

# ○ BACK TO THE FUTURE

## READING HEIDEGGER READING PAUL

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This piece is a close reading of Martin Heidegger's lectures on Paul from 1920–21. It focuses partly on Heidegger's early phenomenological philosophy, partly on his interpretation of 'primordial Christian experience of life', including his discussion of *parousia* in Paul.

### HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

*The Phenomenology of Religious Life* came out in 1995 as Volume 60 of Martin Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. The lectures that Heidegger had given as a private lecturer at Freiburg University in the winter semester of 1920/21 and the summer semester of 1921 were thus published in their entirety, together with the draft of a lecture series prepared in 1918/19 that he never in fact gave. The latter concerns the philosophical foundations of mediaeval mysticism, whereas the former partly deals with Augustine and neo-Platonism, and partly constitutes what Heidegger called an introduction to the phenomenology of religion. The present paper focuses on the latter aspect, with special reference to Heidegger's reading of St. Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Heidegger's 'Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion' is divided into two main parts, which in turn are subdivided into a series of chapters and paragraphs. This division reveals that Heidegger sees the study of the concept of religion, and of Paul and early Christianity, first and foremost as an occasion to formulate his own phenomenological philosophy. Thus the first main part partly contains a discussion and critique of Ernst Troeltsch' (1865–1923) philosophy of religion. Heidegger claims here that Troeltsch' thinking leads away from a true understanding of the phenomenon of religion, because it embarks from a false philosophical foundation. Partly Heidegger seeks to show that philosophy must be formulated as a phenomenology if it is to succeed in approaching a real understanding of what he calls the factual experience of life (*die faktische Lebenserfahrung*). It is not until the second main part that Heidegger comments on Paul – in particular the Letter to the Galatians and the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians – and the primordial Christian experience of life (*die urchristliche Lebenserfahrung*). The transition from the first to the second part is fairly abrupt, and the editor points out that Heidegger appears to have abandoned the first, methodological, i.e. philosophical part of the series because an anonymous person attending them raised objections – though what objections is not known. Be that as it may, immediately after this episode Heidegger embarked on the second main part (Heidegger 2004: 255). The titles given to the two main parts are indicative: the first is called 'Methodological Introduction. Philosophy, Factual Life Experience, and the Phenomenology of Religion'; the second: 'Phenomenological Explication of Concrete Religious Phenomena in Connection with the Letters of Paul'. The second, in other words, was to be more concrete. And so it is, but only a little.

These apparently insignificant details offer a clue that Heidegger's aim in these lectures is to set out an ambitious philosophical programme, not to provide a detailed exegesis of Paul's letters. These lectures in the phenomenology of religion should thus be seen as preparatory sketches towards Heidegger's groundbreaking work *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Stated briefly, they represent a

move away from the Kantian philosophy of mind towards phenomenology. Heidegger's reflections on Paul and early Christianity are in other words opening shots in a tremendous philosophical showdown. By way of introduction, therefore, it is necessary to give an account of Heidegger's phenomenological thinking as it is expressed in *Phenomenology*.

## PHILOSOPHY IS PHENOMENOLOGY

The aim here is to describe certain key features of Heidegger's early philosophy, in order thereby to show as clearly as possible the matters at issue in Heidegger's lectures on the phenomenology of religion.

By way of introduction, Heidegger distinguishes between philosophical and scientific concepts: the latter aim to give a precise understanding of the object of research, while the former are vacillating, vague and fluctuating (Heidegger 2004: 3). He then goes on to ask why common ground can nevertheless be found between science and philosophy. His provisional answer is that both are objectivised through language and therefore appear as objects that apparently contain a decipherable meaning (Heidegger 2004: 4). Heidegger's at once simple yet fundamental distinction between science and philosophy is the pivotal point in his thinking. What is at stake here is the phenomenological method originally put forward by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), which Heidegger adopted and went on to develop further. In brief, Husserl sought to fight a phenomenological battle against what he saw as a prejudice, namely, that reality exists independently of human consciousness. This prejudice rests on the illusion of an immediate – unmediated – understanding of the world, and Husserl therefore refers to it as the natural or naive approach. It is thus an important point that the prejudice is not simply a prejudice of science, but relates to fundamental aspects of human understanding. According to Husserl, it was now the task of phenomenology to deal with this natural approach without accepting its validity, the aim being to reveal and expose the prejudice and thereby destroy it. Husserl refers to this manoeuvre as the phenomenological *epoché* (cessation) and *reduction*.<sup>2</sup> In the light of this, Heidegger rejects the view of the relationship between subject and object, between consciousness and its object, put forward by the traditional philosophy of mind, in favour of investigating the problem of understanding. Philosophy, for Heidegger, does not offer a view of the world. To philosophise, on the contrary, is to be aware of oneself as an experiencing being. Philosophy should therefore limit its concerns to the 'preliminary questions' (Vorfragen) associated with the problem of understanding, and should straightforwardly make a virtue of the fact that it is itself in such a plight that it can no longer provide a complete understanding or interpretation of 'what is proper to philosophy' (Heidegger 2004: 4).<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger now seeks to analyse the three words, introduction, phenomenology and religion that appear in the title of the lecture series, and starts by posing a rhetorical question: does it make any sense at all to speak of an introduction to the phenomenology of religion? Can one introduce something in philosophy in the same way as one does in science? According to Heidegger, current philosophy assumes that, just because science has its origins in philosophy, philosophy itself is a science. This in turn means that one often encounters a certain philosophical uncertainty in scholarly introductions to scientific works. From a scientific point of view, Heidegger claims, it seems quite simply fruitless and unacademic to enquire into the nature of philosophy (Heidegger 2004: 6). For philosophy, on the other hand, it is quite essential that the

subject be properly introduced. The question of the nature of philosophy must be dealt with before one can proceed to ‘positive work’ (Heidegger 2004: 6). But he goes yet further. ‘The fact that philosophy *constantly* has to attain clarity about its essence is a deficiency only if the idea of science is cited as the norm’ (Heidegger 2004: 6). Thus philosophy will never be able to arrive at a final definition of its own nature, since it originates from the factual experience of life (Heidegger 2004: 7). And a little further on he sets out the programme ahead: ‘Philosophy is to be liberated from its ‘secularization’ to a science, or to a scientific doctrine of world-views’ (Heidegger 2004: 8).

Here, then, Heidegger has given a phenomenological explanation of how the word ‘introduction’ should be understood. But one searches in vain for a precise definition of the last word in the title: religion. Instead he embarks on a criticism of Ernst Troeltsch’s philosophy of religion. Heidegger seeks to show how the current philosophy of religion, here represented by Troeltsch, is dependent on the philosophy of mind, which reduces philosophy to science. Thus, according to Heidegger, the aim of Troeltsch’s thinking is to arrive at a scientifically valid definition of the essence of religion (Heidegger 2004: 14). What is wrong with this concept of religion, according to Heidegger, is that religion is understood as an object, just as was the case with philosophy, and through being conceptualised is reduced to something secondary and derivative. From a phenomenological viewpoint, however, it is crucial that the phenomenological method be ‘phenomenon-adequate’ (fænomenadækvat) (Zahavi 2004: 27).<sup>4</sup> According to Heidegger, Troeltsch’s concept of religion is not ‘adequate’ in this sense, since he defines religion on the basis of a philosophy that in turn is defined on the basis of science. Religion thereby becomes an object of consciousness, and Heidegger concludes that the philosophy of religion is thus turned into a science of religion (Heidegger 2004: 19).

With these few remarks we have outlined the main features of Heidegger’s methodological reflections in *Phenomenology*. A far more detailed presentation would be necessary in order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of what the early Heidegger means precisely by the factual experience of life. This applies not least to his reflections on the historicity of existence. However, it is outside the scope of the present study to explore these themes. Nevertheless, one last aspect should be highlighted before we turn to Heidegger’s reading of Paul: namely, the concept of *formal indication* (formale Anzeige), which plays a significant role in the early Heidegger. With this methodological tool Heidegger seeks to show that it is not a matter of explaining what it means to exist, but rather of understanding how human beings relate to their experiences (Heidegger 2004: 42–45).

The factual experience of life includes both a ‘how’ and a ‘what’, and the formal indication is intended to help shift the gaze from the *what* of experience to the *how*. The facticity of understanding however includes another aspect, namely the enactment of meaning or understanding. Thus what we have is a tri-partite structure: ‘content-sense’ (Gehaltsinn): *what* is experienced; ‘relational-sense’ (Bezugssinn): *how* it is experienced; and finally ‘enactment-sense’ (Vollzugssinn), which refers to the enactment of meaning (Heidegger 2004: 43). It can be only *formally indicated* that the enactment of meaning – which must be achieved by the philosopher him/herself – presupposes attention to how the subject of experience relates to his/her own experience. All philosophical concepts are thereby formally indicated in accordance with Heidegger’s introductory remarks concerning the vague and fluctuating nature of philosophical concepts. The philosoph-

ical concept is a guide, an indicator, nothing more (Granberg 2003: 150f.) Philosophy begins with factual life and must return to it. All philosophy is completed or consummated in its application, an application that we cannot, however, say anything about. The demand for philosophy to return to the factual life is a crucial feature in defining the formal indicator. In several places Heidegger describes the manoeuvre as ‘a turning around’ or ‘*transformation*’ (Heidegger 2004: 8). This brings us to his reading of Paul.

## THE READING OF PAUL

Here we must limit ourselves to two points: Heidegger’s return to the question of the task that the philosophy of religion should address, especially in connection with the primordial Christian religion, and his in-depth analysis of the First Letter to the Thessalonians. First, however, a few words about the Letter to the Galatians.

With his phenomenological approach to religion Heidegger seeks to gain a prior understanding of an ‘original’ approach to Paul. In using the term ‘original’, Heidegger is not thinking in terms of either history or psychology. His aim is only to give a formal indication of how Paul *relates to* the experience of Christ, and thereby to turn the interpreter’s gaze in the right direction. Heidegger speaks of using the formal indication ‘only [to] open an access to The New Testament’ (Heidegger 2004: 47). The formal indication ‘renounces the last understanding that can only be given in genuine religious experience’ (Heidegger 2004: 47). He then goes on to say that ‘all concepts [in the Pauline conceptual universe] are to be understood from out of the context of Christian consciousness’ (Heidegger 2004: 48), the final goal of which is *salvation* (*hê sôtêria*) and *life* (*hê zôê*, cf. Gal 6:8). The historical research of the theologians is significant here, in Heidegger’s view, because, despite the fact that they had no understanding of phenomenology, their research reveals this consciousness and in this sense stands apart from ‘modern positions’ (Heidegger 2004: 48). By ‘modern positions’ Heidegger means, for example, Luther’s interpretation of the Letter to the Galatians. But the Letter to the Galatians, in Heidegger’s view, is meaningful precisely because it tells us about Paul’s religious development. What is striking about it, says Heidegger, is how undogmatic it is, even though, like the Letter to the Romans, it has been taken as a theological tract. What Heidegger is concerned to show here is that all the concepts contained in the Letter are subordinate to Paul’s religious consciousness i.e. to the way in which he relates to the content of the faith that he is discussing. It is therefore vain to search for a theological system in Paul’s writings (Heidegger 2004: 51).<sup>5</sup>

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND PRIMORDIAL CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY

Following these remarks on Paul’s fundamental religious experiences and the Letter to the Galatians, Heidegger now asks what these have to do with the philosophy of religion. He thus resumes his earlier train of thought and reminds us that the philosophy of religion is dependent on the concept of philosophy. An erroneous philosophy leads to an erroneous philosophy of religion. Unfortunately Heidegger does not provide any more detailed definition of the relationship between philosophy and religion, but he appears to juxtapose the two when he says that it is a mistake to believe that religion ‘is to be projected into an understandable context’ (Heidegger 2004: 52). What Heidegger means here is that religion, too, avoids the subject-object schema and must therefore be subordinate to the subject’s experiences. If, on the other hand, one insists

on seeing primordial Christian religiosity only as a historical phenomenon, one thereby constructs an object that is dependent on a specific context, such as the consciousness of a particular region or epoch – a consciousness that is merely one among many possibilities and types (Heidegger 2004: 52). Primordial Christianity, like every other type of religion, is thus defined as a function of a particular geographical region or historical period. This unfortunate mixing of (historical) science and philosophy can be seen in the current philosophy of religion (Troeltsch again), which tends to work on and interpret the multiplicity of types of religion from two premises: ‘1. Religion is a case or an example of an extra-temporal lawfulness. 2. From religion only that which has the character of consciousness will be taken up’ (Heidegger 2004: 52). That is to say, the philosophy of religion gathers particular instances of religion and generalises from these; similarly, it poses only those questions that fit within the subject-object hermeneutics of the philosophy of mind: what is ‘extra-temporal’ is actually consciousness itself, which is treated by the philosophy of mind as a non-historical, autonomous phenomenon. But does Heidegger himself not also pose particular questions when he seeks to understand primordial Christian religiosity through his own exclusive, phenomenological method? Heidegger does pose the question himself, but believes he can avert the problem by answering that ‘it is the tendency of phenomenological approach to experience the object itself in its originality’ (Heidegger 2004: 53). Which is tantamount to saying that the philosophy-of-mind treatment of precise concepts is not adequate to the phenomenon – i.e. to religion as an object. Heidegger hereby implies that there is ‘something’ in religiosity that is completely crucial, namely the *how* of religion: how do Paul and the primordial Christian congregation relate to their experiences of Christ? This *how*, according to Heidegger, is overlooked if one treats the Pauline letters as discourses containing a *what* that can be apprehended without the *how* of discourse.

Heidegger’s remarks suggest that phenomenological philosophy alone is phenomenon-adequate in relation to the primordial Christian religion. Not surprisingly, therefore, Heidegger’s own proposal for an adequate reading of Paul is based on a phenomenology of religion. The question now is how the ‘how’ of discourse can be made an object of analysis? Is religion perhaps to be understood as something irrational, for example the feeling of being overwhelmed by the sacred? No, says Heidegger. In part what he is opposing here is a hermeneutics based on empathy, which he sees as a variant on the philosophy of mind, in that it presupposes that one consciousness, one subject, can think itself into another consciousness, which then becomes simply an object. And in part he is attacking the notion of religion as something completely other, e.g. as holy or sacred. There is no reference here to the issue raised in the formal indication: that of glimpsing how the subject experiences (Heidegger 2004: 54f.).

But what about the results produced by the historians of religion? Here Heidegger concedes, as mentioned above, that there is a place for a certain amount of objective, historical analysis. But ultimately historical research suffers from the fact that it lacks a leading ‘fore-conception’ (*Vorgriff*) (Heidegger 2004: 53). To be sure, Heidegger points out, Paul’s preaching in the Letter to the Galatians reminds one a good deal of the teachings of the Stoic-Cynic wandering preachers of the time. But does this comparison in itself lead to an understanding of Paul’s text, Heidegger asks (Heidegger 2004: 55)? His assumption here is that all the motives that might be of interest for a historical understanding are given in the factual experience of life (Heidegger 2004: 53). Notice that for Heidegger the factual experience of life is not an expression of a modern position that is read into the text, but an expression of a formal definition of the historicity of understand-

ing. As soon as religious historical research 'is subjected to a phenomenological *destruction* (Heidegger 2004: 54) it can become, with its perceptions, an auxiliary discipline that stimulates the phenomenological interpretation of religion.

How then to define primordial Christian religiosity? As mentioned above, it will not do to draw a categorical distinction between the rational and the irrational. These categories are simply the misleading products of the subject-object hermeneutics and thereby bear witness to the fact that consciousness, to which rationality is linked, constructs yet another object, namely the irrational (Heidegger 2004: 54). When one speaks of what remains residually mysterious to our reason – the realm that religion is supposed to be concerned with – this is essentially just an 'aesthetic play with things that are not understood' (Heidegger 2004: 55). But is there perhaps a leading motif in Paul's calling, preaching and exhortation that has to do with the meaning of religiosity itself (Heidegger 2004: 55)? Heidegger believes this is the case, and accordingly proposes a double phenomenological thesis that: '1. Primordial Christian religiosity is in primordial Christian life experience and is itself such. 2. Factual life experience is historical. Christian religiosity lives temporality as such' (Heidegger 2004: 55). These somewhat obscure formulations are intended to show that an understanding of primordial Christian religiosity cannot be sought through the historical study of particular periods or through the formation of concepts within the philosophy of mind, but must be sought in the facticity and historicity of life experience. In popular terms, the religiosity of Paul and the early Christians is embedded in the question: what does it mean to exist? That is to say, it is embedded in a question of ontology. In so far as philosophy is phenomenological, it is also ontological.

According to Heidegger, the fact that Paul's preaching here is couched in the form of letters is an advantage, because the *how* in his preaching is communicated to others. One cannot reach any decisive results by comparing the New Testament literature, including Paul's letters, with the contemporary literature of the time, he claims, since there is no great difference between them (Heidegger 2004: 56). On the other hand it is true that '[i]n analysing the character of the letter, one must take as the only point of departure the Pauline situation and the How of the necessary motivation of the communication in letters. The content proclaimed, and its material and conceptual character, is then to be analyzed from out of the basic phenomenon of proclamation' (Heidegger 2004: 56). And a little later: 'One may not isolate the epistolary character, nor bring into the problem the literary question of style. They are not primary. The epistolary style itself is the expression of the writer and his situation' (Heidegger 2004: 57). Here, then, Heidegger settles accounts with the prevailing tendency, found for example in the Tübingen school, in which a text such as the First Letter to the Thessalonians was perceived as not being genuine because of its lack of dogmatic content (Heidegger 2004: 56). For Heidegger the opposite is the case: it is precisely this letter that is crucial in understanding primordial Christian religiosity, because the *how* of the letter plays a much greater role than the *what*. This brings us to Heidegger's reading of the First Letter to the Thessalonians.

## THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

In his reading of the First Letter to the Thessalonians Heidegger distinguishes programmatically between the 'object-historical' (objektgeschichtliche) situation and the letter situation (Heidegger 2004: 61). It is a question of our completing the letter with Paul, says Heidegger (Heidegger 2004: 61). The aim is to follow *how* Paul communicates his own experiences to the Thessalonians.

First of all, however, Paul's own relationship to these experiences must be revealed. We can recognise here Heidegger's distinction between 'content' (Gehalt) and 'relation' (Bezug): the way in which someone experiences something (Bezug) is crucial to the content of the experience (Gehalt). As suggested earlier, Heidegger sees the epistolary genre as exemplary, precisely because the letter-form privileges the meaning of the relationship over the meaning of the content, and among Paul's letters the First Letter to the Thessalonians is especially governed by this 'relationship meaning.' The advantage of this, according to Heidegger, is that it makes it possible to reveal Paul's relationship to his own experiences (in this respect, as we have seen, the Letter to the Galatians is also important), in so far as precisely what Paul wishes to do is to pass these experiences on to the Thessalonians. What is happening here, then, is a sharing of knowledge that is anchored in a common experience.<sup>6</sup>

At this point any critically-trained exegete will surely sound the alarm and object that Heidegger's method is naive, in so far as he appears to take Paul at his word without critically questioning the power associated with Paul's apostolic and charismatic authority. What appears to be missing, quite simply, is a hermeneutics of suspicion. Two points should be mentioned in relation to this objection: first, Heidegger is wary of imbuing the text with motives that – in an ambiguous formulation – cannot be found in the text itself. For example, to claim that one can perceive a hegemonic praxis in the Pauline letters would, in Heidegger's view, be an example of modern interpretation. To be sure, Heidegger himself to the highest degree grafts his own phenomenological philosophy onto the text, but at the same time he claims that there exists a correspondence between the primordial Christian and the factual experience of life. It is not unthinkable, of course, that hegemonic praxis could, in the same way, constitute a link between two epochs ('there/then' and 'here/now') – in other words, that hegemony could constitute a form of experience-based *Vorgriff* or *Ansatz* – but paradoxically this would go against Heidegger's existential ontology. Moreover, Heidegger again rejects the hermeneutics of empathy by referring to its dependence on the subject-object schema. To imagine oneself into Paul's situation is to privilege the aspect of *content* and thereby to construct something objective – a primary thing to which the subject must relate empathetically. Thus the problem of empathy is epistemologically constructed (Heidegger 2004: 61f.). Nevertheless, Heidegger admits that there is a problem here, and he identifies language as the sinner. Precisely through language, any expression is reduced to something that exists: an object. Thus Paul's words, as a text, ineluctably become an object. But in factual experience we have an all-embracing situation that includes the triad of the '*surrounding world*' (Umwelt), the '*communal world*' (Mitwelt) and the '*self-world*' (Selbstwelt) (Heidegger 2004: 8). The human being is always in a situation, and this fact of being in the world is much more complex and all-embracing than the subject-object schema or the idea of an autonomous consciousness would suggest. This complexity must be maintained if the absolute historical in a phenomenological sense is to be preserved. When one of the three aspects is privileged in the analysis, the triadic structure is temporarily dissolved or abolished (the problem of 'emphasis' (Abhebung)) (Heidegger 2004: 62), but the other aspects reverberate with it nevertheless. In the factual experience of life there is an unbreakable connection between the surrounding-world, the communal-world and the self-world, and the goal of philosophy is a return to this facticity: 'The return to the original-historical is philosophy' (Heidegger 2004: 63).<sup>7</sup>

In terms of methodology there must be a conversion from the object-historical to the enactment-historical, to the situation understood phenomenologically – as opposed to ‘condition’ (Lage), which is used with reference to the historical situation. And since a situation is not a thing or an object it cannot be projected into our consciousness. For example, it is not possible to deduce Paul’s consciousness from an object-historical definition of Paul’s outside world. This is because something ‘like an I’ (Ichlich) (Heidegger 2004: 63f.) is involved in every situation. But it is not that the I or the ego creates unity in the situation’s diversity. For something not-I is also involved in the situation. What matters, once again, is to avoid the subject-object schema: what is not I is not apprehended by the I, but belongs to ‘Being like an I’ (Heidegger 2004: 64). Heidegger forms his distinction between the like an I and the not-I through a critique of J.G. Fichte’s (1762–1814) idealistic subject-philosophy. Heidegger cites Fichte’s famous sentence: ‘The I posits the not-I’ (Das Ich setzt das Nicht-Ich) (Heidegger 2004: 64) and goes on to modify it with the help of the following: ‘That which is ‘like an I’ *is* and *has* the not-I, the not-I merely *is* and does not *have*’ (Das Ichliche *ist* und *hat* das Nichtichliche, das Nichtichliche *ist* bloss und *hat* nicht) (Heidegger 2004: 64). The point is that being in Heidegger is defined as relating to the self; that is to say, I relate to the not-I, but I do not posit (predicatively) the not-I. The not-I in an indeterminate sense is characterised by its being (on an equal footing with the I), but cannot relate to itself and therefore does not ‘have’ a world.

What, then, has happened to Paul and the Thessalonians? Yes, object-historically speaking some of the Thessalonians have joined Paul, cf. Acts 17:4. However, if we look at the First Letter to the Thessalonians the perspective changes from the third person to the first and second person: Paul ‘has’ the Thessalonians in a phenomenological rather than an instrumental sense; in other words, the Thessalonians’ situation enters into Paul’s own situation, phenomenologically speaking. Paul’s relationship to the Thessalonians is not that of a subject to an object but, on the contrary, becomes part of what we could call the fundamental conditions of Paul’s subjectivity, or, in Heidegger’s terms, his self-world. Concepts such as hope, joy and glory are linked not primarily to the Thessalonians’ potential rejection of Paul, but refer to the fundamental conditions that define Paul’s ‘Selbstwelt.’ To simplify it somewhat, Paul’s description of his relationship to the Thessalonians gives us insight into the original situation that defined Paul’s religiosity and primordial Christian religiosity in general: it is a situation marked by hardship and affliction, joy and hope. With this methodological handle Heidegger believes that he has solved the problem of Paul’s apparent self-contradictions in the First Letter to the Thessalonians: in 2:6 Paul asserts that he did not seek recognition from the Thessalonians, while for example in 2:20 he says that the Thessalonians are his joy and glory. Paul does not present himself with a view to winning the Thessalonians over to his side. He is communicating his experience of being torn between affliction and joy (Heidegger 2004: 67).

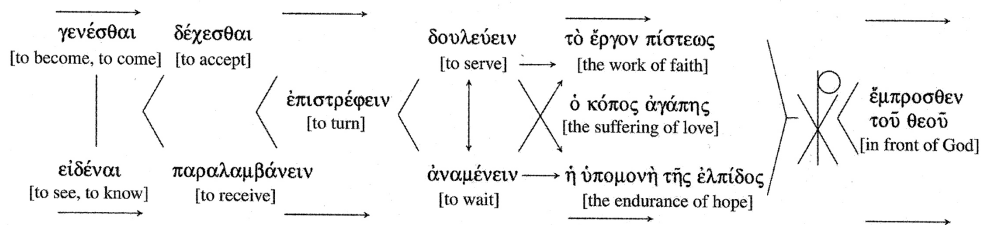
What do Paul’s and the Thessalonians’ experiences involve? They are associated first and foremost with their ‘having-become’ (Gewordensein), a having-become that both Paul and the Thessalonians have knowledge (Wissen) of. Paul’s repeated references to what they have already become, and to their knowledge of this, may seem stylistically conventional (Heidegger 2004: 65). But Heidegger sees these repetitions in an enactment-historical perspective: the repetition contains a tendency and a motive, for he is not referring here to an event that is past and completed. The knowledge they share is a special knowledge that arises solely from the context of the Christian life experience. But how to make this knowledge explicit? Here Heidegger brings



the above-mentioned emphasis (Abhebung) into play: through a methodological operation this special knowledge must temporarily be removed from the facticity of the situation, even though it originally belongs there. However, this operation does not yet make it possible for the interpreter to imagine himself into the special knowledge of what Paul and the Thessalonians have become, since their experiences do not touch upon something that is now known once and for all: their present being *is* their Gewordensein, which is not the recognition of an object, but precisely a form of being that belongs to the factual life situation. Nevertheless it is possible through the above-mentioned methodological manoeuvre to define more precisely their having-become. The Thessalonians accepted the word in a state of great affliction, but at the same time their reception of the word was associated with an inexplicable joy, and, unlike affliction, this joy, in Heidegger's view, can be experienced as a *gift*, something that cannot be motivated by one's own experiences (Heidegger 2004: 66). The focus is thus on the reception itself (cf. 1:6). What they have absorbed is not stored as an accumulation of knowledge or skills, for their knowledge does not concern a *what*, but is, on the contrary, a knowledge of life's hardships and the fragility of life. This knowledge is made accessible through their absolute conversion to God (1:9-10), and this is a conversion that phenomenologically speaking demands that one constantly assimilates and relates to the given circumstances of life. Heidegger then summarily dismisses the whole history of Western philosophy and theology, accusing Western thought of having constructed a theology and a conceptual framework on the basis of knowledge that cannot be conceptualised:

It is a decrease of authentic understanding if God is grasped primarily as an object of speculation. That can be realised only if one carries out the explication of the conceptual connections. This, however, has never been attempted, because Greek philosophy penetrated into Christianity. Only Luther made an advance in this direction, and from this his hatred of Aristotle can be explained (Heidegger 2004: 67).

Heidegger now presents his dynamic model of conversion, though in a schema that is intended to contribute only to a pre-understanding of the whole. There is no question here of a phenomenological understanding, for '[i]n its formal elevation what is authentic is missing' (Heidegger 2004: 67). In the centre is the notion of *waiting* (*anaménein*) and *serving* (*douleúein*) as an expression of the *how* that is attached to the reception of the word, and which, in the form of faith, hope and charity points in the direction of what it means to stand *coram Deo/emprousthen tou theou* (Heidegger 2004: 68; Heidegger 1995: 96).



That Paul's preaching is of a kind that can only be answered adequately through a continued waiting full of affliction, hardship and vulnerability mixed with joy, is related to the fact that, through receiving the word, Paul and the Thessalonians are exposed to dangers arising from the finite nature of this world. This is the source of all sorrows and of Paul's words that they can no longer bear such affliction. Thus primordial Christian religiosity, according to Heidegger, 'lives time itself' in the midst of life's afflictions. And life before or without the reception of the word is an inauthentic life under the idols (*eidôlôn*, 1:9).

But there are certain shortcomings (*hysterêmata*) among the Thessalonians (3:10), and Heidegger now again points to the ability of the epistolary genre to give an insight into Paul's Selbstwelt: from the First Letter to the Thessalonians the interpreter can form an impression of Paul's communication of his 'self-world' to the Thessalonians through his answer to the two questions that apparently disturb the Thessalonians: (1) What is to happen to those among the congregation of believers in Christ that are already dead and cannot experience the parousia or second coming (4:13-18)? (2) When and how will the second coming occur (5:1-11)? Not surprisingly, Heidegger lets the first question alone (Heidegger is a thinker of finiteness). By contrast he has much to say about how the second coming will occur. The crucial point, according to Heidegger, is Paul's distinction in 5:3-4 between people in general and the Thessalonians: 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape' (5:3). 'But ye, brethren', says Paul, directly addressing the Thessalonians, 'are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief ...' (5:4). The knowledge that is at issue here is precisely the knowledge that Paul and the Thessalonians have: not a form of knowledge that is mastered once and for all, but one that involves continuous self-reflection. They *have* their lives because they relate to their lives. Thus Heidegger can also say that the Thessalonians have God in so far as they accept their lives under the conditions of finality and fragility. For the phenomenologist Heidegger life is precisely something that human beings either *have* or something that simply exists or *is* (cf. Heidegger's discussion with Fichte).

Heidegger's analysis corresponds in its main features to the current understanding in Pauline scholarship: Paul does not have a conceptual and static theology. Rather, he is theologizing, responding to particular situations. But what Heidegger is concerned with here is, equally, a philosophical endeavour that concerns the consummation or actualisation of a knowledge that cannot be apprehended, much less communicated. Heidegger himself uses the expression 'believing knowledge' (Glaubendes Wissen) (Heidegger 2004: 71. Put in inverted commas by Heidegger) about the state of relating to the world that fundamentally includes waiting and serving. From this perspective, all the social-moral admonitions concern the exercise of Christian religiosity. This also means that primordial Christian religiosity, according to Heidegger, cannot be explained by reference to its identification with a particular form of consciousness. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of its going beyond, rather than identifying with, that consciousness, in so far as what is at stake is a comprehensive and radical turning away from consciousness's inauthentic, object-oriented approach to the world. Thus Paul's letters must be seen as one expression of 'a communication of Christian knowledge' (Heidegger 2004: 71) about the factual life. And Heidegger insists emphatically that the Christians' 'having-God [Gott-Haben] is the opposite of all bad mysticism. Not mystical absorption and special exertion; rather withstanding the weakness of life is decisive' (Heidegger 2004: 70). The hope associated with the second coming

is not, according to Heidegger, linked to the future in a vulgar historical sense. ‘We never get to the relational sense [Bezugssinn] of the  $\pi\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  by merely analyzing the consciousness of a future event’, says Heidegger (2004: 71). By thinking of the fundamental movement of philosophy, which embarks from factual life and returns to factual life, we can say that in primordial Christian religiosity, with Paul’s self-world as the paradigm, Heidegger sees a return to the afflictions and fragility of factual life. Primordial Christian religiosity is thus exclusively associated with an eschatological horizon. But this horizon, according to Heidegger, is itself exclusive, i.e. of a special nature. For whereas the concept of the parousia in antiquity signals the appearance of the god or the king, the concept radically changes character in early Christianity expressing a *reappearance*: what has already appeared once (namely Christ) will appear again (Heidegger 2004: 71). In Heidegger’s phenomenological thinking primordial Christian religiosity involves a return to the factual life, not the pursuit of an abstract future. The parousia, the coming again, points back to the word that Paul and the Thessalonians *have* already received through affliction, and which they must continue to relate to if they are to avert the Day of Judgement, in other words the sufferings of life, from stealing over them like a thief in the night. Heidegger himself highlights this clear connection between the Christian and the factual life: ‘There is no security for the Christian life; the constant insecurity is also characteristic for what is fundamentally significant [Grundbedeutendheiten] in factual life’ (Heidegger 2004: 73). And precisely because death is part of the factual life, Heidegger remains silent on the question of the resurrection of the dead.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have come to the end of this *tour de force* through Heidegger’s introduction to the phenomenology of religion. The aim has been to investigate Heidegger’s thinking on this subject, with special emphasis on his reading of Paul. A great many other questions however have arisen along the way. By way of conclusion let us take up a few of these, even if we must limit ourselves to the headlines:

1. Heidegger’s style is idiosyncratic. His philosophy is ontological, but at the same time he seeks to engage in formal analyses. His aim is to do away with any tendency towards the kind of concept-formation that prevails in the philosophy of mind, yet he pays homage to concept-formation as such, so long as the concept, in accordance with his thinking, is always fluid and vague. Thus his thinking becomes a form of conceptual poetry that has certain similarities to mythic-poetic language and can only with difficulty be made the object of criticism or contradiction. The use of words such as destruction, revelation and conversion is suggestive in this regard, and lends both a religious and a totalitarian expression to his thinking. Sometimes it is as if Heidegger has so taken to heart the religious discourse in the Pauline letters that he has appropriated for himself Paul’s words in I Corinthians 2:15: ‘he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.’ He seeks to destroy all philosophical systems, yet perhaps builds his own *system to end all systems*. At the same time these early lectures offer a key to understanding why his thinking exerted such a power to fascinate.

2. The lectures on the phenomenology of religion are undoubtedly of great significance to the ongoing interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophy, including, for example, his use of formal indications.<sup>8</sup>

3. The lectures include important considerations on the relationship between philosophy, religion and knowledge; considerations that, although they are linked to Heidegger's own programme and time, continue to pose a challenge to the study of religion. In general, Heidegger threw a bomb into the humanist self-understanding of the 20th century. The question is whether the humanities can be regarded as a science at all? Whatever the case, Heidegger's philosophy has had an impact on the way we understand what understanding means, and how our understanding of the past comes about.

4. It is precisely this relationship, between history and understanding, that is central. Paul Ricoeur has criticised Heidegger for blurring the question of the relationship between ontology on the one hand and the appropriation of cultural signs on the other.<sup>9</sup> By sinking into a fundamental ontology, Heidegger, according to Ricoeur, forfeits the chance to interpret and thereby appropriate historical and cultural signs. These signs, in Ricoeur's view, contain a number of utterances that have to do precisely with the problem of understanding in an ontological sense. It is therefore a matter of putting the fundamental ontological questions in quarantine (following Heidegger's inspiration, one could even talk of a form of *Abhebung*), while one works hermeneutically on the interpretation of historical signs. In pursuance of Ricoeur's thought we might pose the question as to whether a certain methodological inconsistency can perhaps be detected in Heidegger's reading of Paul? To be sure, Heidegger says expressly that his reading of Paul is simply an occasion to unfold the phenomenological method. But what if the primordial Christian transformation of the concept of time, which Heidegger himself brings to the discussion, is just a figure of thought that, through the history of theology and in a broader sense the Christian culture as such, has inspired his own thinking?<sup>10</sup> In that case the primordial Christian notion of the *parousia* is not an example of the phenomenological method; rather, the phenomenological method is an example of the primordial Christian notion of the *parousia*. Is Heidegger's reading of Paul itself perhaps a function, and reading, of theological traditions? There are certain indications that this is the case. To be sure, the German-Jewish philosopher Jacob Taubes (1923–1987) criticizes Heidegger's philosophy and claims that virtually no one, with the exception of Karl Barth, could see that Heidegger desired the destruction of the Judeo-Christian religion (Taubes 1993: 91). But was it rather the case that Heidegger wished for the destruction of an onto-theology such as a number of philosophers of religion had proposed? Whatever the truth, Heidegger's reading of Paul – despite the fact that it is presented first and foremost as a radical philosophical rebellion – seems to constitute an important contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of theology. Heidegger appears here quite simply as one of the most influential church fathers in 20th century Protestant theology. Does that perhaps make him into a 'normal' Protestant theologian?

5. Despite the fact that Heidegger's reading of Paul is bound to its time, I believe that it contributes to current research on Paul. Partly because Heidegger raises the question as to the validity of historical research, in so far as he asks whether religious research understands its object when it undertakes a contextual analysis (cf. pt. 3), and partly because Heidegger's Paul seems in many respects to fit so perfectly into the so-called new perspective on Paul, formed some three decades ago by Krister Stendahl, James D.G. Dunn and others.<sup>11</sup> What is at issue here is not least a rebellion against a dogmatic (Lutheran), concept-oriented reading of Paul in favour of a reading that focuses on the relation between 'knowing' and 'doing' in Paul. And in a somewhat broader perspective Heidegger's formal indications seem to pave the way for an understanding of the

complex relationship between knowledge and action in religious discourse. Finally, attention should be drawn to Heidegger's remarks on the epistolary genre. Heidegger is sensitive to the particular structure of the genre, which he links to his own phenomenological perspective: the situation of the letter, according to Heidegger, makes it possible to catch a glimpse of the factual life (phenomenologically understood) and thereby becomes a textbook example of the fact that the content-meaning is subordinate to the meaning of relationship. However, he appears to underrate the reciprocal and communicative aspect of the genre, and as mentioned above the question of authority and power is thereby excluded.

Finally: there is no doubt that Heidegger places Paul in a phenomenological procrustean bed – but perhaps not the worst such bed that the history of interpretation has seen. Heidegger's phenomenological gaze is sharp, yet at the same time quite blind to its own blindness.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The manuscripts of the lectures were reconstructed on the basis of a number of transcripts made by five students who attended them. Heidegger's own manuscript no longer exists. For an exposition of the text, see the editor's epilogue (Heidegger 2004: 255–258). I occasionally refer to the German concepts (Heidegger 1995).
- 2 Husserl's considerations on the cessation of the natural or naive approach constitute a central element in his thinking, and the problem is dealt with in a number of places, for example Husserl (1950).
- 3 Heidegger returns to the plight of philosophy in connection with his discussion of Paul and the first Christian congregations. According to Heidegger, they too are 'in distress', because they have gained an insight into the basic conditions of existence: see the discussion below.
- 4 Cf. also Zahavi 2003 and Heidegger 1976.
- 5 Heidegger's critique of dogmatic readings certainly reminds one of the 'new perspective' on Paul: 'In terms of religion Luther and Paul are the most radical opposites (...) Thus we must free ourselves from Luther's point of view. Luther sees Paul from the perspective of Augustine. Nevertheless there are genuine connections between Protestantism and Paul' (Heidegger 2004: 47). Cf. p. 18 above. Elsewhere Heidegger expresses his great respect for Luther, cf. the quotation above, p. 13. The question is therefore whether, in distancing himself from Luther, Heidegger is making a hermeneutic sham manoeuvre, cf. the concluding remarks in this essay.
- 6 A genre such as the diary also contains a first-person narrator's experiences, but these by their very nature are not articulated with a view to sharing experience – unless the diary breaks with the genre's conventions and addresses itself to inquisitive readers.
- 7 With the triad Umwelt, Mitwelt and Selbstwelt the reader is presented with the second triadic structure in Heidegger's text; the first is formulated in connection with the creation of the formal indication: Gehalt, Bezug, Vollzug, cf. above, p. 5.
- 8 See for example Hent de Vries (1999: 158–243).
- 9 'The doubt I express (...) is concerned only with the possibility of the making of a direct ontology, free at the outset from any methodological requirements and consequently outside the circle of interpretation whose theory this ontology formulates' (Ricoeur 1989: 6).
- 10 Heidegger himself points out that the question of identification in history cannot be solved outside the problem of tradition (Heidegger 2004: 62).
- 11 Cf. Dunn (1983) and Stendahl (1976).

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