

## Heidegger's "A-theism" as a Confrontation with Theological Questions

EGURO Fumihiko<sup>1</sup>

The University of Tokyo

### Abstract

The young Heidegger defined his philosophical position as "A-theism". This is generally considered to be the expression of his separation from his theological origin (Herkunft). Due to this generally accepted assumption, Sartre classified Heidegger as an atheistic existentialist. But Heidegger's atheism is completely different from Sartre's atheism, and making this difference clear is very important for understanding Heidegger's thought.

So my aim to focus upon Heidegger's atheism is as follows: 1. If we analyze the process of the formation of his atheism in detail, we can provide a persuasive explanation of Heidegger's relation to his theological origin as a *sequence* rather than as separation. 2. On the one hand, the principle of atheism expresses Heidegger's attitude towards theology. On the other hand, it provides an answer to Heidegger's important question: How does God enter into philosophy? For what the modern death of God or the end of theological questions means is not that these old questions have become "meaningless," but that the way they were framed and answered has lost its plausibility. Therefore, it is not that modern western philosophy is unburdened and unguided by theological questions, but that it should be a confrontation with the binding force of theological questions.

### 1 Introduction

In this paper, I shall elucidate Heidegger's "A-theism" in his early thought. In the 1920s Heidegger liked using the term of "A-theism" as an expression of his philosophical attitude toward theology. But after the last use of this "A-theism" in "GA26: *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928)," Heidegger never used it. Far from refraining from this use, Heidegger was denying the generally accepted characterization of him as an atheist. His denial of "A-theism" apparently seemed to mean a change in his philosophical standpoint, so that his interpreters has been correlating the change

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<sup>1</sup> fumihiko.e@gmail.com : Master Course Student, Department of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies, The University of Tokyo.

with Heidegger's turn<sup>2</sup> [Kehre] from the early thought to the later one. In fact, it is a remarkable tendency to positively consider the problem of God in the later Heidegger. For example, the title named "the last God [der letzte Gott]" is an important jointure [Fuge] in *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (cf., GA65, 403–417), written in 1936–1938 and published posthumously in 1989. Contrary to this dominant interpretation which discerns a disconnection of Heidegger's thought, this paper takes a different approach toward Heidegger's "A-theism." I shall argue that what it should be found out in "A-theism" is not that there exists an inexplicable discontinuity between the early and the later Heidegger's thought, particularly with regard to Heidegger's attitude toward theology, but that there exists a *continuous changing movement* from the early to the later thought.

• Considering a continuous changing movement in Heidegger's "A-theism", we are going to clarify the following three problems:

- (a) An appropriate interpretation of Heidegger's relationship to his theological origin [Herkunft] in the early Heidegger
- (b) The discovery of the matter of concern as the superior character of "I am" [ich bin] from the theological origin
- (c) The clarification of the reason Heidegger disuses the term of "A-theism" as a matter of principle in his later thought

## 2 Heidegger's relationship to his theological origin in the early Heidegger

### 2-1 Heidegger's theological origin

The "A-theism" as which the young Heidegger defined his philosophical position has been generally considered to be an expression of his separation from his theological origin [Herkunft]. But this interpretation contradicts the following Heidegger's suggestion, "Without this theological origin [Herkunft], I would never be on the path of thinking. But origin always remains future [Zukunft]" (GA12, 91)<sup>3</sup>, mentioned in "*On the Way to Language*." So we should analyze the formative process of his atheism in detail, and should find out in "A-theism" a sequence from Heidegger's origin rather than a separation from it.

In 1916, Heidegger decisively moved away from the system of Catholicism and his blind belief in God. This internal movement can be judged from the following Heidegger's confession to his friend Father Engelbert Krebs:

Epistemological insights that pass over into the theory of historical knowledge have

<sup>2</sup> In recent research, it is well known that the so-called "turn" does not simply mean Heidegger's turning point in thinking activity. (cf., Gethmann 1974, 21–29 : Hosokawa 1992, 17–46 446–459 : Philipse 1998, 233–246: Todoroki 2007, 320–331: Gotou 2008, 99–122)

<sup>3</sup> [The original text: (GA12, 91)]

Ohne diese theologische Herkunft wäre ich nie auf den Weg des Denkens gelangt. Herkunft aber bleibt stets Zukunft.

made the **system** of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me—but not Christianity and metaphysics, although I take the latter in a new sense. (Ott1988, 106)<sup>4</sup>

So, Heidegger moved away from “the *system* of Catholicism” at this time. Could this movement only mean the separation from his origin? But, in the letter, Heidegger also mentioned that “Christianity and metaphysics” gained a new meaning. What does it mean?

To answer these questions, we should discuss the formative process of Heidegger’s “A-theism” in “*The Theory of Categories and Meaning in Dun Scotus*”, which was written in very early years (1915) by Heidegger who had two identities as a theologian and as a philosopher. In this thesis, we can see that Heidegger pays attention to the tension between the human being and God, and this tension is derived from God’s transcendent character.

First, Heidegger suggests that the lifestyle [Lebenshaltung] in medieval times lies in the transcendent principle-relationship toward God [in dem transzendenten Urverhältnis der Seele zu Gott] (cf., GA1, 193).<sup>5</sup> Heidegger claims that this elucidation is important for philosophical research. That is to say, the young Heidegger discerns that “Precisely the existence of a theory of meaning within medieval Scholasticism reveals a *refined disposition for attentively listening in on the immediate life [das unmittelbare Leben] of subjectivity and its immanent contexts of sense* without having acquired a precise concept of the subject.” (GA1, 401: Sup, 63; *my emphasis*)<sup>6</sup> Thus, “the immediate life” in medieval theology clearly shows us the structure of human life [Leben].

Then, the reason there is a distinguished elucidation of life in theology is that it was always linked to God’s transcendence. Heidegger says as follows:

It (the concept of **analogy**) is the conceptual expression of the particular form of inner Dasein that is anchored in a primordial, *transcendent relation of the soul to God* and lived precisely in the Middle Ages with an unusual reserve. *The multiplicity of relations in life between God and soul, between the here-and-now and the beyond, are subject to change in virtue of the increasing distance or proximity (in a qualitatively intensive sense) between them at particular times. The metaphysical linkage accomplished through transcendence is at the same time a source of manifold oppositions and thus the source of the most*

<sup>4</sup> [The original text: (Ott1988, 106)]

Erkenntnistheoretische Einsichten, übergreifend auf die Theorie des geschichtlichen Erkennens haben mir das *System* des Katholizismus problematisch u. unannehmbar gemacht—nicht aber das Christentum und die Metaphysik, diese allerdings in einem neuen Sinne.

<sup>5</sup> [The original text: (GA1, 193)]

Besinnt man sich darauf, welch treibende Kraft und bleibende Macht das philosophisch-theologische Geistesleben für die ganze Lebenshaltung des mittelalterlichen Menschen darstellt, deren Grundstruktur gerade in dem transzendenten Urverhältnis der Seele zu Gott besteht, dann wird es nicht schwer halten, über die Unentbehrlichkeit und fundamentale Bedeutsamkeit der historischen Erforschung dieser Seite mittelalterlicher Kultur sich zu einigen.

<sup>6</sup> [The original text: (GA1, 401)]

Gerade die Existenz einer Bedeutungslehre innerhalb der mittelalterlichen Scholastik offenbart eine feine Disposition sicheren Hineinhörens in das unmittelbare Leben der Subjektivität und der ihr immanenten Sinnzusammenhänge, ohne daß ein scharfer Begriff des Subjekts gewonnen ist.

*abundant thriving of the immanent personal lives of individuals.* (GA1, 409: Sup, 67; *my emphasis*)<sup>7</sup>

The particular form of inner Dasein is connected with a “transcendent relation of the soul to God.” In addition, Heidegger discerns that the relation between the human being or “Dasein” and God produces the *increasing* distance [Entfernung] or proximity [Annäherung] at particular times, and that this *Christian metaphysical* linkage through *transcendence*, which is derived from both the increasing distance and proximity, is the source of *lives* of individuals. Hence transcendence does not mean a radical distancing from and loss of self (ibid.). But in transcendence, there precisely exists a life-relation that is built on a certain correlativity. So Heidegger concludes:

The scale of values does not therefore gravitate exclusively toward the transcendent but rather is as it were reflected back from the fullness and absoluteness of the transcendent and comes to rest in the *individual*. (GA1, 409: Sup, 67; *my emphasis*)<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, we should discern that the young Heidegger emphasizes the meaning of *individual* life character and that the individual meaning does not gravitate exclusively toward the transcendent and is not subject to Hegelian sublation [Aufhebung]. Thus the young Heidegger faces up with “the great task of a fundamental critical discussion of Hegel.” (GA1, 411: SP, 68) This point is important, because this task eventually has reached to the criticism of the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics in his later thought, and because this point clarifies the process that the young Heidegger’s “philosophy of reverent intimacy with God” (GA1, 410: SP, 68) in 1915 changes into “A-theism”. So, the young Heidegger thinks about the relationship between philosophy and God in the following way:

**Living spirit is as such essentially historical spirit in the widest sense of the word.**  
The true worldview is far removed from the merely fragmentary existence of a theory detached from life. Spirit can be conceptually grasped only when the total fullness of its accomplishments, i.e., its history, is lifted up within it, and with this constantly burgeoning fullness that is in the process of being philosophically conceptualized *a continually developing means for gaining a living conceptual grasp of the absolute spirit of God* is pro-

<sup>7</sup> [The original text: (GA1, 409)]

Er ist der begriffliche Ausdruck der bestimmten, im transzendenten Urverhältnis der Seele zu Gott verankerten Form inneren Daseins, wie es im Mittelalter in seltener Geschlossenheit lebendig war. Kraft der jeweiligen Entfernung oder Annäherung (im qualitativ intensiven Sinne) ändert sich die Mannigfaltigkeit der Lebensbezüge zwischen Gott und Seele, Jenseits und Diesseits. Die metaphysische Verklammerung durch die Transzendenz ist zugleich Quelle mannigfacher Gegensätzlichkeiten und damit reichsten Lebens des immanent persönlichen Einzellebens.

<sup>8</sup> [The original text: (GA1, 409)]

Die Wertsetzung gravitiert also nicht ausschließlich ins Transzendente, sondern ist gleichsam von dessen Fülle und Absolutheit reflektiert und ruht im Individuum.

vided. (GA1, 407–408: Sup, 66–67; *my emphasis*)<sup>9</sup>

To gain a living conceptual grasp of the absolute spirit of God, what philosophy can do is not that it directly grasps the concept of God itself, but that it only provides “a *continually developing* means” [ein sich fortwährend steigerndes Mittel] for the grasp. So this philosophy aims to consider the individual behavior of Being [Seinsart] toward never reached God; that is to say, the meaning of life [Leben] opened to the transcendent. This viewpoint leads to the discovery of “who-character” [Wer-heit] as the identity of Dasein, mentioned in “GA24: *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.” We can see that Heidegger’s genuine origin lies in this viewpoint, and that there exists his hidden leading inclination to rethink God-problem in the later thought.

## 2–2 The meaning of “A-theism”

After the aforementioned movement from “the *system* of Catholicism” in 1916, during the period from 1919 to 1928, Heidegger began to think that philosophy must be *a-theistic* as a matter of principle. Although this principle is not mentioned openly by Heidegger, we can find out it in an inconspicuous footnote to “*Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle (1922)*.”

“Atheistic” not in the sense of a theory such as materialism or the like. Any philosophy that understands itself in terms of what it is, that is, as the factual how of the interpretation of life, must know—and know it precisely if it also has an “*intimation*” [Abnung] of God—that this throwing of life back upon itself which gets actualized in philosophy is something that in religious terms amounts to *raising one’s hand* [Handaufhebung] against God. But philosophy is thereby only being honest with itself and standing firm on this, that is, it is comporting itself in a manner that is fitting to the only possibility of *standing before God* that is available to it as such. And here, “atheistic” means: keeping itself free from the temptations of that kind of concern and apprehension that only talks glibly about religiosity. Could it be that the very idea of a philosophy of religion, and especially if it does not take into account the facticity of human being, is pure nonsense? (GA62, 363: Sup, 193–194; *my emphasis*)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [The original text: (GA1, 407–408)]

*Der lebendige Geist ist als solcher wesensmäßig historischer Geist im weitesten Sinne des Wortes. Die wahre Weltanschauung ist weit entfernt von bloßer punktueller Existenz einer vom Leben abgelösten Theorie. Der Geist ist nur zu begreifen, wenn die ganze Fülle seiner Leistungen, d. h. seine Geschichte, in ihm aufgehoben wird, mit welcher stets wachsenden Fülle in ihrer philosophischen Begriffenheit ein sich fortwährend steigerndes Mittel der lebendigen Begreifung des absoluten Geistes Gottes gegeben ist.*

<sup>10</sup> [The original text: (GA62, 363)]

>Atheistisch< nicht im Sinne einer Theorie als Materialismus oder dergleichen. Jede Philosophie, die in dem, was sie ist, sich selbst versteht, muß als das faktische Wie der Lebensauslegung gerade dann, wenn sie dabei noch eine >Ahnung< von Gott hat, wissen, daß das von ihr vollzogene sich zu sich selbst Zurückreißen des Lebens, religiös gesprochen, eine Handaufhebung gegen Gott ist. Damit allein aber steht sie ehrlich, d. h. gemäß der ihr als solcher verfügbaren Möglichkeit vor Gott;atheistisch besagt hier: sich freihaltend von verführerischer, Religiosität lediglich beredender Besorgnis. Ob nicht schon die Idee einer Religionsphilosophie, und gar wenn sie ihre Rechnung ohne die Faktizität des Menschen macht, ein purer Widersinn ist?

Heidegger contends that philosophy amounts to raising one's hand [Handaufhebung] against God in religious terms. But philosophy also has "an intimation [Ahnung] of God." When philosophy succeeds in doing this "Handaufhebung" and in doing the throwing of life back upon itself, it can gain the only possibility of standing before God in "A-theism." From these remarks, we can confirm the radicalization of inclination in "*The Theory of Categories and Meaning in Dun Scotus*." For example, the relationship between "Handaufhebung" and "Ahnung" in "A-theism" is similar to the one between the increasing distance [Entfernung] and proximity [Annäherung] (GA1, 409). So the separation from "the *system* of Catholicism" does not mean the abandonment of God-problem. Then, what attitude does "A-theism" take toward religion itself? Heidegger remarks:

Questionability is not religious, although it alone might lead to a situation of religious decision. My comportment in philosophizing is not religious, even if as a philosopher I can also be a religious person. "The art resides precisely in that": to philosophize and, in so doing, to be genuinely religious; i.e., to take up factually one's worldly, an historiological-historical task in philosophy, in action and in a concrete word of action, though not in religious ideology and fantasy. (GA61, 197: Sup, 148)<sup>11</sup>

Hence, Heidegger refused any religious behavior in philosophizing, and from this point, we can clearly recognize his separation from the Catholic origin. But Heidegger claims that an historiological-historical task in philosophy can be *genuinely* religious. So Heidegger never denies religion itself in "A-theism".

Next, we need to pay attention to the meaning of "A" of "A-theism", because it expresses the above mentioned relationship between Being and God.

Philosophy, in its radical, self-posing questionability [Fraglichkeit], must be *a-theistic* as a matter of principle. Precisely on account of its basic intension, philosophy must not presume to possess or determine God. The more radical philosophy is, the more determinately is it on a path away from [weg] God; yet, precisely *in the radical actualization of the "away"[weg], it has its own difficult proximity to [bei])* God. For the rest, philosophy must not overly speculate because of that but has, instead, its own task to fulfill. (GA61, 197: Sup, 148)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [The original text: (GA61, 197)]

Fraglichkeit ist nicht religiös, sondern vermag überhaupt erst in die Situation religiöser Entscheidung zu führen. Ich verhalte mich nicht religiös im Philosophieren, wenn ich auch als Philosoph ein religiöser Mensch sein kann.»Die Kunst liegt aber darin«: philosophieren und dabei echt religiös zu sein, d. h. faktisch seine weltliche, historisch-geschichtliche Aufgabe im Philosophieren zu nehmen, in einem Tun und einer konkreten Tunswelt, nicht in religiöser Ideologie und Phantastik.

<sup>12</sup> [The original text: (GA61, 197)]

Philosophie muß in ihrer radikalen, sich auf sich selbst stellenden Fraglichkeit prinzipiell *a-theistisch* sein. Sie darf sich gerade ob ihrer Grundtendenz nicht vermessen, Gott zu haben und zu bestimmen. Je radikaler sie ist, umso bestimmter ist sie ein weg von ihm, also gerade im radikalen Vollzug des »weg« ein eigenes schwieriges »bei« ihm. Im übrigen darf sie sich nicht darob verspekulieren, sondern hat ihr 'Sach' zu tun.

Thus I think that “A” of “A-theism” has two meanings, which are never completely divorced each other. The first meaning is “away” [weg] from God, which creates the tension between Being and God. Derived from that, the second meaning has its own sense; that is, “its own difficult proximity to [ein eigenes schwieriges »bei«] God.” Hence, we should discern that this refusal of belief in God did not mean a refusal of God itself.

In conclusion, we see that Heidegger’s “A-theism” is an expression of a philosophical principle, and that it provokes *the tension between the human being and God*. From this, we can provide a persuasive explanation of Heidegger’s relationship to his theological origin as a *sequence* rather than as a *separation*. Furthermore the theological origin leads to rethink the problem of transcendence in his later thought in various ways. We are going to discuss the following long quotation, which is the last use of “A-theism” in 1928:

The problem of transcendence must be drawn back into the inquiry about temporality and freedom, and only from there can it be shown to what extent the understanding of being qua superior power [Übermächtiges], qua holiness, belongs to transcendence itself as essentially ontologically different. *The point is not to prove the divine ontically, in its “existence”, but to clarify the origin of this understanding-of-being by means of the transcendence of Dasein, i.e., to clarify how this idea of being belongs to the understanding-of-being as such.* The idea of being as a superior power can only be understood out of the essence of “being” and transcendence, only in and from the full dispersal belonging to the essence of transcendence, and not by an interpretation referring to an absolute Other [Du], nor to the *bonum* [the good] as value or as the Eternal. (Still remaining for consideration is being and *δαμόνιον*, the understanding of being and *δαμόνιον*. Being qua ground! Being and nothingness-*Angst*.) (GA26, 211 Anm.3: MFL, 165)<sup>13</sup>

The above is purposely not dealt with in the lectures, because precisely here and now, with the enormously phony religiosity, the dialectical illusion is especially great. It is preferable to put up with the cheap accusation of atheism, which, if it is intended ontically, is in fact completely correct. But might not the presumably ontic faith in God be at bottom godlessness? And might *the genuine metaphysician be more religious than the usual faithful, than the members of a “church” or even than the “theologians” of every confession?* (GA26, 211 Anm.3: MFL, 165; *my emphasis*)<sup>14</sup>

13 [The original text: (GA26, 211 Anm.3)]

Das Problem der Transzendenz ist in die Frage nach der Zeitlichkeit und nach der Freiheit zurückzunehmen, und erst von da kann gezeigt werden, inwiefern zur Transzendenz selbst, als wesentlich ontologisch differenter, das Verstehen von Sein qua Übermächtigem, qua Heiligkeit gehört. Es geht nicht darum, ontisch das Göttliche in seinem »Dasein« zu beweisen, sondern darum, den Ursprung dieses Seinsverständnisses aus der Transzendenz des Daseins, d. h. die Zugehörigkeit dieser Idee von Sein zum Seinsverständnis überhaupt zu erhellen. Nur aus dem Wesen von »Sein« und Transzendenz her, nur in und aus der vollen, zum Wesen der Transzendenz gehörigen Streuung (vgl. § 10, 6. Leitsatz) kann diese Idee des Seins als Übermacht verstanden werden, nicht aber in einer Auslegung auf ein absolutes Du hin, und auch nicht als bonum, als Wert oder als Ewiges. (Zu bedenken bleiben: Sein und *δαμόνιον* bzw. Seinsverständnis und *δαμόνιον*. Sein qua Grund! Sein und Nichts—*Angst*.)

14 [The original text: (GA26, 211 Anm.3)]

After the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger began to consider the idea of being as a superior power [Übermächtiges]. He also tries to answer the problem of God from the consideration of holiness [Heiligkeit]. Then, he suggests that the point is to clarify the origin of the divine understanding-of-being by means of the transcendence of Dasein.

In 1928, we can find out that he began to refrain from the use of “A-theism.” But now, we see a continuous changing movement in “A-theism,” and never delude ourselves with the literal change.

### 3 The superior character of “I am” [ich bin] from the theological origin

#### 3-1 The meaning of “I am”

We could argue that the young Heidegger accepted his leading motive of some philosophical problems from his theological origin. From these problems, we are going to pick up on the superior character of “I am” [ich bin].

We have already discussed that “A-theism” provokes tensions between the human being and God. From this, we contend that the young Heidegger’s interest is in the being-character of Dasein [sum= ich bin], and that this interest is derived from his theological origin. Heidegger indicates this point in the following passage:

The temptative—not in a religious sense; for the experience of it to be alive, there is not required a basis in religious experience. To be sure, the temptative, as a character of movedness, *first becomes visible through Christianity; visible: experienceable in factual life, able for me to experience it :»bin«bar.*( GA61, 154: PIA, 114 -115; *My emphasis*)<sup>15</sup>

The meaning of life [Leben] gives Heidegger a perspective of the superior character of “I am.” This “bin-bar” character leads to “Seinkönnen”(can-be), which is Heidegger’s basic term. And by “I am,” Heidegger suggests the following problems:

The formal indication of the “I am,” which is the indication that plays the leading role in the problematic of *the sense of the Being of life*, becomes methodologically effective by being brought into its genuine factual actualization, i.e., *by becoming actualized in the demonstrable character of the questionability* [“restlessness”] *of factual life as the concretely historiological question, “Am I?”* Here the “I” is to be taken purely in the sense of a reference to my concrete factual life in its concrete world, in its historiological circum-

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Dies wird in der Vorlesung mit Absicht nicht behandelt, weil gerade hier heutigentags, bei der gewaltsam unechten Religiosität, der dialektische Schein besonders groß ist. Lieber den billigen Vorwurf des Atheismus einstecken, der sogar, wenn er ontisch gemeint ist, völlig gerechtfertigt ist. Ob aber nicht der vermeintliche ontische Glaube an Gott im Grunde Gottlosigkeit ist? Und der echte Metaphysiker religiöser ist denn die üblichen Gläubigen, Angehörigen einer >Kirche< oder gar die >Theologen< jeder Konfession?

15 [The original text: (GA61, 154)]

Das Tentative—nicht religiös; es braucht keine religiöse Grunderfahrung für seine Erfahrung lebendig zu sein. Tentativ als Bewegtheitscharakter allerdings durch das Christliche erst sichtbar gemacht; sichtbar: im faktischen Leben erfahrbar, »bin«bar.



stances, and possible situation, within the history of the spirit. (GA61, 174: PIA, 131; *my emphasis*)<sup>16</sup>

In the concrete, factual actualization of the question, “Am I?,” *the sense of the “am”* must be experienced,... Instead, this factual questioning itself brings to maturity *a genuinely new questioning* which is thereby all the more urgent with regard to the object at issue, life, precisely as an object (in its *questionability*). This latter questioning concerns the meaning of Being “here,” in the sphere of the experience and possession of factual life; i.e., it concerns the determination of the sense of the “am.” (GA61, 175: PIA, 132; *My emphasis*)<sup>17</sup>

In these quotations, we encounter “questionability” [Fraglichkeit], which also plays an important role in the principle of “A-theism.” That is to say, this “questionability” is connected with the character of “away [weg] from God” in “A-theism.” This time, “questionability” provokes the superior character of “I am,” and leads to “a genuinely new questioning.” It is the question of the sense of the “am” that leads to the most important question in Heidegger’s philosophy, that is the question of “the meaning of Being [seiend].” And it also creates *the genuine “Newness”* in philosophy, which is completely different from the newness of other sciences.

Thus, we could see Heidegger’s continuous changing movement from the theological origin, *to the stage of discovery and forgetfulness of Being [seiend]*, which is open to the coming of newness and future [Zukunft] of philosophy.

### 3-2 “Newness” for philosophy

It is well known that there are several evaluations of Heidegger’s philosophy as a “New philosophy” that was born in the 20th century. But, we can point out that Heidegger’s true intention was not to have talked about “new things” in philosophy, notwithstanding these generally accepted evaluations (cf., GA61, 193-194:GA16, 674). Therefore, this attitude that refuses to talk about “new things” is derived from the original character of Heidegger’s thought. So we should pay attention to the character of Heidegger’s thinking activity as a *path* [Weg], and we should consider the meaning of the discovery of “Newness” for philosophy. Only from this consideration, we can understand

16 [The original text: (GA61, 174)]

Die für die Seinssinnproblematik von Leben führende formale Anzeige des »ich bin« wird in der Weise methodisch wirksam, daß sie in ihren genuinen faktischen Vollzug gebracht wird, d. h. in dem aufweisbaren *Fraglichkeitscharakter* (»Unruhe«) des faktischen Lebens sich vollzieht als das konkret historische Fragen: »bin ich?«, wobei »ich« zu nehmen ist lediglich im Sinne des Hinzeigens auf mein konkretes faktisches Leben in seiner konkreten Welt, in seiner geistesgeschichtlichen historischen Lage und Situationsmöglichkeit.

17 [The original text: (GA61, 175)]

Im konkreten faktischen Fragevollzug des »bin ich?« muß der Sinn des »bin« sich zur Erfahrung bringen lassen, ..... Vielmehr zeitigt dieses faktische Fragen in ihm selbst ein genuin neues, den befragten Gegenstand Leben damit aber gerade gegenständlich umso mehr vordrängendes (in seiner Fraglichkeit zeigendes) Fragen nach dem, was »hier«, im Umkreis des Erfahrens und Habens von faktischem Leben, Sein besagen soll, was es mit dem »bin« sinnmäßig für eine Bewandnis habe.

what, for Heidegger, a contribution to philosophy<sup>18</sup> is, and how a philosopher makes a contribution toward philosophy.

In this sentence, we point out that Heidegger's decisive contribution to philosophy lies in "seiend" (the present participle of Being in German) as enowning [Ereignis], which is the most important term in later Heidegger. And we also discuss the reflexive structure of seined (Being), which creates the philosophical "Newness" that originated from enowning. Heidegger's decisive contribution to philosophy consists in an elucidation of the multiple meanings of the following occurrence: "*Being is* [das Seiendes ist] = [Ereignis]," which is the basic experience that cannot be reduced to any other experiences for human beings. Then Heidegger's analysis of Being circulates through the enowning from the beginning to end. This circulating movement is defined by Heidegger as "letting Da-sein emerge from within the truth of Be-ing, in order to ground beings in the world and as such and to ground man in the midst of them" [aus der Wahrheit des Seyns das Da-sein entspringen lassen, um darin das Seiende im Ganzen und als solches, inmitten seiner aber den Menschen zu gründen].(GA65, 8) We insist that this circulating movement is expressed as the reflexive structure of philosophical "Newness" by Heidegger. Therefore, it is confirmed that Heidegger's contribution to philosophy is motivated by the reflexive structure of philosophical "Newness," and that this "Newness" is completely different from the newness of other sciences, which is aimed only at some "progress (cf., GA65, 3)." After this confirmation, and by paying attention to the context of Heidegger's discovery of "seiend", we can present the possibility of a unified interpretation of Heidegger's ontology. And in this paper, we have attempted to investigate Heidegger's theological origin [Herkunft], in order to find out *the stage of discovery and forgetfulness of "seiend."*

## 4 Heidegger's disuse of "A-theism" as a matter of principle in his later thought

### 4-1 Heidegger's "A-theism" and Sartre's atheism

It is well known that Sartre classified Heidegger as an atheistic existentialist in "*Existentialism is a Humanism*"<sup>19</sup>. In this discourse, Sartre says as follows:

Atheistic existentialism, which I represent, is more consistent. It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom *existence precedes essence*—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, *the human reality*<sup>20</sup>. (Sartre 1946, 21: EH, 22; *My emphasis*)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> It is also the name of Heidegger's second chief book (GA65: *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*).

<sup>19</sup> Sartre says, "what complicates the matter is that there are two kinds of existentialists: on one hand, the Christians, among whom I would include Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics; and, on the other, the atheistic existentialists, among whom we should place Heidegger, as well as the French existentialists and myself."(Sartre1946, 21:EH, 20)

<sup>20</sup> "The human reality" [la réalité humaine] is the translation of "Dasein" in French at that time.

<sup>21</sup> [The original text : (Sartre 1946, 21)]

L'existentialisme athée, que je représente, est plus cohérent. Il déclare que, si Dieu n'existe pas, il y a au moins

Sartre's existentialism does not exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God. However, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference. Thus Sartre concludes:

It is not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the real problem is not one of his existence; *what man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God.* (EH, 53–54; *My emphasis*)

Therefore, Sartre's atheism does not decide either for or against the existence of God. It remains stalled in indifference. Thus it is unconcerned with the religious question.

Contrary to what Sartre thinks, Heidegger refused to call himself an atheistic existentialist in his "Letter on Humanism (1946)." Heidegger remarks:

With the existential determination of the essence of man, therefore, nothing is decided about the "existence of God" or his "nonbeing," no more than about the possibility or impossibility of gods. *Thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of man from the relation of his essence to the truth of Being is atheism.* And what is more, this arbitrary classification betrays a lack of careful reading. (GA9, 350–351; BW, 252–253; *My emphasis*)<sup>22</sup>

We have already argued that there is an inexplicable discontinuity between the early and the later Heidegger concerning the use of "A-theism." However, a more careful consideration of this problem proves that this disuse does not mean the rejection of the principle of "A-theism," but the radicalization and clarification of that. It is confirmed by the following passage:

But with this reference the thinking that points toward the truth of Being as what is to be thought has in no way decided in favor of *theism*. *It can be theistic as little as atheistic.* (BW, 254; *My emphasis*)

Therefore, the point of this problem is not that this philosophical principle and this attitude toward theology are acceptable or meaningless for Heidegger, but that what Heidegger thinks and aims at by the use of this expression "A-theism" can no longer be described properly by this term.

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un être chez qui l'existence précède l'essence, un être qui existe avant de pouvoir être défini par aucun concept, et que cet être c'est l'homme ou, comme dit Heidegger, la réalité humaine.

22 [The original text: (GA9, 350–351)]

Mit der existenzialen Bestimmung des Wesens des Menschen ist deshalb noch nichts über das »Dasein Gottes« oder sein »Nicht-sein«, ebensowenig über die Möglichkeit oder Unmöglichkeit von Göttern entschieden. Es ist daher nicht nur übereilt, sondern schon im Vorgehen irrig, wenn man behauptet, die Auslegung des Wesens des Menschen aus dem Bezug dieses Wesens zur Wahrheit des Seins sei Atheismus. Diese willkürliche Einordnung läßt es aber außerdem noch an der Sorgfalt des Lesens fehlen.

This is because this expression, in a literal sense, is highly influenced by the binding force of an old-fashioned expression of atheism, where many philosophers have been using this term imply different meanings from Heidegger's one<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, this disuse also has the purpose of staying away from the risk that the contemporary reader confused Heidegger's "A-theism" with Nihilism or Sartre's atheism, which created a sensation at that time.

So we should try to correctly determine the hidden difference between Heidegger's "A-theism" and Sartre's atheism. This provides an answer to Heidegger's important question: How does God enter into philosophy?

Sartre defines "existentialist humanism" in the following way:

But there is another meaning to the word "humanism." It is basically this: man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized; and, on the other hand, it is in pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist. Since man is this transcendence, and grasps objects only in relation to such transcendence, he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence. *The only universe that exists is the human one—the universe of human subjectivity. This link between transcendence as constitutive of man (not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense that man passes beyond himself) and subjectivity (in the sense that man is not an island unto himself but always present in a human universe) is what we call "existentialist humanism."* This is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator other than himself and that he must, in his abandoned state, make his own choices, and also because we show that it is not by turning inward, but by constantly seeking a goal outside of himself in the form of liberation, or of some special achievement, that man will realize himself as truly human. (Sartre1946, 92–93; EH, 52–53; *My emphasis*)<sup>24</sup>

Sartre's "existentialist humanism" means the link between transcendence as constitutive of man and subjectivity. Thus, man becomes the legislator who can decide the meaning of universe. In addition, Sartre's transcendence is reduced to a goal outside of man which man is able to exist.

As far as a meaning of human-being or universe is reduced to subjectivity, Heidegger thinks that "existentialist humanism" is highly influenced by the binding force of the following onto-theological constitution.

<sup>23</sup> cf., (Heinemann1954: Bollnow1955)

<sup>24</sup> [The original text: Sartre1946, 92-93]

Mais il y a un autre sens de l'humanisme, qui signifie au fond ceci : l'homme est constamment hors de lui-même, c'est en se projetant et en se perdant hors de lui qu'il fait exister l'homme et, d'autre part, c'est en poursuivant des buts transcendants qu'il peut exister; l'homme étant ce dépassement et ne saisissant les objets que par rapport à ce dépassement, est au cœur, au centre de ce dépassement. Il n'y a pas d'autre univers qu'un univers humain, l'univers de la subjectivité humaine. Cette liaison de la transcendance, comme constitutive de l'homme—non pas au sens où Dieu est transcendant, mais au sens de dépassement—et de la subjectivité, au sens où l'homme n'est pas enfermé en lui-même mais présent toujours dans un univers humain, c'est ce que nous appelons l'humanisme existentialiste.

Because Being appears as ground, beings are what is grounded; the highest being, however, is what accounts in the sense of giving the first cause. When metaphysics thinks of beings with respect to the ground that is common to all beings as such, then it is logic as onto-logic. When metaphysics thinks of beings as such as a whole, that is, with respect to the highest being which accounts for everything, then it is logic as theo-logic. (GA11, 76: ID, 70–71; *My emphasis*)<sup>25</sup>

#### 4–2 The experience of holy and who-ness

The reason there is an important meaning in the relationship of Dasein to God is that he attempts to avoid the influence of onto-theo-logical constitution, and that he wants to secure the experience of holy [Heilig]. Thus, Heidegger mentions that “only from the truth of Being can *the essence of the holy* be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only *in the light of the essence of divinity* can it be thought or said what the word “God” is to signify.” (GA9, 351: BW, 255; *My emphasis*)<sup>26</sup> This experience of holy provokes the question of *who-ness*, which is distinguished from the question of *what-ness*.

Heidegger defines the character of who-ness as follows:

Sachheit, thingness, whatness, reality, realitas, or quidditas, is that which answers the question **Quid** est res, **what** is the thing? Even a rough consideration shows that the being that we ourselves are, the Dasein, cannot at all be **interrogated** as such by the question **What** is this? We gain access to this being only if we ask: **Who** is it? The Dasein is not constituted by whatness but—if we may coin the expression—**by whoness**. (GA24, 169: BPP, 119–120; *My emphasis*)<sup>27</sup>

The character of who-ness originates from the superior character of “I am,” which we have already argued in the context of Heidegger’s theological origin. Thus, the meaning of Dasein cannot be reduced to producedness, which is questioned by “What is this?.” In the onto-theo-logical

25 [The original text: (GA11, 76)]

Weil Sein als Grund erscheint, ist das Seiende das Gegründete, das höchste Seiende aber das Begründende im Sinne der ersten Ursache. Denkt die Metaphysik das Seiende im Hinblick auf seinen jedem Seienden als solchem gemeinsamen Grund, dann ist sie Logik als Onto-Logik. Denkt die Metaphysik das Seiende als solches im Ganzen, d. h. im Hinblick auf das höchste, alles begründende Seiende, dann ist sie Logik als Theo-Logik.

26 [The original text: (GA9, 351)]

Erst aus der Wahrheit des Seins läßt sich das Wesen des Heiligen denken. Erst aus dem Wesen des Heiligen ist das Wesen von Gottheit zu denken. Erst im Lichte des Wesens von Gottheit kann gedacht und gesagt werden, was das Wort »Gott« nennen soll.

27 [The original text: (GA24, 169)]

Sachheit, realitas oder quidditas, ist dasjenige, was auf die Frage antwortet: *quid* est res, *was* ist die Sache? Schon die rohe Betrachtung zeigt: Das Seiende, das wir selbst sind, das Dasein, kann als solches mit der Frage, *was* ist das?, überhaupt nicht *befragt* werden. Zu diesem Seienden gewinnen wir nur Zugang, wenn wir fragen: *wer* ist es? Das Dasein ist nicht durch die Washeit, sondern—wenn wir den Ausdruck bilden dürfen—durch die *Werheit* konstituiert.

constitution, “the primary and direct reference to the being of a being lies in the *production* of it. And this implies that *being of a being* means nothing but *producedness*.” (GA24, 213: BPP, 150). Hence, the experience of holy leads us to destroy the onto-theo-logical constitution.

In this point, we can discover Heidegger’s tendency to rethink the problem of God in the later thought. “*The god-less thinking* which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the *divine* God. *Here this means only: god-less thinking is more open to him than onto-theo-logic would like to admit.*” (ID, 72: *My emphasis*)

On this account, Heidegger’s later attempt will renew the concept of transcendence. Heidegger remarks:

Through the ontological interpretation of Dasein as being-in-the-world no decision, whether positive or negative, is made concerning a possible being toward God. It is, however, the case that *through an illumination of transcendence* we first achieve an adequate concept of Dasein, with respect to which it can now be asked how the relationship of Dasein to God is ontologically ordered. (GA9, 159 Anm56: cf., GA9, 351; BW, 253; *My emphasis*)<sup>28</sup>

This mention does not conflict with what we find out in “A-theism” as a matter of principle. Therefore we can observe a continuous changing movement from the early to the later thought.

## 5 Conclusion

The problem of Heidegger’s “God” has received increasing attention from researchers in recent times; this is because he attempts to answer the question, “how does God enter into philosophy?” especially in modern Western philosophy. In this paper, we point out that this problem is far from an old question that has not been a genuine problem in modern philosophy. On the contrary, it is of great importance for modern philosophy to rethink the problem of “God” in the 21st century. For what the modern death of God or the end of theological questions means is not that these old questions have become “meaningless,” but that the way in which they were framed and answered has lost its plausibility. Therefore, it is not that modern western philosophy is unburdened and unguided by theological questions, but that it should confront the binding force of theological questions. Heidegger himself confronts this problem in consideration for the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics.

In addition, we confirm that Heidegger’s attitude toward treating the problem of “God” is with the intention of reconsidering the problem of “transcendence.” Correctly, his thinking activity

<sup>28</sup> [The original text: (GA9, 159 Anm56: cf., GA9, 351)]

Mit der existenzialen Bestimmung des Wesens des Menschen ist deshalb noch nichts über das »Dasein Gottes« oder sein »Nicht-sein«, ebensowenig über die Möglichkeit oder Unmöglichkeit von Göttern entschieden. Es ist daher nicht nur übereilt, sondern schon im Vorgehen irrig, wenn man behauptet, die Auslegung des Wesens des Menschen aus dem Bezug dieses Wesens zur Wahrheit des Seins sei Atheismus. Diese willkürliche Einordnung läßt es aber außerdem noch an der Sorgfalt des Lesens fehlen.

is aimed at grounding “the movement of transcendence of Dasein,” in consideration for a reflexive structure of seined [Being]. From this point of view, we can confirm that there exists the continuous changing movement between the theological origin [Herkunft] and the *coming* future [Zukunft] of philosophy. Moreover, a successive “turn” [Kehre] in Heidegger’s thinking is observed.

## 6 Questions for further discussion and study

### 6-1 The character of who-ness and the subtle difference between production and creation.

We have already confirmed that the character of who-ness stands out in the theological context, in virtue of the close relationship between human beings and God. I think that this character of who-ness gives Dasein the character of indefiniteness [Unbestimmtheit], which is the source of the most abundant multiplicity of Dasein’s mode of feeling [Stimmung]. Moreover, this feeling has *already* been sent from Being’s vocation [Bestimmung] in Being’s history [Geschick], when Dasein finds out to be in that mode of feeling. This Heideggerian “history of Being” originates from *eschatology*.

Therefore, the precedent character of history [Geschick], which creates the character of who-ness or that of Being’s “face” if you like, is deeply associated with the Hebraic concept of “creation”, which is distinguished from the Hellenic “production” [ποίησις]. It is well known that Emmanuel Lévinas renewed the Hebraic concept of creation<sup>29</sup>. Lévinas reinterprets this ancient concept and attempts to criticize Heidegger’s philosophy. However, despite Lévinas’ daring attempt, Heidegger does not really stand on a secure footing of the genuine Hellenic tradition, even in later thought. But Heidegger’s attempt is aimed at leaping the abyss between Hellenism and Hebraism. In consideration for this point, we can explore the genuine relationship between Heidegger and Lévinas. Furthermore, we can also clarify their respective idea of the concepts of Hellenism and Hebraism.

### 6-2 “Destruktion” as a form of confrontation with the whole Western tradition.

In addition, by focusing on Heidegger’s theological origin, we can confirm that Heidegger’s basic concept of “destruction” [Destruktion] originates from Martin Luther’s *destructio* (in Latin)<sup>30</sup>. From this confirmation, we can examine why Heidegger moved away from the dogmatic system of Catholicism, and ascertain why Heidegger’s activity of thinking always confronts the whole Western tradition.

29 cf., (Lévinas TI, DMT, DQVI)

30 In 1923, Heidegger mentioned that the young Luther was his philosophical companion. He remarked: Companions in my searching were *the young Luther* and the paragon Aristotle, whom Luther hated. Impulses were given by Kierkegaard, and Husserl opened my eyes. (GA63, 5: *Ontology*, 4: *My emphasis*: cf., Van Buren1994a; Mcgrath2006) [Begleiter im Suchen war der junge Luther und Vorbild Aristoteles, den jener haßte. Stöße gab Kierkegaard, und die Augen hat mir Husserl eingesetzt.]

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