TB,9; ZSD, 10.

⁶ See, for example, *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 28, a. 2: “And so it is clear that relation really existing in God is in reality the same as the essence, and differs only in the manner of understanding for relation

difficulties attached to thinking of God as a Being, even if we qualify it by the addition of “supreme” or “ens realissimum.” Anything which reduces the divinity to an “entity” carries with it the danger of rendering the divinity a determinate, and thus no longer an infinite being. What the doctrine of subsistent relations does is to allow the original notion of “being” to be cashed out in terms of infinite activity which “subsists in” the perichoresis of Father, Son and Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity had evolved from roots in both testaments of the Bible, from the Word and Spirit or “Breath” of God in creation, through the incarnation of the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit which is at the root of the Christian interpretation of that salvation history. Reflection on these primary beliefs led, through doctrinal development, to a full blown theology of the Trinity which preserved both the unity of the one true God, with his threefoldness in person. Far from presenting the believer with a conundrum of belief, it informed him/her with the richness of divine “interior” life, which was at once the creative power of the world and the source of human redemption through divine grace. This divine grace or favour was constituted by the sending of the divine Word into the world and his abiding presence by the power of the indwelling gift of the Spirit. Over time this faith developed into a doctrine of Trinity or triunity, which sought to render the essential faith reasonable, not in the sense of rationally demonstrable, but as not proving unacceptable to the essential requirements of rationality, the avoidance of contradiction and absurdity. The subsequent reflection on the grounding faith maintained the reality of the three divine persons, without, however, infringing the fundamental tenet of monotheism: I believe in one God. The essential key to this reconciliation was the recognition that although the divine persons were absolutely real—not therefore simply three aspects of the divinity—they continued to constitute one divine “superessential” divinity—persons, in some real sense, yet not distinct entities.

It was probably Anselm, drawing on the patristic tradition, who introduced to medieval theology the notion of opposed relations as the technical solution to the problem of the trinity.⁷ In Aquinas’s theology of the Trinity, this solution is amplified and worked out in enormous detail. Each divine “person” is nothing other than “his” relation to the others. In the personalist language of Trinitarian theology, the Father is such by virtue of his begetting of the divine Word and his breathing forth the Holy Spirit and likewise in the reciprocal relations. Put in another way, the divine persons have no “nature” antecedent to their mutual relations. It may be said that each is and is nothing more than what

implies a respect for its opposing term, such as is not implied in the notion of essence. It is clear therefore that in God the being of the relation is nothing other than the being of the essence.”

⁷ See Chapter 1 of St. Anselm of Canterbury’s *De processione spiritus sancti*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), available online at www.umn.edu/jhopkins. See especially 466-475. There is no doubt that Anselm was drawing on and seeking to clarify centuries of reflection, not least among the Greek patristic writers. On this see Giles E.M. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004).

he is by virtue of this “relation of opposition.”⁸The divine “persons” are not therefore distinct entities but constitute one divine being. Moreover, this divine being is not an “entity” in the ordinary sense – which would imply determinacy and limitation—but is simply this infinitely recursive activity of the divine processions, sometimes referred to as circumincession or, to use the Greek term, perichoresis.⁹ Failure to grasp this central understanding of the divine nature as not any kind of essence in the ordinary sense, but rather that whose nature is nothing other than his esse or activity, does indeed lead to the kind of “onto-theology” so severely criticised by Heidegger. It is also a key to any kind of useful retrieval of Aquinas’s thought on these matters. When it is said that God’s essence is his existence, it must be understood that this “existence” or esse is not a sort of characterless whirring in the background of the world, but is this infinitely rich triune interrelationship. The further elaboration of this interrelationship is what constitutes the theology of Trinity, Incarnation and Reconciliation. But these are matters more strictly theological and take us, for the most part, outside the scope of this paper.

In the medieval view, this doctrine of relations is also immediately implicated in the doctrine of creation, for there can be no real distinction between the divine life in itself and its activity in relation to what is other than itself, namely divine creation. Perhaps unfairly here we leave aside the question of the relations in general of an infinite being to what is other than itself. We must reserve this question for another occasion. Suffice it for now to say that a more sophisticated understanding of the relation of divine transcendence to divine immanence has to be the key to this problem.

The relation between divine creative activity and creation itself fully implicates the essentially Trinitarian character of the divine essence. Although the activities of God in relation to the created world—operationes ad extra—are said to be “one”—the one is the unity of the Trinitarian life and activity that is here involved—not the unity of a divine “closed shop!” For the “one God” and the Trinitarian life are one and the same. In the measure that God is immanent in his creation, it is the immanence of the triune creator. What, however, is of particular interest in the present context is the nature of presence of the divine trinity, not just to creation in general, but to the “rational creature”—that is to say, to human beings. This relation is described, in general, as divine mission or sending. Significantly, the relations of the divine trinity to human being in time are denominated as “giving” and “sending!”

⁸ In the sense that begetting and begotten are “opposed” and constitute the “terms” of the relation.

⁹ For the implications of this for theories of existence see my article, “Esse, Procession, Creation: Reinterpreting Aquinas,” in *Analecta Hermeneutica* vol. 1 (2009), available online at <http://www.mun.ca/analecta>. Among other matters there I give a fuller account of what is implied in the medieval doctrine of creation over and above the limited notion of “productive causation”—the light in which Heidegger is inclined to view, and so to undervalue, medieval notions of creative activity.

Giving and Sending

In order to bring out the interesting parallels between Aquinas and Heidegger in this context, I will juxtapose a text from each. First, for Aquinas, “[In matters relating to the origin of Persons] certain things relating to their principle denote a temporal term, such as sending and giving; for something is sent so that it may inhere in something and is given so that it may be possessed. But for a divine person to be possessed by any created being, or to exist in some new way in it, is a temporal matter.”¹⁰ Consequently, sending and giving in relation to God are predicated only in a temporal sense.¹¹ It is perhaps worth underlining that this Trinitarian giving and sending are essentially related to Time. What this giving and sending are for and what they accomplish, we shall consider shortly. In *Time and Being* Heidegger writes,

In the beginning of western thinking Being is thought, but not the “It gives” as such. The latter withdraws in favour of the gift which It gives. That gift is thought and conceptualized [in einen begriff gebracht wurde] from then on exclusively with regard to beings.

In other words, although Heidegger intends to consider the Giving, so to speak, in itself, he is here affirming that it comes into human consideration in the gift which It gives.

A giving which gives only its gift, but in giving holds itself back and withdraws, such a giving we call a sending. According to the meaning of giving which is to be thought in this way, Being—that which It gives—is what is sent. Each of its transformations remains destined [geschickte] in this manner.¹²

It is of course highly significant that Being is now displaced as the transcendent schlechthin—“the absolutely transcendent”¹³—in favour of the *Es gibt*. The giving and sending of both Being and Time and their mutual relations are now referred to by Heidegger as *Das Ereignis* which now becomes the focal concern of the essay. Heidegger will eventually take this step when he writes: “What determines both, Time and Being, in their own, that is in belonging together, we shall call: *das Ereignis*. . . . Accordingly, the It that gives in ‘It gives Being,’ ‘It gives Time,’ proves to be *Das Ereignis*.”¹⁴

Although Heidegger’s text and argument here are exceedingly painstaking in their exclusion of possible misunderstandings, the pattern of

¹⁰ E.g., not eternal.

¹¹ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 43, a. 2.

¹² TB, 8; ZSD, 8, emphasis mine.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), H 38.

¹⁴ TB, 19; ZSD, 20.

trinity is again very clear: “What is now clear is this: What allows both matters to belong together, what brings both matters into their own, what particularly maintains their belonging together and holds them there, the matter at stake is Das Ereignis.”¹⁵

It should be noted here, leaving the present article open to the charge of superficiality, that I do not attempt at this point to explore the enormous richness and detail of this Heideggerian text, containing, as it does, his most protracted investigation of that which is most central to his life project. In particular a huge omission, for the moment, is the resonance of the Heideggerian text with the traditional, particularly the Augustinian doctrine of divine grace. In the final analysis it could well be argued that for the later Heidegger and certainly the Heidegger of the texts in *Time and Being*, the “thinking” which becomes possible with the “destruction” of metaphysics, is itself a gift, which is not reached simply by the power of thought, but is consequent on an experience of Being which is itself a gift.¹⁶ I return to this theme in a later section of this essay.

Thus we see that in the later thinking of Heidegger, Being itself is displaced by the new emphasis on the “It gives,” in such a way that a first triunity emerges: the It gives, Being and Time. Heidegger makes a great deal of the ambiguity of *Es gibt* which could mean quite simply: “there is.”¹⁷ In the obvious sense this would simply present us with two related but distinct terms: Being and Time. But the whole of the argument of this essay is that the *Es gibt* must be understood in an ontologically strong sense, as that which was implicit in early Greek thinking but became “forgotten” in subsequent metaphysical explorations of Being (always in relation to beings). It might be said that the “It gives” takes priority over and is the key to the proper thinking of both Being and Time. Consequently the most fundamental triunity uncovered here is that of

	Being
It gives . . .	
	Time

None of these is a being or entity, yet all are “matters,” the meaning of which is to be found in their essential interrelations, through which each means what it means by virtue of its relations to the other two. [By referring to them as “matters,” Heidegger is finding a middle term which avoids entity on the one hand, but also the unreality of the “mere” concept on the other] Being can only be thought (understood?) in relation to its being both given and sent. But again,

¹⁵ Ibid. Heidegger’s text here is very closely argued, in particular in order to fend off any tendency to reify the terms, and in order to establish a certain priority of the sending and giving of the It in the It gives to the giving and extending of Time and Being in their mutual determination.

¹⁶ TB, 25-26.

¹⁷ It should be noted that it is by way of this development that Heidegger parts company with contemporary naturalism which holds that what is is simply what “is given” or, for Wittgenstein, what is the case [was der Fall ist]. What Heidegger has in common with other speculative thinkers is precisely to enquire further into the nature of that giving and being given.

Being can only be thought in its relation to Time. What then is the It which gives? It is not something in itself but the giving which is at the same time a withholding. It is not exhausted in giving and sending, but continuously sends both Being and Time. Heidegger should be quoted directly here:

Accordingly we try to look ahead to the It which—gives Being and Time. . . . We try to bring the It and its giving into view and capitalize the “It.”

First we shall think Being in order to think it into its own [nature?].

Then we shall think Time in order to think it into its own [nature?].

In this way, the manner must become clear how there is (it gives) Being and how there is Time. In this giving, it becomes apparent how that giving is to be determined which, as a relation, first holds the two toward each other and [thus yields them].¹⁸

This structure or pattern of a dynamic triunity is the essential framework for all that follows with regard to the “thinking” of Time and Being, which now follows.

The Triunity of Time and its Determination of Being

What follows in Heidegger’s text is not two separate treatments of each of Time and Being in their triune structure, but a more complex re-formative thinking of Being in its traditional sense of “presencing,” by way of an analysis of the triune structure of Time. Having once again dismissed the notion of time as a sequence of “nows”—a characteristic of calculable time—Heidegger explores the notion of presencing as “constant abiding” (*verweilen*). The three dimensions of Time—always implicit in the notion of the present—are now seen as three forms of presence—absence being understood now not negatively but as a kind of presence:

That which is no longer present presences immediately in its absence—in the manner of what has been and still concerns us. . . . In what has been, presencing is extended. Presence by way of absence is in another way characteristic of the future: In the future, in what comes towards us,

¹⁸ TB, 5. Although for the most part I have followed Stambaugh’s translation in this instance it is quite misleading—she has being and time brought “into being” which is clearly what Heidegger is avoiding saying. See the German text at ZSD, 5. We shall have to say in what follows things such as “how each is what it is” but not in the sense of conferring “entity” upon them. The difficulty of saying these things about relations of opposition is nothing new. It is anticipated at length in, for example, Aquinas’s discussion of relational and essential properties in the Trinity.

presencing is extended. Finally, in the present too, presencing is extended.¹⁹

It is impossible to do justice in this summary treatment to the subtlety and richness of Heidegger's treatment of the relational nature of Time as presence and thereby to Being as presence. It is luminously clear that each dimension is what it "is" by virtue of its relation to the other two and is nothing other than that relation. Time is "constituted" precisely by the interplay of these opposed relations. But Heidegger goes on to ask:

But from what source is the unity of the three dimensions of true time determined, the unity, that is, of its three interplaying ways of extending [Stambaugh: "giving"] in virtue of its own presencing?

And the answer is:

The unity of time's three dimensions consists in the interplay of each towards each. This interplay proves to be the true extending, playing in the very heart of time, the fourth dimension, so to speak. . . . True time is four dimensional.²⁰

However, in case we might think that Heidegger is abandoning triunity in favour of a fourfold, he goes on to show that "the fourth dimension is in fact the first: that is, the giving that determines all." The original triunity of the Giving, Being and Time remains intact.²¹

In Being and Time, Heidegger had already redefined authentic temporality in terms of a threefold relation to which he gives the name of ecstases, in the sense of standing outside of themselves and characterised this in the rather cumbersome "*primordial 'outside-of-itself in and for itself.*"²² In the present context, if we were to look for an essential description of time as opposed to temporality, we might say that Time is the unity of the threefold extension of future, past and present, as the modes of presence, in their relations of opposition.

¹⁹ TB, 13. Stambaugh's translation of these sections entirely obscures Heidegger's insistence that what each mode of presencing offers is to be characterised as extending—each section ends in the identical "wird Anwesen gereicht." By offering alternative translations in each instance it may be that other overtones of "gereicht" are suggested, but at the cost of losing the very deliberately symmetrical attribution of Heidegger's text. Her translation here obscures two further important features of what Heidegger here has to say: first Heidegger's attempt (later repudiated) to offer a unified account of time and space (see especially TB, 14), but perhaps, secondly, it also obscures the allusion to Augustine's conclusion that time is "a distention of the mind," see Confessions, book 11, especially paragraph 26.

²⁰ TB, 15; ZSD, 15-16.

²¹ There is a parallel quaternity in the treatment of the Trinity by Aquinas. He makes a distinction between the divine essence in its unity and the trinity of divine persons, thus needing a quaternity of terms to include both the relational and the "essential" aspects of the divine.

²² Heidegger, Being and Time, H 329.

Thus, we are left with two important structures or patterns of triunity: the first being that of the “Es gibt,” Being and Time, each to be conceived only through relation and none as a thing in itself; and second, the triune play of presence at the heart of time, through which Being, as “presencing” is extended. No doubt the notion of extension is a correlative of Heidegger’s other notions of “opening,” “clearing” and “unconcealment”—all characterised as giving and sending. An instance would be his discussion of openness (Offenheit) and the clearing (die Lichtung) in the essay on “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” in the same volume as the present essay.²³ For the moment, however Heidegger’s primary focus is on Time. He is conscious of the need for the inclusion of Space for the full understanding of presence and he does this by way of an elision of time and space in the notion of time-space. So for example: “Time-space now is the name for the openness which opens up in the mutual self-extending of future approach, past and present.”²⁴ The repeated emphasis on the notion of time as extension is, I think, a vital key to Heidegger’s treatment. But, for the moment, it is essentially the extension of the triune ecstasies of time which takes precedence over extension in the spatial sense.

Das Ereignis: Giving, Sending and Withholding

At the start, as we have seen, Heidegger stated his intention of thinking Being without any reference to its being grounded in beings. Yet in that very endeavour he has found himself drawn into the understanding of “true time,” in which the reference to beings, at least human beings, becomes unavoidable; for what is time but that extending in which Being is manifest for human beings:

In so far as Being and Time are only given in the activity of Das Ereignis, it belongs to Das Ereignis as its particular characteristic that it brings man as the one who perceives Being, in so far as he stands within true time, into his own. So brought into his own, man belongs to Das Ereignis.²⁵

How this does not offend against the original project will become clear in what follows, for the relation of human being or Dasein to Das Ereignis has been reconceived, in such a way as to overcome Seinsvergessenheit.

This might seem to suggest that we could now get a clearer idea of what is intended in the idea of Das Ereignis. But Heidegger goes on to stress that, since this giving is what enables man to relate to Being through his standing in

²³ TB, 65ff; ZSD, 71ff.

²⁴ TB, 14; ZSD, 14-15. Heidegger is careful here not to confuse the dimensionality of space with “stretches” of time—such thinking belongs with the derivative notion of calculable time and not with “true time” with which we are concerned here. How successful Heidegger’s attempts here to link time and space by way of the notion of extension is a matter which deserves fuller treatment than is possible here.

²⁵ TB, 23; ZSD, 24.

true time, it always lies behind human beings and their experience: “That is why we can never place Das Ereignis in front of us, neither as something opposite us nor as something all-encompassing. That is why the thinking which represents and gives account corresponds to Das Ereignis as little as does the saying that merely states.”²⁶ In this recognition Heidegger believes that ontotheology and metaphysics can be overcome.

Thus we are left with the paradox of having “shown” the nature of Das Ereignis by way of relating it to the giving and sending by which Being and Time are constituted—not as entities but as “matters.” Yet, by that very act of showing we have also discovered the inaccessibility of Das Ereignis in so far as it forever withholds itself. We might be tempted to say that thinking Das Ereignis, is essentially an unknowing.

Paradoxical as this may seem, it nevertheless has important precedents in the history of theology and in perhaps the most important of the Trinitarian thinkers of the medieval world: Anselm and Aquinas. Let it please be noted yet again that there is implied here no direct dependence, derivation nor suggestion of crypto-theology in Heidegger. What is significant is the analogy holding between them when approaching that which is ultimate for thought. It is rather the recurrence of the pattern of thought which is interesting.

The parallel in Anselm is not at first in an explicitly Trinitarian context—even though we have noted his importance in developing the notion of opposed relations in the Trinity.²⁷ The Trinitarian faith is later expressed in assessing what is implicit in what lies beyond human comprehension.

In his famous and perhaps notorious *Proslogion*—so often misrepresented by philosophers—Anselm is seeking a single “argument” or line of thought which would combine and unite everything that we believe about God. Yet in the end he discovers through this very process of thinking it all through that God remains “in light inaccessible.”²⁸ “Truly I do not see this light since it is too much for me; and yet whatever I see, I see through it.” God is behind and before all things, even the eternal.²⁹ Anselm’s project can very well be understood through the Heideggerian notion of a *Rückkehr*, a stepping back from thinking about Being in relation to beings.

The same is certainly true of Aquinas, particularly in the structure of the *Summa Theologiae*. We recall that Heidegger had said at the opening of *Time and Being*:

We want to attempt to say something about the attempt to think Being without reference to its being grounded in terms of beings . . . otherwise . . . there is no longer any possibility of explicitly bringing into view the Being of what is today all over the earth, let alone of adequately

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Anselm, *De Processione Sancti Spiritus*, 468ff.

²⁸ See the dramatic “denouement” of the work as a whole which begins with chapters 14-16.

²⁹ Ibid., chapter 20. These sections of the work are quite essential to the understanding of what is going on in the better known earlier chapters.

determining the relation of man to what has been called “Being” up to now.³⁰

Aquinas is particularly conscious of the need to see what can be said about God “as He is in himself,” if we are ever to understand other things in relation to him. This is his guiding concern in determining the structure of his great work of theological synthesis. Among some of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries some works of systematic theology were based on the *historia salutis*, the biblical account of human salvation, or on the theology of signs. Aquinas however in his discussion of the essential subject matter of theology rejects these models and formulates his principle of organization as God as he is in himself and, subsequently, all else in relation to him. This is established in the important but again, often neglected first question of the whole *Summa Theologiae* on the nature of theology.³¹ The calm and unspectacular manner of Aquinas’s exposition conceals for the unwary the essential paradox that what is ultimate, most important and determining for theology is something which cannot be represented essentially. It determines the character of everything else, yet remains in itself unsayable.

Thinking the Ultimate

The main thrust of Time and Being has been to relate both Time and Being in their opposed relation—an opposition that is constitutive rather than negating—back to their source in *Das Ereignis* which is characterised by its activity of giving and sending, yet at the same time as withdrawing. This Heidegger recognises as the move that leads to what is ultimate but perhaps, certainly at this point “unsayable:” “But inasmuch as the modes of giving that are determined by withdrawal—sending and extending—lie in *Ereignen*, withdrawal must belong to what is peculiar to *Das Ereignis*. But this discussion is no longer the matter of this lecture.”³²

Nevertheless, Heidegger at once goes on to make a number of rather clear observations precisely about what he has just declared to no longer come within the purview of this lecture. This might well seem perverse unless we continue to follow the thread of Heidegger’s argument—for argument, at least in Anselm’s sense of a “line of thought” it surely remains—Heidegger’s opening injunction “not to listen to a series of propositions, but to follow the movement of showing.”³³ From this section two important points emerge: first, that *Ereignis*

³⁰ TB, 2; ZSD, 2.

³¹ *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 7: “Whether God is the subject of this science.” Aquinas writes: “All things are treated in sacred teaching (theology) from the point of view of God either because they concern God himself or because they are ordered to Him as to their origin and end.”—This all in spite of the fact that “concerning God we cannot know what He is.”

³² TB, 22; ZSD, 23.

³³ TB, 2; ZSD, 2. This is an admonition that might well be addressed to readers of Anselm’s

manifests its property of withdrawing “from limitless unconcealment.” Secondly, and slightly more obscurely, Heidegger names this characteristic *Enteignis* or [Stambaugh] “expropriation.” It is by virtue of being assimilated into this *Ereignis*, which nevertheless is always characterised by withdrawal, that human being comes into its own—by standing within true Time. Human being is thus drawn into the triunity of the *Es gibt*, which gives Time, which in turn, in its own threefold extension yields Being as abiding presence. We might be inclined to think that this is the end-point at which the concerns of Being and Time originally aimed but was not yet able to give expression to. Heidegger’s important conclusion from all this is the following: “That is why we can never place *Das Ereignis* in front of us nor as something all-encompassing. This is why thinking which is grounded in representational thinking tells us as little about *Das Ereignis* as does propositional utterance.”³⁴

As Heidegger recognises, we have said something about *Das Ereignis*, but at the same time we must not be led on to think that *Das Ereignis* is something nor even that “there is *Ereignis*.” The mistake in drawing such a conclusion is the same, Heidegger says, as trying “to derive the source from the river.” Almost immediately Heidegger recognises that he is indeed dangerously close to the matter of traditional metaphysics, even as he conducts his thinking without reference to beings and therefore in a non-metaphysical manner of thinking. Yet even in such an endeavour, “a regard for metaphysics still prevails.”

Heidegger surely recognises here, that even if the whole manner of his “thinking” is other than that of “traditional” metaphysics, what he is endeavouring to think and say is to give expression to what is ultimate for human thought. This is what seems to be true for Plato, Anselm, Aquinas, as well as for the German Idealists and indeed for other more recent speculative philosophers such as Bergson, Peirce, Whitehead, and Collingwood. That, we might well think, is what traditional metaphysics (and, indeed, theology) was all about, even as it conducted its discourse in a propositional mode. Plato’s ultimate is, metaphorically, the unviewable Sun, in the light of which alone we are able to see. Less metaphorically it is the Good “beyond Being” or “beyond essence” or perhaps even “beyond presence.” For Anselm the ultimate is not, as is sometimes thought, “that than which no greater can be thought,” but rather “that which is greater than can be thought.” For Aquinas, God is that about which we cannot know “quid sit” or “what he is” but only “that He is.” What is true for each of these is that the ultimate is understood also as the “source” or *arche* of all else. What Heidegger has recognised and underlined is that it is even misleading to say that there is *Das Ereignis*, precisely for the reason that this confuses the “source with the river.” It is however surely unfair to imply that such a confusion prevails in the thought of his greatest predecessors in their endeavours to “think

Proslogion, without which the whole point of the work is almost always lost as well as to readers of Aquinas who fail to follow the movement of exposition, particularly of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*.

³⁴ TB, 23; ZSD, 24.

the ultimate.” In each case we are talking about a boundless giving, which is also a withholding in the sense that it is inexhaustible. In each case it is recognised that in our attempts to think about the “existence” of God, we are not thinking of the kind of existence which characterises created, finite beings. What perhaps most distinguishes Heidegger here and clearly sets him at variance with his medieval predecessors, is his insistent avoidance of thinking of “giving” as “creation,” which for Heidegger always implies “productive causation.”³⁵

Gracious Giving and Sending

For Aquinas, the divine Trinity is immanent in the whole of creation and this presence reflects the Trinitarian nature. But, in addition to this presence, the divine Trinity becomes present in human beings [*rationalis creatura*] by the giving of divine grace. The divine Word and the Holy Spirit are said to be both given and sent to those who are endowed with grace and it is by grace that fallen humanity is restored to that for which it was destined—it might well be said that it is by this divine giving that the human being enters into its own [*Sich eignet*]. We note an interesting resonance of this in the passage already cited: “Das Ereignis has as what is proper to it [that which it owns] that it brings man into his own as the one who harkens to Being to the extent that he stands within true time.”³⁶ In other words, human beings enter into what is their true destiny by way of a gracious gift. This is not the place to rehearse all the echoes of the theology of grace to be found in a Heidegger who had been steeped in the thought of Augustine, the great theologian of grace, and one who retained Augustine’s essential distrust of human nature as capable of good without the gift of divine grace—Augustine’s anti-Pelagianism³⁷—but it might well be argued that if Heidegger’s thought is essentially “post-metaphysical,” it is perhaps even more essentially “post-theological.” I discuss the nature of this complex relationship a little further in my concluding remarks.

What has become clear in the course of these considerations is that in refusing to understand “givenness” in the naturalistic sense of that about whose origin no further questions can be asked, Heidegger has offered a post-

³⁵ Heidegger’s critiques of the traditional notion of creation are generally well known. However he does explore the notion of creativity and createdness in the equally central essay, “On The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); in German as “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950). It is here that Heidegger elaborates, in opposition to the idea of causal production, a fundamentally important notion of creation as “letting be”—a notion that might serve as an important corrective to some traditional notions of creation

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ A great deal of Augustine’s theology of grace in its utter gratuitousness, while yet being indispensable for any kind of human “salvation” was directed against Pelagius and his followers—Pelagius, a Welsh monk who maintained that human effort can be effective in self-justification and meritorious action. What I am calling an anti-Pelagian streak particularly in the later Heidegger comes out a good deal in his descriptions of human forlornness and the recognition that “we cannot save ourselves” typical of the writings on technology and of course in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview.

metaphysical, post-theological view of reality as essentially “given.” What is entailed in this “givenness” is clearly the “matter” of the essay on Time and Being. Yet even when its heart is guarded by the insistence that withdrawal is of the “essence” of Das Ereignis, what is disclosed is more easily understood against the background of that against which it contends. This I think is what is at the heart of Heidegger’s closing remark: “Yet a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics. Therefore our task is to cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself.”³⁸

The sceptical reader might at this point well complain that having endorsed a strong view of the Es gibt, in the end Heidegger escapes behind a veil of mystical word-spinning, possibly even suggesting that only those to whom it is given, can gain further familiarity with Das Ereignis. There may be some truth to this, but a more positive answer might be that all that we can know, in this context, is what is disclosed “in the epochs of the destining of Being,” in which “Being is unconcealed for thinking with its epochal abundance of transmutations.” Heidegger does indeed suggest that thinking about these matters “remains bound to the tradition of the epochs of the destiny of Being. This is true especially when it recalls in what way and from what source Being itself receives its appropriate determination, from the “‘there is, It gives Being.’ The giving showed itself as sending.”³⁹ Put in its simplest, plainest and therefore, in the case of Heidegger, possibly its very misleading terms, the conclusion might well be that Das Ereignis with regard to the Es of the Es gibt remains beyond any kind of representation. Yet it can in some sense be known through what it gives in the thoughtful understanding of the epochs of the destining of Being. Once again we have come to a conclusion which, mutatis mutandis, is not unlike the traditional theological conclusion about knowledge of God, though in this case we may talk about his creation: what can be known of God is always limited by the a creaturis. God can be known only mediately through what he does, while remaining in “light inaccessible.” Heidegger might seem at one and the same time to be borrowing from that which he is vigorously contesting. This is particularly true of his use of relations of opposition in the expression of triunity.

A Note on the “Fourfold” and the “Way”

We have noted that, perhaps awkwardly, Heidegger has included Space in his account of giving and sending. In Time and Being, however it is not central to the argument, which is more immediately concerned with the relation of Being as presence with the threefold extension of Time. However there are places where Heidegger devotes further thought to space as it belongs to human being, thought of as dwelling. For example in the essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” Heidegger develops his understanding of human being coming into its own—the gift of Das Ereignis—through what he terms the Geviert, a kind of interactive

³⁸ TB,24; ZSD,25.

³⁹ TB,10; ZSD, 10. My emphasis.

square, sometimes translated as the “fourfold,” employing once again definition by way of relation. None of the terms, earth, sky, divinities and mortals can be fully understood except in their relation to one another, while yet not to be confused with one another. It should be noted in passing that in this poetic exploration of “life on earth” Heidegger does advance an ecological ethic with clear reference to modern technology and its disruption of proper human “dwelling”—this by the way and in answer to those who complain of the absence of an ethic in Heidegger’s developed thought.

Once again, Heidegger’s Geviert has an interesting predecessor, not only in Eastern thought,⁴⁰ but also in a very brief reflection of Aquinas in his treatment of Time as a divine creation. The context is a discussion of the Aristotelian belief that the world has no beginning in time, in which Aquinas is defending the biblical notion that the world was created “at the beginning of time”—literally, because God creates an essentially temporal world. The present condition of human life is mortality; and human life prior to death is described as being “in via” (on the road)—man is homo viator. Or as Heidegger might have put it, the human condition is always to be unterwegs. But the reference to another fourfold immediately follows the assertion that the world is created in time, for, Aquinas says: “for four things are said to have been created together, namely, the empyrean heaven, corporeal matter (which is what is to be understood by the name ‘earth’), time and the angelic nature.”⁴¹ There is clearly here not a precise correspondence with Heidegger’s fourfold, but each includes heaven and earth and a reference to divine messengers—for that is the root meaning of “angel”—one who is sent by God. Heidegger writes: “The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead.”⁴²

Despite this imperfect correspondence between the two fourfolds, it is certainly clear that both are concerned with setting the scene of human dwelling and pilgrimage. If the one contains elements of the mythical, so does the other, unless Heidegger’s “messengers” are to be taken literally.

Concluding Remarks

What has been put forward in this article is clearly something in the nature of a hermeneutical study of a vitally important Heideggerian text. I maintain that the richness of meaning of the text is greatly illuminated by seeing the similarities in the pattern of what I have called “triunity” between Heidegger’s use of the notion of constitutive relations of opposition in his inquiry into the nature of Das Ereignis, Being and Time, as well as what I have termed the modes of extension

⁴⁰ See Reinhard May, *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 43.

⁴¹ Sum. theol., 1a, q. 46, a. 3 and again 1a, q. 66, a. 3. Aquinas cites Basil, Bede and Strabo as authorities for the empyrean heaven—the outermost fiery sphere, the abode of angelic beings and eventually of glorified humans. We need not get involved in the details of this sphere, not of burning fire but of extreme luminosity.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 150; in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 144.

in the discussion of Time as “abiding presence” to the medieval explorations of the divine triunity of opposed relations. What I have put forward is by its nature very schematic and does not enter into the “fine print” of a great deal of Heidegger’s discussion. But the question remains: what is the nature of the relationship that I have sketched between two otherwise dissimilar speculative projects?

I have already suggested that I do not imply that Heidegger is borrowing from a tradition which, however integral to his thought, is founded upon a religious faith which he no longer shares and has declared to invoke a theological horizon incompatible with his own view of the task of a contemporary phenomenology. What then is the point of the juxtaposition that I have, in the barest outlines sketched in the article?

In a fine preface to his study, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, John Ashton discusses alternative approaches to comparative studies under the headings of analogy and genealogy.⁴³ As I understand it, whereas genealogy endeavours to trace lines of origin from one text or context to an earlier one from which it derives what is similar, analogy simply endeavours to lay them side by side with a view to deriving the meaning which such comparison highlights by way of recognisable similarities. Genealogical comparison requires that grounds exist for tracing the features of the later back to those of the earlier. In the case of Heidegger, grounds are clearly available for genealogical comparison by reason of his own earlier profession of “Christian theologian” and his reading of the Medieval Latin tradition from Augustine to Aquinas, Scotus, Suarez and so on. In such a project it might be claimed that “a secularised concept preserves its theological memory.”⁴⁴ The present writer has suggested that the post-theological Heidegger writes with a porous membrane of methodological atheism, between his earlier theological endeavours and the post-philosophical “thinking” on which his undoubted claim to fame rests. Much passes through—it is only subsequent judgement that may, or well may not, determine the degree of transformation undergone in the transition.

Consequently, little is claimed by way of genealogy, even though the necessary conditions clearly obtain. Better grounds for comparison obtain simply by way of analogy and the light that the strategy or technique of opposed relation in rendering intelligible the doctrine of the Trinity of persons in one God, with Heidegger’s treatment of what is essentially ultimate in his most mature thinking, *Das Ereignis*, Time and Being and the gracious giving and sending by which human being enters into what is its own.

Heidegger cannot be understood as a free-standing and simply original thinker, but the metaphysical and theological contexts with which he engages are

⁴³ See John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), especially 13-22. I refer to this as a particularly clear and succinct treatment of this central hermeneutical question.

⁴⁴ A quotation from Matthias Fritsch noted by Sean McGrath in his review article: “Alternative Confessions, Conflicting Faiths: a Review of *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82, 2(2008): 317-335.

essential to the understanding of what is original in his thinking. What he is arguing against is inevitably what he is arguing with! It is the main argument of this essay that our reading of Heidegger's text is, at the very least, that much richer and more intelligible for hearing the resonance with the doctrines and ideas that he is engaging with.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Heidegger's famous interview with *Der Spiegel*: Heidegger agrees that: "My entire work of the past thirty years was, in the main, only an interpretation of Western Philosophy . . . this is no abandonment of tradition." See Thomas Sheehan, ed., *Heidegger, the Man and the Thinker* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing Inc, 1981), 45 ff.