

# John Paul II's Call for a Renewed Theology of Being

Just What Did He Mean, and How Can We Respond?

*for the conference*

John Paul II as Philosopher  
Gresham College & Forum for European Philosophy  
Thursday 16 November 2006

*Laurence Paul Hemming*  
Heythrop College, University of London

Since the early twentieth century at least, if not long before, English-speaking philosophers have, as a whole, had an instinctive dislike for the word 'being'. In this they are – surprisingly – in perfect agreement with Friedrich Nietzsche, that “that being is an empty fiction”.<sup>1</sup>

And yet in 1998 Pope John Paul II released the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* – ‘Faith and Reason’, and at the centre of the Encyclical was the following claim: “the *understanding of faith* . . . must have recourse to a philosophy of being.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he added that “many philosophies . . . have deserted the meaning of being”.<sup>3</sup> Precisely the nervousness and avoidance of any discussion of being – beyond the merely copulative meaning of the verb itself – is, for John Paul II, symptomatic of the collapse of the essential connection between faith and philosophy, the understanding of faith, and thinking itself in its deepest forms. Perhaps not accidentally do Anglophone philosophers find themselves aping the gestures of Nietzsche’s texts.

What quickly became clear in commentary at the time was that the Encyclical had been some (considerable) years in the making, and was not of only tangential importance to the pope. What was then, and perhaps is yet, less clear is the actual status of the document: is it *itself* a

---

<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Götzen-Dämmerung* in *Friedrich Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Colli, G. and Montinari, M., Munich, De Gruyter, 1999 [1967–1988], vol. 6, p. 75. “daß das Sein ein leere Fiktion ist.”

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, ???, p. ???, §97. “*intellectus fidei thesaurus*, ad philosophiam essendi decurrere debet” (emphasis in original text).

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, ???, p. ???, §90. “multam philosophiam . . . a sensu essendi recesserunt.”

philosophical statement; or is it a statement *about* philosophy; or is it a magisterial – by which is meant here really ‘teaching’ – document aimed purely at debates internal to the Catholic Church?

It is not that unusual for popes to make magisterial statements concerning philosophy: Leo XIII’s *Æterni patris* springs to mind,<sup>4</sup> but there are also statements by Benedict XV, and of course his (now much better known) correspondence with Voltaire. One could even construe St. Pius X’s *Pascendi* (negatively) as a magisterial statement on issues which are philosophical in origin.

In this paper I wish to examine two essentially contradictory understandings of being in the Encyclical, as a way of opening up a discussion of John Paul II’s call for a renewed philosophy of being. The first is, I want to argue, phenomenological: the second, metaphysical. I want to examine the possibilities for a renewed philosophy of being, before concluding in what directions *Fides et Ratio*, and therefore John Paul II’s final remarks on philosophy, might point.

In 2002, together with some colleagues, I published a new translation of the Encyclical Letter, in a parallel text, with some supporting commentary. The new translation was not intended to supplant the official translation, which, as a working document, provides an entirely satisfactory access to the Encyclical for the non-technical reader.<sup>5</sup> There are, however technical issues which a parallel edition was meant to address. Let me give just one example. At §49 the Encyclical, citing Pius XII’s letter *Humani Generis*, says “suam ipsius philosophiam non exhibet Ecclesia, neque quamlibet praelegit peculiarem philosophiam aliarum damno”. The official translation renders this as “the Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others”. While this is not wrong, it misses an important and subtle point, a point that we need to keep ahead of us in all our deliberations today. For a significant question underpinning the headline of today’s conference – John Paul II as

---

<sup>4</sup> Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Æterni Patris* of 4 August 1879, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, Rome, Propaganda Fide, 1879, vol. XII, pp. 95–115. Translated in Wynne SJ, J. J., *The Great Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII: Translations from Approved Sources*, New York, Benziger, 1903.

<sup>5</sup> The official English translation can be found on the Vatican website, and was also published as *Faith and Reason: Encyclical Letter of John Paul II*, London, Catholic Truth Society, 1998. There has been quite a bit of discussion about which language is original to the various translations which exist. Thus is the Latin ‘official’ or ‘typical’ text really more reliable than the Italian or Polish in which it has been claimed by various commentators at various times the Encyclical was originally written. Whatever the views of the various commentators, the typical, and so definitive, text, is the Latin text, as it is in all formal Vatican documents to this day. This is published in the *Acta Apostolica Sedis*. John Paul II, was, as is the current pope, in any case fluent in Latin.

philosopher – is ‘what does it mean for a Christian to be called a philosopher?’. The Latin actually says that *if* the Church were to privilege one philosophy, this would be *aliarum damno* – ‘to the condemnation of the others’. Here, I hope, we see why a more precise, technical – actually philosophically more astute – translation was needed alongside the official working document:<sup>6</sup> it goes right to the heart of the issue John Paul II addresses with respect to the question of a philosophy of being. What indeed is the proper relationship between philosophy and faith, and the reflection on faith that goes under the name of the science of theology?

Fr. Fergus Kerr has pointed out on a number of occasions that the understanding of philosophy developed by John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* owes much in its sense of the history of philosophy (as a history of being, *Seinsgeschichte*) to Martin Heidegger. Although the *Seinsgeschichte*, or ‘history of being’, is never explicitly mentioned, the history traced through successive sections of the Encyclical without doubt owes much to Heidegger’s account. We should not overlook, however, the influence of Hegel as well, for it is Hegel, even before Heidegger, who announces that philosophy has a successive, epochal history, and that (for Hegel at least) history culminates in a claim that the most perfectly manifest form of philosophy in absolute subjectivity is to be found in Christianity itself.

Although John Paul II makes reference to other forms of philosophy, he is explicit and unashamed that philosophy, as a tradition of thinking, is nevertheless primarily Greek in its origins, European in its unfolding and indeed even so remains essentially Eurocentric.<sup>7</sup> In providing a lengthy account of the origins of philosophy, and discussing its various historical forms, he becomes most preoccupied with the advent of rationalism and then finally nihilism. This diagnosis of philosophy he describes in the following way: “as a consequence of the crisis of rationalism, something akin to *nihilism* has appeared. Insofar as it is a philosophy of nothing, it possesses for the men and women of our age a certain glamorous allure. Its supporters claim that it has no end beyond itself, without the hope or the capacity for arriving at the goal of truth. According to the nihilist, existence provides us only with the capacity for feeling and experiencing, in which the ephemeral takes pride of place. From nihilism the view has arisen

---

<sup>6</sup> Our own translation reads “the Church does not have a philosophy of her own, nor does she select a particular one to the detriment of others”. *Restoring Faith in Reason: A Translation of the Encyclical Letter of John Paul II Fides et Ratio together with Commentary and Supporting Essays*, Hemming, L. P. and Parsons S. F. With Meredith SJ, A., London and Notre Dame, SCM Press and University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, §49.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §69.

that there should be no holding to any definitive commitment, because everything is fleeting and provisional.”<sup>8</sup> The critique of philosophy that John Paul II advances is exactly the understanding of the world that we find laid out by Friedrich Nietzsche: “the ‘apparent’ world is the actual: the ‘true world’ has now been put aside”.<sup>9</sup>

We might say at this point that John Paul II as philosopher is – as much as are the Anglophone philosophers I cited at the beginning of my paper – most in accord in his diagnosis of philosophy (and this means as a philosopher with respect to the philosophical description or account of the world he seeks to give) – with Nietzsche himself. Being is no more than a vapour, and the world of appearances is the only one which has mankind in its glittering grip. The only difference between John Paul II and Nietzsche is in what consequences are to be drawn from this – most of all (for the pope himself) with respect to faith.

In posing the question of John Paul II as philosopher in this way there is a certain provocation – for few, Catholic, Christian, or unbelieving – would identify Karol Wojtyła with the apostle of nihilism and the proclamation of the death of God, Friedrich Nietzsche. This, however, begs the question of what philosophy *does*. For philosophy *as* phenomenology, as what lets the phenomena speak for themselves and lets them be seen for what they are, does not ‘do’ anything at all. Philosophy in this sense, is the deepest, stillest, most careful speaking. Philosophy is above all speaking as disclosing, and a pointing out how, and this means for whom, things ‘are’. Philosophy, in this sense, always presupposes an understanding of being. The question here is not what John Paul II *brings to description*, for he brings out, discloses, and brings into the open a situation which we all recognise and to which we can find ourselves within. In this sense, one might say, the description of the ‘way the world is’ at present already functions as a kind of philosophy of being in his thinking – or rather (as I propose to explore in greater depth) that his thinking draws itself off from the way the world is. There is an extensive discussion of nihilism in the encyclical, and it is not different from that to be found in his other

---

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §46. “Veluti consequens discriminis rationalismi tandem nihilismus crevit. Quatenus philosophia nullius rei, pro hominibus nostrae aetatis quandam suam habet pellicientem vim. Eius fautores inquisitionem putant in se ipsam conclusam, nulla data spe neque facultate adipiscendi veritatis metam. In nihilismi opinione existentia dat tantum copiam quiddam sentiendi et experiendi, qua in re evanida primas agunt partes. Ex nihilismo illa opinio orta est de nullo officio definitive tenendo, quandoquidem fugacia et temporaria sunt omnia.”

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Götzen-Dämmerung*, p. 75. “Die ‘scheinbare’ Welt ist die einzige: die ‘wahre Welt’ ist nur hinzugelogen . . .”

writing. It is not possible in the time allotted to me today to explain why nihilism – above all for Nietzsche, but in fact in all its forms, is *essentially* a psychology – such that Nietzsche describes “nihilism as a psychological state”.<sup>10</sup> The word I have translated here as ‘condition’ is *Zustand*. A *Zustand*, a state, is what has been brought to stand, made to stand out and stand forth: what has been stabilised to be known from out of the flux *scheinbare Welt*, the ‘apparent world’ or world of appearances (the never-ending, ever-changing and altering world of *becoming* in his metaphysics) that we shortly found Nietzsche describing in the *Götzen-Dämmerung*, What plucks a state of affairs from out of the flux of the appearances? Nothing other than the human *subject*, that one who always emerges as the site wherein the appearances are brought to a standstill and who can make a stand against the rage of change.

The final and last form of nihilism, so Nietzsche says, is to enter into a world which “is constructed only from psychological needs”, which is a “standpoint” wherein human existence has no goal or end.<sup>11</sup> Every standpoint sets up a subject who sets out his or her own sense of ‘truth’. John Paul II concludes, almost as if reading this off the page, “the immense variety of standpoints . . . results in nothing other than . . . various expressions of nihilism”.<sup>12</sup>

Those of you who know John Paul II’s work – indeed anyone with an ounce of common sense – will know that what Nietzsche celebrates, John Paul II bemoans, and so we are entirely unsurprised to discover him saying that “*Nihilism* is the denial of the humanity and the very identity of man”.<sup>13</sup> It is this very common sense – so beloved of Anglophone philosophy – that I want now to address. Why do we take it for granted and why can we know in advance, even before we have read a word more of John Paul II that he will take up a certain attitude toward the nihilism that he has nevertheless brought out into description here – a description that I have shown, in no more than a few lines, follows the exact same contours and lines of the arch-nihilist

---

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Nachlaß 1887–1889 in Friedrich Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Colli, G. and Montinari, M., Munich, De Gruyter, 1999 [1967–1988], vol. 13, p. 46 (Kritik des Nihilismus). “Der Nihilismus als psychologischer Zustand.” (= Nietzsche, F., *Der Wille zur Macht*, Stuttgart, Kröner, 1996 [1901–1931], I, §12, p. 12)

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Nachlaß 1887–1889*, p. 48 (= *Wille zur Macht*, p. 15). “Nur aus psychologischen Bedürfnissen [ist] diese Welt gezimmert . . . Stadtpunkt”, and the next paragraph adds “daß weder mit dem Begriff ‘Zweck’, noch mit dem Begriff ‘Einheit’, noch mit dem Begriff ‘Wahrheit’ der Gesamtcharakter des Daseins interpretiert werden darf”.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §81. “Opinationum multitudo . . . nihil aliud perficiunt nisi ut . . . varias in nihilismi indicationes.”

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §90. “*Nihilismus* est humanitatis hominis ipsius negatio et eius proprietatis.”

Friedrich Nietzsche? Why do we recognise that every *Zustand* immediately begs a response, an attitude, a perspective and an outlook? For here, at this point in considering John Paul II as ‘philosopher’ we need to make a certain kind of transition, *from* John Paul II who brings to a phenomenological description a *Zustand*, the world as it now is, *to* the John Paul II who responds, and proposes a critique of the situation he has described with respect to a philosophy of being. It is in this sense there is more than one ‘philosophy of being’ at work, both in the Encyclical and for the philosopher John Paul II.

From what standpoint can John Paul II undertake a critique of the nihilism of the contemporary situation? Is not his very taking up of a ‘standpoint’, the place from which he will comment on the *Zustand* not merely further evidence of the nihilism that our age *is*? And is not this very question the one that engulfs contemporary faith, and theologians of every stamp and quarter – that each one of us, in order to be seem to be a human voice (that the entire character of human existence, to which Nietzsche referred, is made up of standpoints which are embodied by voices announced through the subjectivity of the human subject?) – that nihilism enforces that each one of us must take up an attitude *toward* the nihilism in midst of which we are?

John Paul II calls for a renewed philosophy of being: does this mean that as a philosopher he will *oppose* the *Zustand* of being to which he gives description, and which he calls nihilism? This is the transition-over from a pure phenomenology, a philosophy that describes how things *are*, to a philosophy that ‘does’ something. What could be more a philosophy of being than one that addresses how things *are*, and so go on *being* – ushering forth in their very essence? The transition I want to indicate goes over to how things *ought to be*, what is to be required of them. Thus the philosophy of being that John Paul II called for and that I intend to explore is at the same time not a philosophy that explains how they really are right now (although it is grounded there, and necessarily so), but one that is conducted in the optative – that says how they should be. This is his standpoint. Is not a standpoint a place from which one takes up an aim?

Nietzsche says that “that the highest values have devalued themselves . . . the aim is lacking: the answer to the ‘why?’ is lacking”.<sup>14</sup> He analyses the will to power in its very essence as the *driving* back up through the empowerment of power itself of the productive aim. The devaluation of the highest value is nothing other than the proclamation of the death of God itself.

---

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Nachlaß 1885 – 1887*, 1988, vol. 12, p. 350 f. “Es fehlt das Ziel; es fehlt die Antwort auf das ‘Warum?’ . . . was bedeutet Nihilismus? daß die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen.”

For Nietzsche, every standpoint of a subject now reaches out to whatever it wants, such that, through power, it does not derive its value from what it steps out towards and aims at, but rather it values, *evaluates* whatever is, in order to produce what it might, and so *ought*, to be. Thus when John Paul II argues that “wherever man detects a summons to the absolute and transcendent, there is opened up for him some indication of the metaphysical interpretation of things: in truth and beauty, in moral good, and in other people, in being, and in God”,<sup>15</sup> if the *Zustand* is such that God is dead and the inner unity of being is disbanded, then what is the character of the summons named here? Is not (as I have argued elsewhere) the summons in question the very will to power itself, so that will *wills* us, and it is through and as will that we appear at all? “The will in question here, the originating will, is not the intentional act of a subject, but the very condition of possibility of an intentional subject.”<sup>16</sup>

To illustrate the danger that we have come upon – the danger inherent in the present situation of the *Zustand* of nihilism, and the danger also inherent in the solutions proposed for it, I want to refer to some brief remarks of Martin Heidegger’s on the inherent nihilism on Marxism. There is no doubt that John Paul II was himself the most implacable opponent of Marxism, but I want to show that taking John Paul II’s understanding of philosophy in one direction has the potential to fall into the same *Zustand* from out of which Marxism also springs, as a way in to enquiring how we should understand John Paul II’s call for a renewed philosophy of being.

At the heart of Nietzsche’s metaphysics was the phenomenal description of the drive into power itself, the ‘will to power’ which he himself never succeeded in completing as a text,<sup>17</sup> but

---

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §83. “Ubi cumque praesentem quandam appellationem ad absolutum et transcendens detegit homo, inibi ei aperitur indicatio metaphysicae rerum interpretationis: in veritate ac pulchritudine, in bonis moralibus ac personis ceteris, in esse ac in Deo.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hemming, L. P., *Postmodernity’s Transcending: Devaluing God*, London and Notre Dame, SCM Press and University of Notre Dame Press, p. 29. “The will in question here, the originating will, is not the intentional act of a subject, but the very condition of possibility of an intentional subject. Nothing, as such, wills. Willing is how everything must be.”

<sup>17</sup> The *Wille zur Macht* for this reason remains one of the most controversial of Nietzsche’s books, having been put together by Heinrich Köselitz, Ernst Horneffer, and August Horneffer under the direction of Nietzsche’s sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche and Peter Gast, first in 1901, then in a revised edition of 1904, then as vol. 16 of the so-called *Großoktav* edition in 1911. It was republished in augmented form by Kröner in 1930 with a postscript by the Nazi philosopher Alfred Bäumler, and a further rearrangement of the material with entirely spurious claims to be scholarly appeared in 1940 edited by Friedrich Würzbach. The Colli-Montinari critical edition of Nietzsche’s works did not include the text, but almost all the aphorisms can be shown to be contained in their arrangement of the material from Nietzsche’s notebooks. Cf. for an extended discussion of the Colli-Montinari

the idea of which Martin Heidegger examined with such acuity in his lectures.<sup>18</sup> In a television interview with Richard Wisser in 1969 Heidegger commented on a sentence of Karl Marx in the following manner:

I will quote him precisely by reading aloud: ‘The philosophers have merely *interpreted* the world in different ways; now the task is to *change* it’.

By quoting this sentence *and* by adhering to these thoughts, one overlooks the fact that a world change presupposes a change of *world idea* and that a world idea is only to be obtained by sufficient *interpretation* of the world.

“That means, Marx rests on a specific interpretation of the world in order to claim his ‘change’ and thereby he shows that this statement is not established. He gives the impression that he has decidedly spoken against philosophy, while, in the second part of the statement, the unspoken demand for a philosophy is tacitly assumed.”<sup>19</sup>

At a seminar in Zähringen in 1973 Heidegger added that his judgement on Marx “is not political”, but (and however) “with Marx the position of the most extreme nihilism is reached”.<sup>20</sup>

---

claims about Nietzsche’s own abandonment of the actual text (though not the idea) of the will to power, Montinari, M., “*La volonté de puissance*” *n’existe pas*, Paris, Broché, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche in Gesamtausgabe*, vols 6.1 and 6.2, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1997 (1961), first published by Günther Neske, and the full texts of the lecture courses and discussions on which these were based in volumes 43–44, 46–48 and 50 of his collected works: *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst* (winter semester 1936/37); *Nietzsche’s metaphysische Grundstellung im abendländischen Denken: Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (summer semester 1937); *Zur Auslegung von Nietzsches II. Unzeitgemäßer Betrachtung ‘Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben’* (winter semester 1938/39); *Nietzsches Lehre von Willen zur Macht als Erkenntnis* (summer semester 1939); *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus* (second trimester 1940); *Nietzsches Metaphysik* (prepared for the winter semester 1941–, but not delivered).

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, M., *Martin Heidegger im Gespräch (17th September 1969) in Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebenswesens in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 2000, p. 703. “Ich will ihn genau zitieren und vorlesen: ‘Die Philosophen haben die welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kömmt darauf an, sie zu *verändern*.’

“Bei der Zitation dieses Satzes und bei der Befolgung dieses Satzes übersieht man, daß eine weltveränderung eine Änderung der *Weltvorstellung* voraussetzt und daß eine Weltvorstellung nur dadurch zu gewinnen ist, daß man die welt zureichend *interpretiert*.

“Das heißt: Marx fußt auf einer ganz bestimmten Weltinterpretation, um seine ‘Veränderungen’ zu fordern, und dadurch erweist sich dieser Satz als nicht fundierter Satz. Er erweckt den Eindruck, als sei entschieden gegen die Philosophie gesprochen, während im zweiten teil des Satzes unausgesprochen die Forderung nach einer Philosophie vorausgesetzt ist.”

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, M., *Seminar in Zähringen 1973 in Seminare in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 17, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1986 (1977), p. 393. “Meine Marx-Auslegung, erläutert Heidegger, ist nicht politisch. Sie denkt auf das Sein hinaus und auf die Weise, wie es sich zuschickt. Mit diesem Ausblick und in dieser Sicht kann ich sagen:



What Marxism exposes precisely is not anything political, but in fact the extreme *moralism* of the will to power. The paradox of the situation of postmodernity, on which John Paul II himself commented,<sup>21</sup> is that it lacks the vicious apocalyptic drive of the rhetoric of Marxism (although this is reappearing in the current obsession with ‘saving the planet’, an entirely moralistic and nihilistic project if ever there was one), while nevertheless engulfing us in a euphoria which is nevertheless driven by strong, moral constraints: a will to power that constrains *through* its moralism. Does not every contemporary plea to change the world, to transform it and re-produce it as other, to *demand* that it be other than it is, spring from an essentially nihilistic place (the standpoint of the subjectivity of the subject) – including every single Christian plea? From where else could it spring?

And on what basis is this transformation understood to need to take place, except the subject itself? The metaphysical renewal which John Paul II calls for is to be undertaken specifically as an anthropology: he says “we must not therefore think of metaphysics as in some way opposed to anthropology, rather it is metaphysics itself that permits the conception of the dignity of the human person, based on his spiritual nature, to be solidly grounded. The person, specifically, constitutes the place for the encounter with the very activity of being, and therefore with metaphysical reflection.”<sup>22</sup> It is this conflation of the metaphysical with the anthropological which has, precisely, given rise to the possibility of John Paul II’s ‘theology of the body’. Once again it is difficult not to note a direct correspondence with the *Zustand* of the phenomenological description implicit in Nietzsche’s texts. Heidegger notes of Nietzsche’s own metaphysical attention to the question of the body as such, the subject considered ‘anthropologically-biologically’: “‘Body’ is the name for that form of the will to power, in which it is immediately accessible to the human being as a distinct ‘subject’, because it is always a distinct component

---

mit Marx ist die Position des äußersten Nihilismus erreicht.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §91. “A quibusdam subtilioribus auctoribus aetas nostra uti tempus ‘post-modernum’ est designata.”

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §91. “Ita quidem metaphysica disciplina non respicienda est tamquam anthropologiae opposita, quandoquidem metaphysica ipsa sinit solide stabiliri dignitatis personae conceptum ex eius spiritali natura. Persona, nominatim, locum constituit praecipuum ut quis congregiatur cum actu essendi ac, propterea, cum meditatione metaphysica.”

of his condition”.<sup>23</sup>

If, therefore, the call for a renewed philosophy of being is to unfold, what shape and character must it take? Does it, on the one hand, restate what a previous philosophy of being has said – in which case, why must it be renewed? Or does it try to unfold a philosophy of being with respect to the phenomenological situation of nihilism, a description which John Paul II has fully adequately managed to bring out?

There is a further confusion, which I wish merely to indicate, though not directly to address (although any more extended treatment of these topics would have to address it). The philosophy of being, insofar as it is a philosophy of being has – philosophically speaking, and not speaking from the understanding of faith – to be understood within the naming of it by Aristotle above all (but also by Plato) as a θεολογία, a theology, inasmuch as it is a philosophy, and being insofar as it is being (ὅν ἢ ὅν), philosophy as such.<sup>24</sup>

John Paul II finds in St. Thomas Aquinas, whom he describes as the Apostle of Truth,<sup>25</sup> a philosophy which has every capacity of being counterposed to the world of appearances, and which he calls “truly a philosophy of being and not merely of appearing”.<sup>26</sup> What, then are the hallmarks of a ‘philosophy of being’ for John Paul II? He notes that “within the compass of the Christian metaphysical tradition the philosophy of being is an active or dynamic philosophy, which presents truth by means of structures which are at the same time ontological, causal, and capable of being shared with others”.<sup>27</sup> A philosophy of being elicits the “act of ‘being’” and what is “upheld” by that act of being.<sup>28</sup> The ‘being’ at issue here is, however, the “transcendent

---

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 50, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1990, p. 48. “‘Leib’ ist der Name für jene Gestalt des Willens zur Macht, in der dieser dem Menschen als dem ausgezeichneten ‘Subjekt’ unmittelbar zugänglich, weil stets zuständig ist.”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: VI, I (1026a20 f.); XI, VII (1064a41).

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §44. “Apostolus veritatis”

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §44. “vere est philosophia essendi et non apparenti dumtaxat”

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §97. “Intra metaphysicae christianae traditionis prospectum philosophia essendi est philosophia actuosa seu dinamica quae ipsis in suis ontologicis, causalibus et communicativis structuris praebet veritatem.”

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §97. “actu[s] ‘essendi’ . . . quod [est] actu ipso ‘essendi’ sustentatur.”

and absolute being”, and not any other.<sup>29</sup> In this sense John Paul II reiterates the understanding of being that was elicited especially in the nineteenth century and up to the mid-twentieth century by various the schools of neo-Thomism. Every being (philosophically speaking) is sustained in its being by that act of being which is the divine being. Being, understood like this, is entirely the metaphysical understanding of being – being is the highest, and most general actually for any other being’s possibility of being. We should note here that John Paul II qualifies the ‘act of “being”’ by placing the word being – *essendi* – in parenthetical quotation marks. This draws attention to an awkwardness, but one that theological, not philosophical.

Theologically speaking, and with respect to faith, God created the heavens and the earth, God is the foundational creator of all that is – the opening words of the sacred scriptures say and mean exactly this. Such a truth, however, is given through God’s own self-disclosure. God *chooses* to make it known, and recognisable, to those to whom he is also disposed to grant the gift of faith. Faith makes this truth known. Here, God’s relation to the human being is resolved entirely by the book of Genesis, in which God creates man in his own image and likeness.<sup>30</sup> The theological consequences of this are discussed most beautifully by St. Irenæus.<sup>31</sup>

However what John Paul II calls this is not a ‘theology of being’ *but* a ‘philosophy of being’ (equal to that he claims can be found in St. Thomas). The parenthetical quotation marks precisely indicate the difficulty of this ‘philosophy’, in ways that we can do no more than sketch.<sup>32</sup> John Paul II appeals to the neo-Thomist category of analogy in order to ameliorate the difficulty indicated by the placing of the quotes,<sup>33</sup> whilst acknowledging that it is not reason but “faith [that] requires that human speech should in some universal way give expression – even

---

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §41. “ens transcendens et absolutus” and therefore not the being of being human.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Genesis 1<sup>26</sup>. καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν

<sup>31</sup> St. Irenæus *Adversus Hæreses* in (ed.) Migne, *Patrologia Græca*, vol. 7.

<sup>32</sup> We should add to this the view that St. Thomas was not, and did not believe himself to be, a philosopher, although he borrowed extensively from the language of philosophy to elicit what he believed to be truths of faith. Of this, Mark Jordan notes “a Christian theology done well ought to speak more and better about matters of concern to philosophy than philosophers themselves can”. Jordan, M., *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p. 169. Cf. the chapter in this book, *Philosophy in a Summa of Theology*, pp. 154–169.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §83. Here he discusses “man’s power of arriving in a true and certain way at this transcendent and metaphysical reason, even though that way may be imperfect and analogical” (“hominis potestatem cuius vi hanc rationem transcendentem ac metaphysicam percipiat modo vero certoque, licet imperfecto et analogico”).

though voiced analogically, but no less meaningfully – to divine, transcendent reality”.<sup>34</sup> John Paul II does not pursue the question of analogy as a resolution to the parenthesising of this word ‘*essendi*’, ‘being’.

Rather than on analogy, John Paul II relies on an understanding of philosophy which he finds also discussed by his predecessor, Pius XII. Citing again Pius XII’s 1950 Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis*, he reiterates “the history of human reflection clearly demonstrates that in and through the progress and variety of cultures certain basic concepts have preserved both their universal validity for knowledge and the truth of the propositions they express”.<sup>35</sup> This is the basis for the form of a ‘perennial philosophy’<sup>36</sup> to which he has makes allusion repeatedly in *Fides et Ratio*,<sup>37</sup> and which has been repeated in several statements of the Catholic Church’s recent teaching, especially its moral teaching.<sup>38</sup>

The essential characteristic of an ‘*analogia entis*’, an analogy of being, is that being is analogically understood as the inherent (but analogical, and so not univocal – and so a direct similitude) unity of the being of all things with the being of God. For reasons we will shortly explore, except to the eyes of faith, this way is now entirely closed off to philosophy – if ever it were possible (philosophically). The work formally undertaken by analogy in the lexicons of neo-Thomism is therefore here replaced by a claim to ‘perennial philosophy’. Here it is possible to make no more than a few remarks. All philosophy, as metaphysics, has depended (and especially since Descartes) on the ‘experiential’ sense of an ineluctable self-evidence to

---

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §84. “Fides etenim luculenter postulat ut hominum sermo via quadam universali – etiam vocibus analogicis tamen non ideo minus significantibus – realitatem divinam ac transcendentem.”

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §96. “Cogitationis humanae historia utcumque luculenter comprobatur progressionem varietatemque culturarum quasdam principales notiones universalem suam adservare cognoscendi vim proindeque veritatem earum affirmationum quam recludunt.”

<sup>36</sup> The notion of a universal, or perennial, philosophy first appears with Augustinus Steuchus, Bishop of Cisamus, in his *De philosophia perenni sive veterum philosophorum cum theologia christiana consensu libri X*, Basle, Francken, 1542 – later given more general consideration by von Leibniz. The phrase was taken up by the Second Vatican Council in its 1965 Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatum Totius*, which *Fides et Ratio* cites at §60.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §§43, 60, 85, 87, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for just some examples, *Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 3, 2003 in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vatican, Typis Vaticanis, 2004, pp. 41–49; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Vatican, 2003; Trujillo, Cardinal López in an interview given to the *Zenit* news agency on 17 January 2003 at the opening of the fourth *World Meeting of Families* in Manila, Philippines.

demonstrate the truth of whatever it claims. The assertion *cogito ergo sum* does no more or less than this – it is what, in midst of whatever else is doubtful, can *not* be eluded. As such, this appeal to the ineluctability of the knowability of whatever is known represents a ‘phenomenological moment’, a point at which whatever is claimed arises for itself, and at one and the same time demands our assent as true. It is the moment where *cogito ergo sum* and *cogito ergo (id) est* are said as an identity.<sup>39</sup> In this sense what John Paul II attempts to name in the ‘perennial philosophy’ is a kind of binding to the necessity of being, the inescapability of being as what, in the being of beings, *befalls* a being such that what *is* cannot be other. This is the ‘mathematical’ moment in thinking – where *μάθησις* means not ‘dealing with numbers’ but rather ‘in anything that I know, what I can take as *already* known with respect to it’. Numbers are mathematical because in every instance of a number being present, what it is the number *of* succeeds my knowledge of the number. In seeing three chairs, I already ‘know’ the three, before even I need know what the three is ‘of’ – i.e., the chairs.

It is here that we can see why certain interpretations of ‘perennial philosophy’ have taken on the character that they do. Insofar as the perennial philosophy, as that which is known in advance, and instantly recognisable to everyone who comes across it (the ‘self-evident’ in everything that is evident, and so appears – in this sense the *perennis* names the *ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ*, the idea of the good *as* the idea which lies behind all ideas and is their inner unity), anyone who refuses to see, and so recognise, what the perennial philosophy names is refusing to see what, as what lies right in front of them and before their eyes (literally, *before* their eyes as what *must* be seen in whatever *can* be seen, inasmuch as the self-evident goes ahead of the evident) is in a sense, culpable.<sup>40</sup> It is unsurprising that in *Fides et Ratio*, having repeated Pius XII’s own naming of the *philosophia perennis*, in the next paragraph makes the transition to a discussion of its importance in how “in the same way the deliberations of *moral theology* can

---

<sup>39</sup> The critical issue is not that the *est* and the *sum* are said as an identity, but in what order or taxis the *est* and the *sum* are ordered one to the other. In the ancient ontology the *est* always precedes the *sum*, such that ‘world’ is always given in advance of the self, and the self is understood only as that which is ‘taken-off’ from the unity of the world (this is how Aristotle’s *σοφία* as the *ἀρχή* of the *ἐν* is understood); for Descartes and all subjectival thinking following him, the self is always understood as represented *prior to* and in advance of everything that is, such that its prior existence is encountered only subsequently to, and as a mere property of, its actuality.

<sup>40</sup> Here is why the *ἀγαθόν* as ‘the good’ comes to assume a moral force – insofar as it is what makes everything evident, and so is the already-evident, it is what is *required to be seen*.

also be clarified according to reason”.<sup>41</sup> The *philosophia perennis* itself becomes the ground for the moral as the ‘natural law’, in a way entirely foreign to Aquinas, despite borrowing the term from him.

For Aquinas, paradoxically, the natural law is known only *through faith*.<sup>42</sup> For John Paul II, the natural law is what all societies tend to exhibit. Thus in his 1995 Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitæ* he speaks of an “objective moral law which, as the ‘natural law’ written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself”.<sup>43</sup> The interpretation given to the notion of natural law by John Paul II separates it from divine revelation. If we take his argument in his Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, again citing St. Thomas Aquinas, that “Indeed, as we have seen, the natural law ‘is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation’”,<sup>44</sup> we see immediately that for St. Thomas, everything turns on the meaning of the word ‘infused’, whereas for John Paul II the critical word is ‘natural’. The infused, for St. Thomas, is what springs from God and is granted through grace to man. In this sense the natural law is fulfilled and fully understandable only in consequence of divine self-revelation – of God’s speaking to us and revealing Himself to us. For John Paul II, the ‘natural’ is what can be known even apart from divine revelation – as part of the *philosophia perennis* it is the basis on which Catholics and atheists of good will can agree, and so can concur in what the

---

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §98. “Explicari similes possunt deliberationes etiam ratione habita *moralis theologiae*”

<sup>42</sup> In the same way as the analogy of names is ordered. In fact the order is absolutely paramount here: the prime analogates are divine attributes, so the divine law is the authorising possibility of the natural law and has the capacity to make it known. In both case what God knows or is, is prior to, and so constitutive for, creation. The priority of God, however, is disclosed only through that to which faith, and so *not* deliberative reason, grants access.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitæ* of 25th of March, 1995 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, ???, ???, ???, §70. The same point is also made at §§2, 62, and 72. The discussion at §72 would appear to contradict my suggestion that the natural law is known only through faith, where John Paul II quotes St. Thomas as saying “Every law made by man can be called a law insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law” (*Summa Theologiæ*, Ia IIæ, q. 95, ad. 2), but the question here is how we may *know* whether a human law is just or not: in the light of *divine self-disclosure*, through which the natural law becomes known, we may then have some authoritative way of *determining* the status of human, and so civil, laws. As always, the question of taxis, or order, in what is known from what is paramount. The divinely revealed natural law which can be elucidated theologically provides a ground on which to establish the truth of what is deliberated philosophically. John Paul II makes an identical argument with respect to the character of the natural law in the 1993 Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* of 8th June 1993 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, ???, ???, ???. Cf. §§12, 40, 42, 43–53, 57, 59, 72, 79.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, §42, citing Aquinas, In *Duo Præcepta Caritatis et in Decem Legis Præcepta. Prologus: Opuscula Theologica*, II, No. 1129, ed. Taurinen, (1954), p. 245. “???”

‘natural law’ is – hence its excellence as a basis for addressing modern (essentially secular) civil society. Here again John Paul II comes remarkably close to a major influence on Friedrich Nietzsche, the Russian Afrikan Spir, who had noted that “the moral law stems from us, not from God, it is our own, better nature!”<sup>45</sup>

Just what is the difficulty indicated by John Paul II’s use of the parenthetical quotes around the word ‘being’ – *essendi*? The current *Zustand* of extreme and outermost nihilism is indicated by John Paul II as a ‘condition’, a situation in whose midst we all live. Precisely as the totalising effects of what also has been named as ‘globalisation’ – what Ernst Jünger referred to as ‘total mobilisation’<sup>46</sup> – have been seen in their successive waves of the political movements of the various kinds of fascism and Nazism, of Stalinism and now of what Martin Heidegger (and indeed Pope Benedict XVI) referred to as ‘Americanism’. Heidegger described Americanism as the re-bounce of an entirely extreme consequence upon itself of what Europe had made possible, and so, by extension, the rebound of that on the rest of the world.<sup>47</sup> All of this is not in consequence of political movements and developments (rather they are the consequence of a European thinking, of what becomes possible in thought itself), but rather as the playing out of the processes unleashed by the unfolding of nihilism itself. Heidegger adds “in the fulfilment of metaphysics by Nietzsche, there were thought out in advance at least some areas of the essential questionability of a world where being begins to rule as the will to will”.<sup>48</sup> This is the *Vollendung*, fulfilment, of metaphysics itself – its triumph *in* its disintegration. Above all,

---

<sup>45</sup> Spir, A., “Das moralische Gesetz stammt aus uns, nicht aus Gott, es ist unsere eigene bessere Natur!”, quoted by Janz, C. P. In his biographical notes to the *Nietzsche in drei Bände*, edited Schlechta, K., Munich, Hanser Verlag, 1966, vol. 1, p. 68, citing Überweg-Heinze, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 4, ed. Oesterreich, T. K., *Deutsche Philosophie des 19. Jahrh. und der Gegenwart*, Basel, Schwabe, 1951.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jünger, E., *Die Totale Mobilmachung in Werke*, vol. 5, Stuttgart, Klett, 1960 (1930). See also the use of this phrase throughout Jünger’s later work *Der Arbeiter – Herrschaft und Gestalt in Werke*, vol. 6, Stuttgart, Klett, 1964 (1932).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Heidegger, M, *Wozu Dichter?* in *Holzwege in Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, vol. 5, 2003 (1950, 1977), p. 291. “Aber dieses Amerikanische ist bereits nur der gesammelte Rückstoß des gewillten neuzeitlichen Wesens des Europäischen auf . . . Europa” (“but this Americanism is itself nothing but the concentrated rebound of the willed nature of the European upon Europe”). See also his comments on America in *Spiegel-Gespräch* from *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, p. 668. Here Heidegger clearly places Americanism, together with communism, as the latest developments in “die planetarische Bewegung der neuzeitlichen Technik” (“the planetary movement of modern technology”).

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, M, *Wozu Dichter?*, p. 291. “In der Vollendung der Metaphysik durch Nietzsche wenigstens Bereiche der wesentlichen Fragwürdigkeit einer Welt vorgedacht sind, in der das Sein als der Wille zum Willen zu herrschen beginnt.

however, this disintegration is experienced as the death of God.

In understanding his call for a renewed philosophy of being, what are we to make of John Paul II's claim that there is a 'philosophy' of St. Thomas Aquinas? It is not so much that there is a 'philosophy' of St. Thomas Aquinas, but rather, that St. Thomas brings to phenomenological description *through* his appeal to being a world in which – Christian faith being taken as a stable and ultimate way of describing the truth of being itself – a certain kind of conflation of being with God is taken for granted. This is – at least – how we as ones coming after St. Thomas (John Paul II included) are apt to interpret Aquinas's description of God as *actus essendi* and 'Deus est ipsum esse' (God has his own 'to be'). Aquinas, of course, does not understand himself as undertaking a phenomenology, but rather as describing the truth as he knows it. But the truth being brought to description, as the bringing to language of whatever *is*, is precisely what a phenomenology is. This is how (our understanding of) phenomenology can address St. Thomas Aquinas, even if he would not have so understood himself at the time.

*We* however, now living within the full unfolding of European nihilism (as a planetary phenomenon) can no longer simply restate being as rationalism and neo-Thomism have understood it, as the full and stable presence, as what is most beingful and mostly highly existent in all that is. *Precisely*, nihilism, as the negation of being (as God) as the principle of the inner and highest unity of all things, means that we can no longer *take for granted*, and so hope to bring to self-evident redescription (a description which everyone can implicitly recognise, the very goal of the *philosophia quaedam perennis*) the understanding of being that St. Thomas had. It is precisely this problem which the parenthetical quotes that John Paul II employs around the word '*essendi*' ('being') indicate. On the one hand, he seeks a metaphysics which reinstates the fundamental metaphysical position that God is the inner unity, and highest being, of all things: on the other, that precisely the contemporary situation of active nihilism makes the reinstatement of this metaphysics an impossibility *as* a phenomenological reality. The equation of all metaphysics, that (taken philosophically) 'God and being: the same' is no longer tenable.<sup>49</sup> To the contrary, St. Thomas is permeated with the entirely orthodox and ancient view that God is

---

<sup>49</sup> It must be added here that St. Thomas Aquinas himself never made this assertion ('*idem est: et Deus et essendi*') or anything like it, and for reasons that we cannot enquire into here, the whole understanding of analogy and of the Divine ideas works in an entirely different way for St. Thomas than it was assumed was the case for many of his commentators. For a discussion of the question of analogy, see Hemming, L. P., *Analogia non Entis sed Entitatis: The Ontological Consequences of the Doctrine of Analogy in International Journal of Systematic Theology* (IJST), vol. 6 (April 2004). pp. 118–128.



unknown as he is in himself, and only known in his effects, an understanding to which I want shortly to return.

To understand what is at issue here it is necessary to turn to the most fundamental insights of Martin Heidegger concerning nihilism and the nothing (*das Nichts*). The undoing of the identity of being and God is what Heidegger understands Nietzsche to have unfolded in his proclamation ‘God is dead’. Heidegger returns to Nietzsche’s claim that “at bottom only the moral God has been overthrown”.<sup>50</sup> By moral we would have to understand that God who appears as a moral imperative, in whom we *ought* and are *required* to believe – above all the God of a moralistic ‘Americanism’ (the kitsch of contemporary social and political life), the ‘ethical’ God who, having been declared dead, must be driven back up into life by our rage against nihilism, secularity, and so who *will* appear, and be *willed* to appear, and so be *willing* to appear as the ground of all beings in their being: the God who *is* to be and so is a *production* of his own self-evident necessity. Heidegger notes in this respect that for Nietzsche “God and the gods are a ‘production’ of humanity”.<sup>51</sup>

Already, John Paul II’s parenthetical quotes acknowledge the problematic character of this God, and the difficulty, in the age of full nihilism, of the equation of God and being. For Nietzsche, the nothing reins: “this is the most extreme form of nihilism – the nothing (‘the meaningless’) eternally!”<sup>52</sup> The parenthetical quotes indicate, both that the epoch of extreme nihilism is upon us, and that a merely metaphysical or analogical understanding of being will not suffice.

This is where John Paul II’s philosophical examination of the present situation breaks off – where he can say no more, or rather, where what he can say, or most hopes to say, concerning a philosophy of being reaches an endpoint. What, for St. Thomas as the *actus essendi* corresponded to its own ontological moment, its own point of phenomenological description – as what appeared for itself and was named – cannot be named in the same way now. To be more

---

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Nachlaß 1885–1887* in *Friedrich Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. Colli, G. and Montinari, M., Munich, De Gruyter, 1999 [1967–1988], vol. 12, p. 213. “Im Grunde ist ja nur der moralische Gott überwunden.”

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche in Gesamtausgabe* in vol. 50, p. 108. “Der Gott und die Götter sind ein ‘Erzeugnis’ des Menschen.”

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 213. “Das ist die extremste Form des Nihilismus: das Nichts (das ‘Sinnlose’) ewig!”

precise, the self-same, what emerges for itself, cannot be said in the same way at a different moment in the history of being.

What *is* to be said? Here we can no more than sketch a suggestion – exactly meeting John Paul II’s call for a renewed philosophy of being, we can perhaps propose how his call can be fulfilled, without resorting either to analogical language (except in the light of faith, but that is a quite different matter) or to the mathematical, the self-evident, as the *philosophia perennis*.

In the age of nihilism what is named in the death of God is not an atheism as such, so that God cannot and *could not* be, but the death of a certain kind of understanding of God, the death of the moral God as the God that is *required* by a certain kind of rationalism. This does not mean God is dead, it means that the God who is the production of philosophy is dead. The age of nihilism is too often interpreted as the equating of God and the nothing. But just inasmuch as God and being are not the same, so God and (the) nothing also, are not the same. Can another God live, a God beyond the nothing? From where would such a God come?

Perhaps one of Heidegger’s most shocking equations, in destroying the equation of God and being – or rather in confirming Nietzsche’s destruction of the identity of God and being, is the equation of being and the nothing. Heidegger says, outrageously (quoting a line of Hegel) “pure being and pure nothing are the same”.<sup>53</sup> In the epoch of nihilism, the nothing comes to the fore, as Nietzsche argues. But it does not come to the fore in the way that Nietzsche suggests: Heidegger says that not only in nihilism can being itself not be thought, and so does being disappear and vanish as a vapour, but also that Heidegger concludes: “perhaps the essence of nihilism lies in this: that it consists in not taking seriously the question of the nothing”.<sup>54</sup> In nihilism the nothing comes to the fore. But nihilism only annihilates, as a ‘no-saying’, and as the rage of power. The “essence of the nothing is: the nihilating . . . the nothing itself nothings<sup>55</sup> *for itself*, as that which makes the concealed *able to appear for itself* all over again. The nothing

---

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, M., *Was ist Metaphysik?* In *Wegmarken* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1996 (1967) vol. 9, p. 120. “Das reine Sein und das reine Nichts ist also dasselbe.”

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, M., *Der europäische Nihilismus* in *Nietzsche II* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1997 (1961), vol. 6.2, p. 43 (=Heidegger, M., *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1986, vol. 48, p. 43. “Vielleicht liegt das Wesen des Nihilismus darin, daß man *nicht* ernst macht mit der Frage nach dem Nichts.”

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, M., *Was ist Metaphysik*, p. 114. “Das Wesen des Nichts: die Nichtung . . . Das Nichts selbst nichtet.”

*claims* us, above all in the moods of dread and *Angst*,<sup>56</sup> which is not a psychological state, an *interiority* to the subject, but a *Vorkommenis*,<sup>57</sup> a coming-forth, above all, of being itself. Being *is* (Heidegger's verb is *west*, 'essences' from out of the concealed *into* unconcealment).

We do not have time to explain why, or how, but for Heidegger, beyond Nietzsche, in the overcoming of metaphysics, the concealed (as the Greeks knew well) and as the Christian mystical tradition also knows, is the region which is *also* proper to God. God emerges, discloses Himself, and disposes Himself (insofar as God chooses) from out of the concealed, which *region* of being the nihilating of the nothing makes available once more. God is not to be thought out of the extantness of what is most present, as what is most beingful in everything in being (presence, as such – the already-present [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι]), but as that one who self-disposes, who addresses us, from out of what to us is concealed (through presencing). This concealment already makes itself felt – presences – through the parenthesis of John Paul II's naming of 'essendi' – this *is* the nihilating of the nothing in his thought, the indication of the non-nihilistic nothing, unfolding.

The proper place of this unconcealment, thought in a Christian way, is the divine liturgy. In the wake of the Ascension and of Pentecost, the divine liturgy is the proper place of the unconcealment of the Christ, who is the only way to the Father. It is perhaps not accidental that the philosopher John Paul II has been followed by the liturgist Benedict XVI.

Laurence Paul Hemming

Feast of St. Albert the Great, 2006.

---

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, M., *Was ist Metaphysik*, p. 113. "Das Nichts begegnet in der Angst" ("The nothing regions in *Angst*").

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, M., *Was ist Metaphysik*, p. 110.