

RETHINKING FAITH

*Heidegger between Nietzsche
and Wittgenstein*

Edited by ANTONIO CIMINO
and GERT-JAN VAN DER HEIDEN

B L O O M S B U R Y

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Introduction

Antonio Cimino and Gert-Jan van der Heiden

Heidegger has often been considered as the proponent of the end of metaphysics in post-Hegelian philosophy due to his persistent attempts to overcome the onto-theological framework of traditional metaphysics. Yet, Heidegger's dismissal of metaphysical, theological and religious motives is deeply ambiguous because new forms of metaphysical and religious experience eventually re-emerge in his writings. Heidegger shares this complex relation to faith and religion with authors such as Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, whose works are also marked by a critique of metaphysics and by a characteristic rethinking of the role of faith and religion.

In this volume, we have collected essays that explore how the phenomena of religion and faith are present in the works of Heidegger, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, and how these phenomena are brought into play in their discussion of the classical metaphysical motives they criticize. The volume especially discusses how the phenomena of faith and religion are rethought in their work and placed in a new relation to reason and rationality. Clearly, these three philosophers offer different accounts of this relation and the goal of the present volume is not only to clarify this relation between faith and reason, but also to show what this newly understood relation implies for the role of faith and religion in philosophy.

To this end, the volume is divided into three parts. The first part explores how the phenomenon of religion determines the agenda of contemporary philosophy. It is especially Heidegger's works that set this agenda for both a hermeneutics of religion and reflections on the fideistic core of contemporary philosophy. The second part offers analyses of the concepts of faith and reason in the works of these important critical accounts of metaphysics, theology and religion. These essays discuss Nietzsche's, Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of faith in relation to more classical metaphysical themes such as truth, reason and questioning. Finally, the third part explores how the important contemporary turn to Paul, as a new theological turn in present-day philosophy, changes and sets the standard for the contemporary reflections on faith and religion. In particular,

as the essays in this part argue, Paul's letters are at the basis of both the critique and reappraisal of faith. This allows the authors of these essays to disclose Pauline resonances in the contemporary philosophical explorations of faith and religion.

The first part, devoted to "The Phenomenon of Religion," opens with the essay "Understanding Religious Faith: A Hermeneutical Approach," in which Ben Vedder discusses the phenomenon of faith and religious behavior. Vedder provides useful conceptual and methodological clarifications with a view to outlining a hermeneutical approach to religious experience. The assumption underlying Vedder's analysis of the phenomenon of faith is that the question of the meaning of religious behavior is something different from religious behavior itself. Thus, if one tries to analyze someone else's behavior (or if one wants to clarify someone else's actions), a distance is needed inasmuch as the reflecting act is a different activity than the act the reflecting act of thinking refers to. Against this background, Vedder poses the question of how religious behavior can be understood from a hermeneutical point of view. In this vein, in the first part of his essay, he explains why onto-theological rationality is not in a position to understand religious behavior. The second part focuses on the question of whether a religious person can be understood through hermeneutical reason.

In his essay, "Is Ontology the Last Form of Idolatry? A Dialogue between Heidegger and Marion," Claudio Tarditi discusses the problem of idolatry in Heidegger's and Marion's approaches to the question of God. First, Tarditi analyzes both the ambiguities and the fruitfulness of the way Heidegger articulates the relationship between "the last God" and Being. In this context, Tarditi focuses on the thesis according to which "the last God" cannot be reduced to Being, although it can only become manifest within an ontological horizon. Second, Tarditi examines Marion's notion of "double idolatry" and shows that Marion views Heidegger's thought of Being as a form of idolatry because it does not succeed in thinking of God as pure absoluteness. Even though Marion shares a number of Heideggerian insights into Western metaphysics as onto-theology, he tries to dismiss Heidegger's ontological idolatry by using the notions of "excessiveness" and "saturation." However, as Tarditi shows, an ontological commitment can be noticed in Marion's approach as well. In the last part of his contribution, Tarditi contends that a hermeneutical approach can overcome the contradiction between ontology and saturation.

Jussi Backman's essay, "A Religious End of Metaphysics? Heidegger, Meillassoux and the Question of Fideism," analyzes Quentin Meillassoux's

conception of the fideistic approach to religious faith intrinsic to the “strong correlationism” that he considers pervasive in contemporary thought. Backman presents the basic elements of Meillassoux’s “speculative materialism,” and especially, the thesis according to which strong correlationism involves a “fideistic” approach to religiosity. In doing so, Backman critically examines Meillassoux’s notions of postmetaphysical faith, religious absolutes and contemporary fanaticism, especially against the background of Heidegger’s philosophy. According to Backman, Meillassoux’s logical and conceptual critique of strong correlationism is innovative, and it may remain legitimate if its presuppositions are accepted. And yet, Backman argues that Meillassoux’s allegations of fideism seem to rely on the questionable application of Enlightenment conceptions to the contemporary situation.

The second part of the volume is devoted to “Faith and Reason” in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. In her contribution, “How we, too, are still pious’: The Status of Truth and the Irreducibility of Faith in the Work of Nietzsche,” Carlotta Santini contextualizes the question of faith, or belief, in Nietzsche with particular reference to the notion of truth. Santini offers an in-depth analysis of the complex aspects that characterize Nietzsche’s dealing with the question of truth and takes the concept of “instinct toward the truth” (*Trieb der Wahrheit*) as guiding theme. According to Santini, in conjunction with the paradox of the world of lies and the intriguing re-evaluation of the believer (i.e., who “believes in truth”), Nietzsche introduces a “weak” (i.e., procedural and nondogmatic) notion of truth, that is, “truthfulness” (*Wahrhaftigkeit*). In the last part of the essay, Santini examines Nietzsche’s account of the will to truth (*Wille zur Wahrheit*), which is closely linked to the well-known notion of the will to power.

The point of departure of Tobias Keiling’s essay, “Dionysius, Apollo and Other *Göttliche*: Denial and Excess of Meaning in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein,” is the distinction between two ways of understanding the radicality of an experience, that is, as an excess and as a denial of meaning. Keiling uses and tests this differentiation in terms of a heuristic and interpretive framework. In so doing, he analyzes Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s accounts of radical experience. With regard to *The Birth of the Tragedy*, Keiling contends that Nietzsche conceives of radicality as a double excess of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, but not in terms of a denial of meaning. Thus, in a radical experience, everything can be reintegrated in that dual interpretive pattern. According to Keiling, Heidegger adopts a different approach in that he does not reduce the divine to representations of opposed metaphysical principles

and contends that the experience of poetry, understood as the beckoning of the divine, is the paradigmatic radical experience. Keiling shows that Heidegger describes radical experiences in terms of an exposure to a meaning that is extraordinary and withdrawn at the same time. In this context, Keiling analyzes some difficulties of this conception. The last part of Keiling's essay concentrates on Wittgenstein and shows that the *Tractatus* gets entangled in a paradoxical attribution of excessive as well as denied meaning. Instead, the later Wittgenstein focuses on the disputes that result from the difficulty of catching the meaning of radical experience.

In her essay, "A way of living, or a way of assessing life': Wittgenstein on Faith, Reason and Philosophy," Chantal Bax shows that Wittgenstein had an enduring interest in religious themes throughout his life, and that his well-known antimetaphysical attitude does not imply any dismissal of theology and religion. By analyzing texts of the early as well as the later Wittgenstein, Bax argues that he always defended a strict distinction between faith and reason. As Bax points out, this also holds true for Wittgenstein's very last collection of remarks, *On Certainty*, which may seem to contend that reason completely relies on something like faith. On closer inspection, however, Wittgenstein need not be said to see everything in (quasi-)religious terms in *On Certainty*. Even so, as Bax underlines, in her concluding remarks, Wittgenstein's texts on religious belief lead us to qualify the customary picture of him as a radical antiphilosopher. In his reflections on religion, Wittgenstein does not confine himself to dismissing erroneous views on religion. He also uses these analyses to give a more appropriate account of faith, that is, as a "way of living, or a way of assessing life."

Vincent Blok's contribution, "A Question of Faith: Heidegger's Destructured Concept of Faith as the Origin of Questioning in Philosophy," analyzes the relationship between Heidegger's method of philosophical questioning and his ambiguous attitude toward faith and religion. Blok scrutinizes Heidegger's thesis according to which religion is excluded from the questionability specific to philosophical thought. After analyzing Heidegger's characterization of philosophy as questioning and discussing three essential aspects of this conception, Blok raises the question whether the concept of faith can be separated from Heidegger's method of philosophical questioning. In this context, Blok shows that, in the 1930s, Heidegger developed a formal analysis of thought in terms of faith (or belief), where belief is understood as a "holding-to-be-true." According to Blok, Heidegger's notion of faith as a holding-to-be-true is a necessary aspect for the "original stance of inquiry" essential to philosophy since

the “truth of Being” can only resonate in a philosophical questioning characterized by faith as a holding-to-be-true.

The third and last part of the volume, “Pauline Resonances,” addresses the reception of Paul in contemporary thought, especially in Heidegger and Nietzsche. In his contribution, “Heidegger on Religious Faith: The Development of Heidegger’s Thinking about Faith between 1920 and 1928,” Ezra Delahaye analyzes Heidegger’s notion of faith in two texts of the 1920s, *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* and *Phenomenology and Theology*, in which he develops two different accounts of faith. In the first part of his essay, Delahaye examines the lecture course held by Heidegger during the winter semester 1920–21 and devoted to crucial methodological questions as well as to a groundbreaking phenomenological reading of Paul. Delahaye focuses on how Heidegger interprets the relation between Pauline faith and *parousia* in the context of factual life. The second part of the essay concentrates on *Phenomenology and Theology*, and explains the extent to which Heidegger’s discussion of faith is reshaped on the basis of his analysis of Dasein. In this context, faith implies a radical transformation of Dasein. In the last part of the essay, Delahaye analyzes both similarities and relevant differences between the two notions of faith developed by Heidegger.

Gert-Jan van der Heiden’s contribution develops “The Experience of Contingency and the Attitude to Life: Nietzsche and Heidegger on Paul.” In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul offers a radical experience of the world in his account of the *schēma tou kosmou toutou* when he writes: “the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). Although the world has a particular present form, Paul announces this form as one that is passing away. This means, as Van der Heiden argues, that Paul lets the world appear in its contingency. Moreover, Van der Heiden argues that the present-day philosophical interest in Paul’s letters concerns exactly this experience of the contingency of the world. In addition, this experience goes hand in hand with a new comportment to the world and a new attitude to life, as Paul explicates. Van der Heiden shows how philosophers interpret this complex of experience of the world and comportment to the world. He does so against the background of Nietzsche’s account of this complex because the important contemporary readings of Paul agree in their rejection of this Nietzschean reading. In particular, Van der Heiden shows how some of the basic insights of the contemporary readings concerning the afore-mentioned complex of experience and attitude to life already take shape in Heidegger’s reading in which the experience of contingency leads to an attitude to life that

neither affirms this world nor rejects this world in resentment and nihilism, but rather leads to a third attitude in accordance with the contingency of this world.

Antonio Cimino's contribution, "Paul as a Challenge for Contemporary Philosophers: Nietzsche, Heidegger and Agamben," explores the multilayered reception of Paul in Nietzsche, Agamben, and especially, Heidegger. Cimino shows that Paul is a challenging interlocutor for those thinkers because he leads them to very different ways of understanding the complex relationship between philosophical rationality and religious experience. It should not go unnoticed that Agamben's and Heidegger's comments on Paul's letters are a reversal of the theses developed by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche sees Paul within the horizon of the Western theological-philosophical tradition and describes him as a dogmatic priest who wants to suffocate the primordial tendencies of life. By contrast, Heidegger uses Paul's letters as a source of inspiration for his own phenomenological hermeneutics of facticity. Thus, Paul helps Heidegger to overcome the traditional way of conceptualizing human existence and outline a new philosophical approach. Likewise, Agamben overcomes Nietzsche's reading, and sees Paul as the proponent of a messianic apostleship that acts against any institutionalization or dogmatization of religious experience.

Along these three lines of investigations, in which the phenomenon of religion, the relation between faith and reason, and the resonances of Paul's letters in contemporary philosophy are examined, this volume offers new insights in the present-day debate on faith in philosophy. By combining interpretive readings and more systematic analyses, the volume maps the complex and fascinating relations among Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, who have powerfully influenced the way twentieth-century philosophy reflected on the themes of religion and faith. At the same time, the essays collected here show the extent to which these three thinkers remain pivotal sources of inspiration for discussions in philosophy of religion and metaphysics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The volume eventually documents that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein still lead us to rethink the relation between faith and rationality, regardless of whether we accept their theses on the phenomenon of religion or not.

Part One

The Phenomenon of Religion

Understanding Religious Faith: A Hermeneutical Approach¹

Ben Vedder

In today's philosophy, and not only there, but also in parts of the public debate, there is an intense discussion about the question of the meaning of religion; this is done in the form of the question into the existence of God. The public opinion seems to be that God does not exist, and that therefore religion and religious behavior are meaningless. In addition, philosophers who think that God's existence is unprovable regard religion, and religious behavior such as rites, to be meaningless, and therefore, superfluous. But wouldn't this mean that a large part of human behavior is meaningless? And would this conclusion be right, given that a large portion of humanity today understands itself as religious?

1. The impotence of onto-theological reason

The rejection of the meaningfulness of religion would, in my view, be justified if the God of the philosophical construction, as is the case in onto-theology, were identical with the God to whom people pray in rites and prayers. The God of the philosophical paradigm or the philosophical conceptuality is seen as identical with the God to whom one prays in rites, readings and sacraments (see Heidegger 1957, 64). In this case, the philosophical God is not distinguished from the God of faith and prayer. The rejection of the onto-theological paradigm, together with the effort to get an intellectual entrance to religion, raises the question of what the meaning of such a "superfluous" behavior that understands itself as religious could be.

¹ The present essay is part of the project *Overcoming the Faith-Reason Opposition: Pauline Pistis in Contemporary Philosophy*, financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO; project nr. 360-25-120), carried out at Radboud University and the University of Groningen.

From the point of view of a hermeneutical approach to religious behavior, we try to understand what someone is doing if he or she behaves religiously. The hermeneutical task is to ask for the meaning of something, especially if we don't see the meaning of that phenomenon, or if we don't see it yet. We then try to make something understandable for ourselves or for someone else. In other words, the question of the meaning of religion or religious behavior brings us into an explication of religion as a hermeneutics of religion.

What could that be—a hermeneutics of religion? In my book on hermeneutics, I differentiate among (1) *hermeneuse*, (2) hermeneutics, (3) philosophical hermeneutics and (4) hermeneutic philosophy (Vedder 2000, 9–23). It would go too far to explain here again these differentiations. This is not necessary because there it concerns a philosophical discussion about the status of philosophy. Therefore, I will confine myself to the first three. A *hermeneuse* is the concrete interpretation of a text, for instance, the Bible; the interpretation of the parable of the lost son is an example. It can be an interpretation of a piece of literature; this can be a text by Hegel or another author. In hermeneutics, by contrast, we are stricter: We ask for the rules according to which—and possibly, without even being aware of it—someone interprets a text. But in the question of religious behavior that concerns us at present, philosophical hermeneutics is the most important. In philosophical hermeneutics, we not only interpret a text, we not only ask for the rules that are used or are to be used, but we also ask especially for the philosophical presuppositions that are present in a text, or in this case, in someone's religious behavior.

Philosophical hermeneutics means also that something has to become understandable by reason. The understandability of religion is obtained and received by asking for the philosophical presuppositions. These presuppositions are to be expressed in an understandable way. The understandability is obtained through a common reason. In onto-theological reason, one of the most important presuppositions seems to be that someone prays or behaves religiously with regard to a God who exists and who must be seen as a highest and almighty being. The onto-theological paradigm then supports the understanding of religion. This is the dominant presupposition if we must believe today's approach. If this presupposition, which means this first position or stand, is not given, the whole building collapses.

To return now to the task of philosophical hermeneutics, we intend to make something understandable, or make it better understandable, by giving an explication of the proposition or by understanding the propositions from the

perspective of its presuppositions, which are its conditions of possibility. In this way, the task of hermeneutics is making someone or something understandable for another or for oneself. I explicate a behavior or a text to someone who doesn't understand what is meant in that situation or context. So a broader context, the context of presuppositions, is needed in order to understand the meaning of a certain behavior.

But whether something is understandable depends on, to a great extent, the historical situation in which what is said or meant takes place. For instance, in a family in which one is used to reading the Bible after dinner and in which everyone is familiar with the Bible, it is not necessary to explain what Dad is doing when he reads the Bible. But more explanation is needed if someone who wants to understand is completely unfamiliar with or alienated from reading the Bible, and is not familiar with the meaning of a biblical text or a certain behavior.

The explication is necessary if there is a situation of distance or alienation. The need for a hermeneutics of religion is the result of the alienation of religion. We see this also in the fact that hermeneutics appears on the scene in the modern age, when the obviousness of religious texts disappears, and therefore, must be called back by an explication that is supported by a common reason.

The Christian religious tradition has also become as unfamiliar as if it were a foreign religion. The Christian Holy days must be explained in the same way as the Ramadan of Islam. In today's culture, it is necessary to explicate what Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are. The immediate familiarity with these religious days has been lost.

Heidegger points out that where the experience of the Holy fades out in a culture, there also dancing and praying for a God are marginalized. This means that the understandability of an explication of praying has to lean on a context in which common experiences of the Holy can be thematized. Only within such a context of common understanding and experience is it possible for an explication to be understandable. Therefore, Heidegger can say that the experience of the Holy is a preliminary condition for the appearance of the gods, not the other way around. The experience of the Holy comes before the possible appearance of the gods (Vedder 2005a).

If it is said that the gods are gone and that we wait for new ones, as Heidegger does, then it means that the familiarity with the religious and the Holy is gone. The old gods are gone, and possible new ones have not come yet because the experience of the Holy is gone. Therefore, a hermeneutics of religion is also a symptom of a disappeared obviousness or understandability. Asking for the