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THE INOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

UNAVOWABLE COMMUNITY

Jean-Luc Nancy

Edited by Peter Connor
Foreword by Christopher Fynsk

The Inoperative Community

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Edited by Peter Connor
Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney

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Chapter 5
Of Divine Places

What is God? Why this question? Can God be said to be a thing? Since he is dead, do we not at least owe him respect for the person he was?

"What is God?" is nonetheless a classic question, admissible and admitted in the strictest theologies. *Quid sit Deus?:* neither the Fathers nor the Councils reject the question. On the contrary, it is *the* theological question, for it presupposes *quod Deus est*—that God is. If it is established for the theologian *that* he is, it may then be asked *what* he is, what sort of thing or being—even if the question cannot be answered, for this too is in keeping with the strictest traditions, not solely of Christianity but probably of all monotheism: we must say that God is, or we must say of God that he is, but it is possible that we will be unable to say of what being his unique and eminent being is made.

"What is God?" will perhaps turn out to have been the necessary but unanswerable question in which the god set about withdrawing.

"I say: God is an essence; but immediately and with greater force I deny it, saying: God is not an essence, since he is not of those things which are definable for us in terms of type, difference and number. And after that I infer from this contradiction that God is an essence above all essence, and, proceeding thus, my understanding establishes itself in infinity and is engulfed by it" (St. Albert the Great).

I can therefore answer, since I can set aside the wrong answers—which is to say ultimately all answers—God is not predicable. (This places us instantaneously at a peak of philosophical saturation, in a Hegelian reab-

sorption of predication: subject and predicate have here, in God, merged with one another.) In raising the question of the theology of the sole and eminent God, we already have the answer: *Deus est quod est,* God is the very fact of his being, the *quod* of which is inaccessible to the question *quid?* It defies the question, it submerges it, and in that way it satisfies it.

The god of the Jews said "I am who I am"; he did not say, as the Greeks understood it, "I am that I am." The gods of other nations said they were gods, or said nothing. One way or the other the god offered himself in his concealed presence. If the god no longer offers himself, if he no longer even conceals his presence in his divine being, he leaves only bare places, where no presence withdraws or comes (*advient*).

1. The question "*what is God?*" is an essentially monotheistic one. Not because it names God in the singular: that naming itself is after all merely a consequence of monotheism, and monotheism consists first of all in the pre-valence of the being of the divine, or of the divine considered as being, over the qualities, functions, or actions of the divine. Contrary to a vague and widespread belief, monotheism definitely does not arise out of a reduction in the number of the gods, nor does it result from a condensation or an Assumption of the Pantheon: in short, monotheism does not consist in the positing of *one* single god as against several gods. It signifies another position of the divine altogether, or an altogether different way of looking at it: here the divine is equivalent to being, and its qualities and actions depend upon the fact of its being.

(Certainly, this presupposes that being is one by definition, that we are talking about being in itself, or of the particular being of such and such a being [*étant*]. The question whether being could be said to be several, that is to say *more than one*—or *less than one*—lies quite a way ahead of us.)

Quid sit Deus? presupposes *quod Deus est,* whereupon we ask ourselves: *what* is the being peculiar to this god who is—*Deus est, ergo unus est*. His quality may remain unknowable, but his quantity at least is certain, and forms as it were the primary quality *of* all divine quality: God will be good, vengeful, powerful, merciful, insofar as he is one, and not the reverse. Hence God is god insofar as he is, or exists, preeminently, being one. The idea of the preeminence of existence in being-as-one (*l'être-un*) provides the essence of monotheism—which is not to say that monotheism always simply confuses God with Being: but in it God is at least the preeminence of being. (Hence non-Greek Judaism is not monotheistic: faith in the god of one people is not faith in one god. It is rather the opposite.)

Polytheism—which takes its name from monotheism—also posits gods who *are,* but this being, as such, they have in common with all things that

are, and it does not constitute the preeminence of being. What does distinguish the god, on the other hand, is first and foremost a quality common to the race of the gods (immortality), then one or several qualities peculiar to each one of them. In spite of this they do not make up a group of figures of the one divine. They do all partake together of divine immortality, but this divine quality does not exist by itself, no more than for its part does the human quality of being mortal. Immortality and mortality do not exist: on the contrary, *existing* takes place either in a mortal or in an immortal fashion. The divine only exists in the gods, in each god insofar as he is *this* or *that* distinct god, the *that one* who exists immortally: Apollo, Indra, or Anubis. In that case the question must be expressed as: *who* is *that* god? It is a question concerning the distinctness of an existent, and not the preeminence of existence. That is why the question may on occasion concern new gods: gods can turn up.

2. "As Aristotle so rightly said, we should never show more restraint than when speaking of the gods," wrote Seneca. The passage by Aristotle is lost, like the gods of whom he spoke. We who come after must show all the more restraint. For we cannot escape a feeling of futility: there is no more to be said about God.

"God," the motif or theme of God, the question of God, no longer means anything to us. Or else—as is all too obvious to an unbiased eye—what the theme of God might mean to us has already moved or been carried entirely outside of him. Is there any statement about the divine that can henceforth be distinguished, strictly speaking, from another about "the subject" (or its "absence"), "desire," "history," "others" (*autrui*), "the Other," "being," "speech" (*la parole*), "the sublime," "community," and so on and so forth? It is as if "God" were in fragments, an Osiris dismembered throughout all of our discourse (indeed there are those who will now continue to speak of the divine in terms of explosion, dispersal, suspension, etc.). As if the divine, God, or the gods formed the common name or place—common and as such erasable, insignificant—of every question, every exigency of thought: wherever thought comes up against the furthest extreme, the limit, against truth, or ordeal (*l'épreuve*),[1] in short wherever it thinks, it encounters something that once bore, or seems to have borne, at one time or another, a divine name.

In a pithy formula that was not in itself without force, Jean-Luc Marion[2] once defined what he saw as the necessary encounter between the modern age and theology in terms of "the principle of insufficient reason": modernity recognizing insufficiency everywhere (in consciousness, discourse, etc.) and theology proposing, along with God and the gift of Charity, the notion of "insufficient reason," or of what Marion calls "the gap," "the distinc-

tion," or "the difference" between beings, as opposed to the fullness of metaphysical being. In fact this was tantamount to proving the opposite: far from being rediscovered, God disappears even more surely and definitively through bearing all the names of a generalized and multiplied difference. Monotheism dissolves into polyatheism, and it is no good asserting that this polyatheism is the true word and the true presence of God in his distance from the supreme Being of metaphysics. For the infinitely absent god, or the god infinitely distended by the infinite distance of god, should no longer be termed "God," nor be presented in any way as "God" or as divine. Try as it may, there is no theology that does not turn out here to be either ontological or anthropological—saying *nothing about the god* that cannot immediately be said about "event," about "love," about "poetry," and so on and so forth. Why not recognize, on the contrary, that thought in this age of ours is in the process of wresting from so-called theology the prerogative of talking about the Other, the Infinitely-other, the Other-Infinite. It is taking away from theology the privilege of expressing the *absconditum* of experience and discourse. In so doing, perhaps the modern age secretly corresponds to the true destination of a *theology:* for it indicates to theology that, in order to speak of God, we have to speak of something other than the Other, the Abstruse, and their infinite remoteness (if indeed it is still a matter of "speaking of something"). So long as we have not understood what is here made clear to us, we will never move beyond an interminable post-theology in which transcendence endlessly converts to immanence (the "metareligion" of Ernst Bloch, in all of its metaphysical candor, is an excellent example of this). In baptizing our abysses with the name of God, we are guilty of at least two errors or two incoherencies: we fill in the abysses by attributing a bottom to them, and we blaspheme (in the true sense of the word) the name of God by making it the name of some*thing*. On the other hand, the most subtle—and most theological—error would doubtless consist in *believing* that the infinite cannot provide a bottom and that naming a person is not naming a sort of "thing."

Lévinas may well say, in many an admirable text, that God is "Infinite," in the sense of "unthematizable": the very term "Infinite" thematizes him, and meanwhile that "revision of Hegel's bad infinite," which Lévinas proposes, begins to suggest itself, a revision that he claims will give the unaccomplishable the dignity of the divine. One thus finds oneself wondering whether any discourse on God can deviate, however slightly, from that of Hegel (even were he *revised*), that is to say from the discourse of philosophy *itself*, or of ontotheology (which culminates in the dialectical ontotheology of the death of God). One finds oneself suspecting that everything could be no more than a question of baptism: from one moment to the next, what has been debaptized could just as easily be rebaptized with the name

ontotheology

of God. And this "baptism" itself would scarcely be a metaphor: from there on there would be ample scope, yet again, for thematizing the "mystery" of the "sacrament" in various discourses on the name, the proper name, the property of names, on election, the symbolic, and so on.

It is thus not enough to ask oneself what God is. That can even turn out to be the surest means of falling short of the question (if indeed it is a question, if it still hides or still reveals a true question), for God has perhaps become everything (or nothing); perhaps he has become, potentially at least, every true question, exigency, or furthest extreme of thought. We would need to be capable of asking, by a very different turn of question or inquiry, *if there is a place* for god, if there is still room (*place*) for him: that is, a place where he does not become indistinguishable from something else, and where it is consequently still worth calling him by the name of *God* (is this the only possible name? I shall come back to that.) A place that allows us to prescribe, with Bias of Priene: "*When speaking of the gods, say they are the gods.*"

question of place distinct location

Could we then in fact be dealing with a question of place, of distinct location (*lieu*) and not with a question of being? But access to such a question (or such an "inquiry" or "quest"), whose turn quite honestly escapes me, is not offered me by a discourse *de Deo*, of whatever sort. I can distinguish neither the "question" itself nor any access to it. But I suspect that one would need to move away, to find a place at some remove in order to say of the gods that they are the gods. That is why, by way of a method, I find myself obliged here to fragment my argument.

begin fragmented argument

3. (*Of divine places:* of the gods and their places; of the places they have abandoned and of those where they hide; of gods without hearth or home, of nomadic gods; of the *here* where the gods are *also*; of the common places of God; of the gods common to all places, to some places, to no place; of God: in what way he is a *topos*; topics and atopics of the divine; of gods and places: treatise on divine paronomasia; where is God to be found? in what place?

nomadic gods

God as a topos within Godself

divine paronomasia

"For yourself, O God of glory and majesty, you have need of no place; you live entirely within yourself" [Bossuet]. But then what are these places "within yourself"?)

cult of the Virgin

"last" divine birth

4. Jean-Marie Pontevia once wrote: "The cult of the Virgin is one of the major events in Western history. It is certainly an event, whose principal phases are datable, and it is a major event, because it may well perhaps be the last example in the West of the birth of a divinity."[3] I propose to add that this "last" example perhaps signifies, and must perhaps have signified for Pontevia, that a divine birth is always possible, and that it is

coming/departure

therefore still possible. But at the same time it means that such a birth bears no relation to a "return," a restoration, or a reinvention of the divine—quite the opposite. Pontevia was well aware of this: "the sacred cannot be reinvented." The divinity born in the figure of the Virgin was in no way the return or the reincarnation of a former divinity. It was the divinity of a new age: of a new age of painting and of woman, as well as of the age in which God himself would vanish into the Concept. It was a divine sign opposed to God.

God himself would vanish into the Concept

"last god"

The "last god" of which Heidegger speaks ought to be understandable in this sense: not the god who comes after all the others, concluding their series, and perhaps not "a god" at all, but rather the fact that there is always another last god to be born, a last god to come, or to disappear. Whether he comes or goes—and perhaps his *coming* is made up of his *departure*—his passing makes a sign. He is "*im Vorbeigang*": he is just passing, or he is in passing. It is in passing that he is, which is why he has his essential mode of being in the *Wink*,[4] that is to say in the gesture we make in order to give a sign, call, invite, lead on, seduce: a wink of the eye, a motion of the hand. The god, the last god: he who, in passing, invites, calls, leads on, or seduces—while "signifying" nothing.

active subjecting

Wink

This could therefore be entitled: *a wink from the Holy Virgin*. It would be the movement of profanation, the Virgin becoming Venus (Pontevia studied this). That is to say it would raise the question: what sort of advances does the profane make to us? Not that, like a good dialectician, the profane makes a sign in the direction of the sacred. But to "give a sign" is perhaps always—divine. And the Virgin could be said to have given a sign for the first time—or else for the last—in the very profanation of the god, beyond the "sacred."

Wink from the Holy Virgin

5. It would appear that the two questions "what is God?" and "who is this god?" are implied by each other. For we cannot ask "who is this god?" if we do not already know we are dealing with a god and if, consequently, we do not know what a god, or the divine, is in general. Conversely, we can only ask "what is God?" when an existing being has been presented or indicated to us as "God." However, this is only apparently the case. To ask "who is this god?" does suppose that we recognize him as being a god, but this is not the effect of a knowledge of the divine previously acquired through examining the question "what is God?" We recognize a god as god, or as divine, without having the least idea of what that is, or even that it can be, but because it manifests itself as such. (This constitutes what we call conversion.) The divine is precisely what manifests itself and is recognizable outside of all knowledge about its "being." God does not

manifest ~~~~ conversion

"He [God] proposes himself, that is all."

propose himself as a new type of being—or of absence of being—for us to know. He proposes himself, that is all.

Conversely, the question "what is God?" is not posed, despite appearances, once a god has in fact proposed himself: for by so proposing himself (or imposing his presence), he has eliminated the very possibility of the question. The question "what is God?" can only be put when nothing remains of God or the gods that is divine, that is to say nothing that makes itself known through its manifestation alone, through its passing or its *Wink* alone. The question arises when all that remains of the gods or of God is the name, "God," a sort of strange half-proper, half-common name or noun. And only then is it appropriate to ask what thing or type of being it signifies.

6. Is "God" a proper name or a common noun?[5]

St. Thomas denies it is a proper name. For the proper name does not refer to the nature of a being but to that precise being—*hoc aliquid*—considered as a singular subject. Now God is not a singular subject, says St. Thomas, although he is not a universal nature either. The common noun, for its part, refers to the nature of a being: but that of God is for ever unknown to us. What remains is that the name *God* refers to God by its operation, and through that at least he is known to us. It will be a name borrowed metaphorically from one of the divine operations, as St. John Damascene indicates: "God comes from *thein,* which means provide for all things, take care of all things; or from *aithein,* meaning burn (for our God is a fire consuming all wickedness); or else from *theasthai,* that is to say to see all things." There is a more appropriate name for God, if we are considering the origin of the name, and that is *"He who is."* But the name *God,* despite its metaphorical origin, remains the superior name when we consider what it has the task of signifying, that is, the nature of the divine. (*He who is* does not qualify his nature; it signifies that he is, but not what he is, nor even that he is being.) However, for St. Thomas there is an even more appropriate name, and that is the Hebrews' Tetragram "which signifies the very substance of God, which is incommunicable and, so to speak, singular."

Hence the God who is considered as the preeminence of being, and not at all as a singular subject, is nevertheless acknowledged, in the end, to be *in some way* singular, and as answering to an unpronounceable proper name. The Tetragram is in no way a metaphor, either for care, or for fire, or for vision, but is the proper noun for him whose proper name cannot be pronounced. The Tetragram is *magis proprium* than any other name, but because it is unpronounceable (*Tetragrammaton* is the name of this Name, but is not the Name) it is therefore also improper. Consequently

"God"—what we call "God," and not the name Deus/Theos and all its metaphors—is the very name for the impropriety of the name. *Tetragrammaton* is the common noun for this Name, or for this name considered as the lack of a name. "God" calls the god where his name is lacking: but the divine is a name that is lacking.

That is why, above and beyond the metaphysics of the Treatise on Divine Names that, from Pseudo-Dionysius to Thomas and down to the present, repeats that God is unnameable (the absolute excess of being over the word or of the thing over the sign is merely a law of metaphysics, which is eminently applicable in the case of the preeminence of being), "God" is that common noun (that metaphor, proper/improper by definition) that *becomes* a proper name only when it is *addressed* to that singular existent who lacks a name. It is thus prayer, invocation, supplication, or whatever—addressed to the lack of a name:

> My God, my God, life is there
> Simple and peaceful . . .[6]
>
> My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

7. What does "my God" mean?

It is in no way an appropriation, a privatization, even less a subjectivization of God. "My God" says that it is I alone, each time, who can call on God or the god. It is the voice of someone who is himself singular that can call upon and name that other singular being. Speaking of "God," discourse speaks of the god, the gods, or the divine. But when someone speaks they are addressing *God*. We say "my God" as we say "my friend" or as we used to say "my Lord," (*mon Seigneur*) which became "mon sieur." In each case, behind the apparent possessive there in fact lies what we ought to call an interpellative: you, here, now, are entering into a singular relationshp with me. This does not ensure the relationship, nor in any way provide the measure of it. But it proclaims it, and gives it its chance.

"My God" signifies: here, now, I am entering into a singular relationship with the lack of a singular name. Hence our justification in asking: who then has the right or the ability to say "my God?"

8.

Today what is no doubt most crucial concerning God is this: he is not unnameable in the metaphysical sense of that being that is inaccessible to all names, of that being that transcends all names, including the name of being itself, according to an unbroken tradition that is the very tradition of onto-theo-logy.[7] (St. John Damascene once again: "He is above all that is, and above being itself." This brings to mind the divine "superessence,"[8] of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, or Ruysbroek, and even certain of Lévinas's

injunctions, such as: "Understand a God uncontaminated by being").[9] God is not unnameable in that sense, because in that sense unnameability is the result of an overflowing of names and language, whereas the unnameability of the god to whom I address myself (if I can) results from the lack of a name. God is unnameable today in that his name, or his names, are lacking. There is no impotence on the part of names in general to express or refer to God (just as, conversely, the unnameable is neither necessarily nor exclusively divine: after all, the name "being" is not appropriate to being either, if as Heidegger says being "*is* not"). In fact it could well be that the "unnameable" is never divine, and that the divine is always named—even if it is for want of a name. But it is the proper name of God that is wanting.

Such for us is the fate of all divine names—or of the divine in all names: they no longer refer to gods, that is to say we can no longer call upon the gods with these names (Indra, Zeus, Wotan, Yahweh, Jesus). They are, as *divine* names (and not as the nomenclature of worship), strictly unpronounceable: they no longer call upon "my God." So it turns out that all divine names refer, as to a common destiny written down in the distant past of the Western world, to the unpronounceable Name, the unutterable Tetragram. As if in Judaism it were written that the divine is destined to withdraw its own name, and in so doing to abscond from call and from prayer. And that we would then be left with only this withdrawal of the name of God, in place of all gods, and also in place of the god of Israel.

When Hölderlin writes: "sacred names are lacking" or "there is a lack of sacred names" (*es fehlen heilige Namen*),[10] he is not implementing the problematic of the Treatise on Divine Names (and in contrast, this latter appears much more as constituting a problematic of the *concepts* of God). No doubts are cast, in Hölderlin, on the possibility of divine names. On the contrary, the assertion of a lack of sacred names implies that we know what such names are—names, as Heidegger's commentary puts it, "which are commensurate with the sacred (or the holy) and which themselves cast light upon it."[11] These names are thus not only peculiar (*propre*) to the divine, they bring it to light, they make it known as the divine that it is. These names are the manifestation of the divine, they are thus perhaps not far from being the divine itself. It is simply (if one may say so) that these names, here and now, are lacking.

(Thus we are familiar with the name God, and it is undeniable, when all is said and done, that it does bring to light something of the divine, however little—at least when we still say "my God," in a sort of mild relaxation of thought and speech. However, even this name is seriously lacking: "God," "god," the God, the god, the gods, gods . . . which way are we to take it? When Hölderlin writes "*der Gott,*" because in German all nouns take a capital letter, we do not know if it should be translated

"'the god,' which is the name of no presence of a god"

by "the God" or "the god"; but Hölderlin himself does not know what he is naming. *Der Gott* names something divine that no longer has any identity, or else it names the very unidentification of the divine and of all the gods. The Tetragram itself is drawn into this unidentification: it can no longer be the common noun for the proper Name of the god, but is in turn subsumed under this even more common noun, "the god," which is the name of no presence of a god.)

proper Name of the god

And so a history ends as it began: "In former times, so I have heard it said in Dodona, the Pelasgians offered up all their sacrifices while invoking 'the gods,' without referring to any one of them by a qualifier or a personal name; for they had as yet heard of no such thing" (Herodotus).

9. What is a proper name? Is it part of language? This is not certain, or at least it is not certain that it is a part in the way a common noun is. It does not behave like a sign. Perhaps its nature is that of a *Wink,* of a gesture that invites or calls. On that score, the lack of proper names has nothing whatever to do with the metaphysical surfeit of the thing over the sign, of the real over language. The lack of a proper name is a lack of *Wink,* and not of signifying capacity. It cannot be judged in relation to sense but in relation to gesture. For the same reasons it could be that there is something of the divine—rather than any meaning—in all proper names. Thus all names could be given to the gods, so that if there is a lack of sacred names, it is not because certain names are lacking. There is a lack of naming, of appellatives, of address.

proper name

Wink

I am she

I am she, says Apuleius's Isis, "cuius numen unicum multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiiugo totus veneratur orbis. Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autochtones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynnam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusini vetustam deam Cererem, et Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, sed qui nascentis dei Solis inchoantibus inlustrantur radiis Aethiopes Arique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii caeremonis me propriis percolentes appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem" (whose single godhead is adored by the whole world in various forms, in differing rites and with many diverse names. Thus the Phrygians, earliest of races, call me Pessinuntia, Mother of the Gods; thus the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropeian Minerva; and the sea-tossed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus, the archer Cretans Diana Dictynna, and the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpine; to the Eleusians I am Ceres, the ancient goddess, to others Juno, to others Bellona and Hecate and Rhamnusia. But the Ethiopians, who are illumined by the first rays of the sun-god as he is born every day, together with the Africans and the Egyptians who

Isis

rebirth every day

distinctive rites

excel through having the original doctrine, honour me with my distinctive rites and give me my true name of Queen Isis).[12]

10. That God has a name, that the gods have names, which are theirs and which are, consequently, holy or sacred names, of that there is no doubt. One thing only remains undetermined: whether "the lack of sacred names" amounts to a pure and simple absence—be it definitive or provisional—of the sacred, or whether this lack still belongs to the sacred itself. Heidegger writes that "the source of this lack is probably concealed in a reserve (*Vorenthalt*) of the sacred." The lack of divine names—the suspension of prayer, of worship—would thus be a way for the sacred to keep itself in reserve, to withhold itself, and as a consequence, thereby to offer itself, to offer itself in reserve, both as its own reserve and as its own withdrawal.

the lack of sacred names

The suspension of worship: no longer to be able to sing, as in the Catholic hymn to the Holy Sacrament, "*Adoro te devote, laetens deitas.*" For there is no longer a *latent* divinity, that is to say a divinity hidden by appearances and revealed as present in its latency. There is nothing latent, there is only the manifest, and what is manifest is nothing other than the lack of sacred names, visible and legible everywhere. There is no longer a single divine name that cannot be pronounced in the most profane and ordinary way. Moreover—proof *a contrario*—we no longer blaspheme the name of God. The divinity is not concealed by this lack, it does not pass from one form of latency into another. This lack reveals the divinity itself as suspended. We should beware of the dialectical reserve, the *Aufhebung* to which Heidegger's words could give rise: I would argue that we should understand those words as meaning that it is the sacred itself that is lacking, wanting, failing, or withdrawn. The lack of sacred names is not a surface lack concealing *and* manifesting the depths of a sacred held in reserve. It bars the way to the sacred, the sacred as such no longer comes (*advient*), and the divine is withdrawn from itself.

latent divinity

suspended (distended)

11. I should like here, without violence and without confusing them, to force together Lévinas and Heidegger momentarily and say: the lack of sacred names is the *à-Dieu* of the sacred. An *à-Dieu* from the depths of its *withdrawal*: a thought that is for the moment quite simply impossible—and impossible in any case as a *unified* thought.

à-Dieu of the sacred

waiting

Each of them knows that a *waiting* concerning the divine is inscribed at the heart of our experience, at the heart of our slow-footed Western necessity. For Lévinas, this waiting, the *vigil* traverses, perishes (*transit*), and pushes to the breaking point consciousness, man, the self, being, and philosophy. In this "breach of immanence" a presence comes (*advient*)—God, the in-finite, "the beyond of being," transcendence as an "ethical

each-for-the-other." The breach delivers us up to an "à-Dieu."[13] For Heidegger, the breach of immanence is constitutive of ex-istence (of being-*there*), and the god is not a presence that could come there: in this sense *Dasein* is being-unto-death and not unto-a-god. But this act of ontological constitution opens precisely onto the possibility of waiting for the strangeness of the divine, which would then in short be a strangeness strange to the in-finite breaching of existence and of the existent. *Dasein* could be exposed to the divine, not in death, nor in its place, but as it were at the same time as to death. "Man dies continually, under heaven, before the divine." Thus the possibility of a "being-unto-God" (*ein mögliches Sein zu Gott*) is opened up, but not established.[14] I could say: the *à-Dieu* of Lévinas is constitutive of the "passivity more passive than passivity" in which immanence is breached; Heidegger's *being-unto-God* (or unto-the-god) is merely a possible: opened up, offered (but equally withheld, withdrawn), in the finite transcendence of being-unto-death. Thought relates to the beyond of being and to the finiteness of being; to the for-the-other and to the for-death: in each case thought has so to speak its *à-dieu*. It is doubtless too soon to be able to say what clashes or encounters, what evasions or confrontations, mark its passage from one relation to the other; I simply wished to recall, here, the sign (*Wink*) that is addressed thus to the thinking of our times.

12. The singular address to a singular god—my god!—is prayer in general. The lack of names suspends prayer. To celebrate transcendence beyond being, or the immanence of the divine, or else, like the German mystics whose heirs we all are, the "sublimeness" of God (nowadays "the sublime" has at times begun to take on the role of a new negative theology), is not to pray, is no longer to pray. To pray is first and foremost to name the singular god, *my* god. Prayer is suspended. All that remains is a distant quotation (*citation*) in the memory: *schema Israel . . . Pater noster . . . lâ ilâh illâ 'llâh. . . .* This recitation, like our cultural or cult memory of divine names, merely sustains the reality of a lack of prayer. This recitation prays for want of praying. It does not implore so as to be able once again to pray: it addresses a lack of prayer to a lack of sacred name, it is a litany laid bare.

13. (A polemical note that it is unfortunately difficult to dispense with when one ventures to speak of "god" today: in the last few years a sickening traffic has grown up around a so-called return of the spiritual and of the religious.[15] Simultaneously, the religious aspect of recent Polish history, the avowed end of Marxism, the renewed assertiveness of Islam, the rediscovery and return to circulation of several currents of Jewish thought, have all

been exploited, then indiscriminately and uncritically enlisted in the promotion of a new cultural value, a spirituality deemed necessary for a jaded Western world, which has lost faith in all its "ideologies." This is to forget, out of stupidity or cunning, the philosophical work that has been unremittingly carried out from a starting point in the death of God [thinking today entails among other things recognizing and meditating ceaselessly upon this irrefutable and unshiftable event that has rendered derisory in advance any "return of the religious"]. The death of God called for and brought forth a mode of thought that ventures out where God no longer guarantees either being or the subject or the world. At these extremes, over these abysses or amid this drifting no god could possibly return. First, because there is no reason why the divine should lend its name to baptizing what thought explores or confronts in its withdrawal. Second, because gods are always coming—or at least can always come—but doubtless never come again. Forgetting the death of God, when not politically or commercially motivated, is tantamount to forgetting thought. It is moreover ironic, though not really surprising, to note that this "return of the religious" proposes itself at the same time and often under the same colors as the return of an empirico-liberal pragmatism [roughly speaking of the Popperian variety] that accurately reflects, in an identical forgetting of thought, the actual "spiritual" content or conduct of these movements of opinion.)

14. "What is God?" is the question of a man wanting for prayer, wanting for divine names. It is the question of a man wanting for God (which is not necessarily to say *lacking* God), or else it is the question put by a man to the want of God.

It is Hölderlin's question, which Heidegger chooses to take up, because the question "who is the god?" is "perhaps too difficult for man and asked too soon."

> What is God? The sky's aspect,
> Though so rich in qualities,
> Is unknown to him. Lightning indeed
> Is the anger of a god. All the more invisible
> Is that which has its envoy in something foreign to it.[16]

The world is unknown to God. The visible and its brilliance, appearing (*l'apparaître*) is unknown to him. But he, the invisible, delegates himself, or rather sends himself—or destines himself (*sich schicket*)—in the visible, something foreign in which, having sent himself there, he is all the more invisible. Heidegger writes: "The Invisible sends itself there so as to remain what it is: invisible." So what is God? He who wishes to remain unknown,

God as a form of extreme intimacy

he who wishes, sending himself in the visible, there to remain invisible. God is not the Hegelian Absolute who "wishes to be close to us." God does not wish to be close to us when he sends himself to us, in the visible we know: he wishes to make himself invisible therein.

(But what if the fact that he wishes to remain himself, *absolutum,* separate in his invisibility at the heart of the visible in which we dwell, were another form of the same Absolute will? And if that is indeed the case, can we still be content to go on conceiving of God, with or against Hegel, with or against St. Augustine, as a form of extreme intimacy? Will a day not come when we shall have to confront a god outside, exposed in the open sky, nowhere hidden and internal to nothing? We must leave these questions to find their own way.

God is that which knows not the world and which does not manifest itself there, does not present itself there, although it penetrates it, sends itself, and dispatches itself therein. The beginning of *Patmos* is well known:

> He is near
> And difficult to grasp, the God.

The nearness of the god is inscribed in these other lines out of which Heidegger develops his commentary:

> Is God unknown?
> Is he manifest like the heavens? It is rather that
> Which I believe.

Heidegger writes: "This God who remains unknown must, at the same time as he shows himself for who He is, appear as he who remains unknown." The god is therefore as manifest as the heavens, he is as *revealed* (*offenbar*) as the open sky and offered to view, selfsame with its aspect.[17] The face of God is as manifest as the *Angesicht* of the heavens. Heidegger writes that "the God who remains unknown is, as such, made manifest by the heavens."

But the poem does not say that God is made manifest by means of the heavens. What it says is quite different: the god is as manifest as the heavens. That God is manifest like the heavens, that is to say that he is as visible, as offered to the view of men as the radiance open and offered over the entire horizon, indicates that the radiance of the divine is equal to that of the heavens, but not that it is mediated by it. The god may very well be made manifest selfsame with the heavens, or with the sea, or with the skin of man or the animal's gaze; it may be that he is manifest selfsame with everything that is open and offered and in which he has dispatched himself. But none of that serves as a (re)presentative of the god—contrary to what

Heidegger's text may at least lead us to believe. If the heavens, or if aspect in general, *Angesicht*, countenance, is also the place of divine revelation, it is not as a visible image of the invisible. The invisible divine lets itself be seen resting, itself, upon the face, or woven into it, sent or destined therein, but as another face that lets itself be seen *here, without "here" serving as mediation for it.*

(This im-mediacy of the god, who is nevertheless not something immediate, this immediacy withdrawn from proximity and immanence in its most manifest presence, is no doubt so unamenable to our modes of discourse that Heidegger, like Hegel perhaps before him, seems to lose sight of it almost as soon as he has glimpsed it.)

Here—on a face, but equally, perhaps, in a name—the divinity lets itself be seen, manifestly invisible and invisibly manifest. God reveals himself—and God is always a stranger in all manifestation and all revelation. Revelation—if such a thing must be conceived of—is not a presentation, or a representation: it must be the evidence of the possibility (never the necessity) of a *being-unto-god*. What there is revelation of is not "God," as if he were something that can be exhibited (that is why to the question "what is God?" there is and there is not an answer), it is rather the unto-God (*l'à-Dieu*) or being-unto-god. Or more exactly, it becomes manifest that such a being-unto-god is possible, that man is invited and permitted to be—that is, to die—before the face of the god.

Pascal: "Instead of complaining because God has hidden himself, you will give thanks to him for having revealed himself so much."

15. Moreover this is what grounds such a revelation: the essence of the god is recognizable simultaneously by two features, the first being that man *is not* the god, the second that man and the god are *together* in an identical region of being (neither of them is being; in Lévinas's language they are together "beyond being"—but *there is* no such "beyond").

Heidegger says: "The gods and men are not only illumined by a light. . . . They are illumined in their being. They are conquered by light (*erlichtet*) . . . , never hidden, but dis-lodged (*ent-borgen*)."[18]

Man and the god, in their radical difference, which is none other than the opening out of the "sacred"—but which is equally well an im-mediacy outside of the profane and the sacred—disclose themselves to each other, and perhaps by means of each other. They disclose themselves, they are, each for his part and each for the other, those who come disclosed.

But what is disclosed here is their strangeness. Where man and the god cease to disclose one another, and to be disclosed to each other, as strangers, in strangeness itself, there the god disappears. (For Hegel, on the contrary,

"man can know he has a refuge in God, since God is not a being strange to him.")

Perhaps, at the extreme—but everything is always decided at the extreme—we will one day have to face the fact (*découvrir*) that the god is essentially distinguishable by nothing save the extreme strangeness of his coming. Euripides:

> Numerous are the forms of the divine,
> and numerous, the unexpected decision of the gods.
> What was expected does not come about,
> but for the unexpected, the god has found the means.

16. If God is God, his death is also his supreme strangeness. Although Hegel himself cannot ultimately think this death except as "the death of death," he nevertheless cannot avoid remaining suspended, seemingly dumbfounded (so that we remark that he too did after all experience the divine) in the face of the event: "The supreme alienation of the divine Idea: 'God is dead, God himself is dead,' is a prodigious and dreadful thing to represent to oneself, something which presents to representation the deepest abyss of schism. . . . God is no longer alive, God is dead; a most dreadful thought: so everything which is eternal, true, is not, there is negation even in God; supreme suffering, a feeling of out-and-out perdition."

In the death of God—inasmuch as *"we have killed him"*—something of the divine is announced, or rather called upon, as Nietzsche knew. It is not "the death of death," it is not the dialectic of the God of triumphant subjectivity. Of course the gods are immortal, they all rise again: Osiris, Dionysus, Christ. But resurrection is not what Hegel would like it to be. It is not the end of the process, nor is it the final appropriation of the Living Concept. Resurrection is the manifestation of the god inasmuch as he comes in his own withdrawal, leaves his mark in his own obliteration, is revealed in his own invisibility (it is not a "resurrection," it is not a return). The god is invisibly manifest and manifestly invisible: this is like a dialectic, but it is not one. However, the fact that it is not one *can only be revealed by the god* (here perhaps lies the difference in knowledge, or in experience, that distinguishes Hegel from Hölderlin).

What "resurrection" refers to—inadequately—is the radiance of manifestation. Osiris, Dionysus, Christ are never as radiant as when they have risen again. They are then what they are: gods of radiance itself, divine glory open, offered, dazzling as the heavens and effaced like them. But this glory, this splendor, like that of the heavens, emerges from shadow and in shadow, in the darkness of the absence of the heavens, of the absence

of the world and of god. Divine radiance is just as much the manifestation of this darkness, which is itself divine.

This is not a dialectic: the gods are immortal. "Death" and "resurrection" do not apply to them. What does apply to them is what they have in common with the heavens, without the heavens being their mediation: the sovereign interplay of darkness and radiance, of radiance withdrawn into darkness and of darkness as manifest as radiance.

For if mortals have the possibility or the freedom to be-unto-god, unto what or unto whom can the god be? Unto nothing, unless it be unto divine manifestation itself: radiance, effulgence, and darkness. The god is not the freedom to *be-unto* in general. He is not projected-toward or destined-to. He simply comes, in radiance and in the withdrawal of radiance. Or rather: his pure radiance withdraws him.

17. Gilles Aillaud: "The invisible does not conceal itself like an essential secret, like the stone in fruit, at the heart of what we see. Freely displayed for all to see, the hidden always protects the un-hidden."[19]

I should like to write: always, whatever happens, a god protects mortals, that is to say exposes them to what they are; and in so doing, he exposes himself for all to see, withdrawn like the heavens. But that is to write more than I can.

Yet Seneca in his time wrote: "Many beings akin to the supreme divinity both fill our eyes and escape them" (*Oculos nostros et implent et effugiunt*). Eyes filled and deserted by divinity, that is our condition.

18. Origen: "If there is an image of the invisible God, it is an invisible image."

19. One might say: there is nothing more divine than a new god shining in all his young splendor. But this new god never comes in any temple; it is the emptiness of the temple and its darkness that make it the sacred place.

Art is sacred, not because it is in the service of worship, but because it makes manifest the withdrawal of divine splendor, the invisibility of its manifestation, the inconspicuousness of its exposure. No passage in Hegel better salutes the gods than the one in which fate is shown offering their absence to us: "Statues are now corpses whose animating soul has fled, hymns are words which faith has abandoned. The tables of the gods are without food and spiritual beverage, and games and festivities no longer restore to consciousness the blessed unity between itself and essence. Lacking in the works of the Muses is that strength of spirit which saw certainty itself spring forth from the crushing of both gods and men. Henceforth

they are what they are for us: beautiful fruits plucked from the tree; friendly fate has offered them to us, as a young girl presents this fruit."[20]

Who is this young girl? She is herself a work of art, she is painted on a fresco, she is deprived of divine life—she is thus a goddess herself, exposed to her own withdrawal. The girl, in the flush of her youth in the midst of the world of "that pain expressed in the harsh words *God is dead*," is the divine truth of the presentation (Hegel writes *präsentiert*) or the offering of this fruit in its beauty. *It is a god—or a goddess—who offers us art*: that is something we have still to think about.

20. The sacred in art, thus defined, means that all art is sacred, and that there is nothing sacred save in art or through it. That is what Christianity in the grip of the Reformation ceased to understand. (For its part, the Catholic church forgot God. Thus it too ended up losing art, and so becoming indistinguishable today from the Reformation.)

There is no profane art, and there is nothing sacred outside of art. However, that is only intelligible if we have done with "aesthetics." And also perhaps with "art." The divine manifests itself at the limits of art, but without art, nothing would reach those limits. And to understand this, ought we not also to have done with the divine?

21. In his study, *Divine Names,* Usener saw a primary species of gods in those he called "the gods of the instant," divinities attached to nothing other than a momentary state, a sensation, or an isolated feeling. "The singular phenomenon is divinized without mediation, without the intervention of any generic concept, however narrow its limits; the bare thing, which you see before you, that and nothing else is the god."[21] Usener is certainly wrong to be content with what we might call the positivist and anthropocentric notion of "divinization," precisely when describing this encounter and this nonconceptual designation of the god. (Not to be able to place, face to face with religious faith, anything other than this paltry, artless reversal, the "divinization" by man of a natural thing, is not to be in the death of God, it is to have forgotten the death of God itself: God would not be dead if he had simply been a projection. As Nietzsche well knew, the death of God requires of us something very different from anthropological idolatry!) But Usener does unwittingly furnish the essence of all divine manifestation: the bare thing, which you see before you, that and nothing else is the god. (The "thing" can be an animal, a person, a stone, a word, a thought.) God is never anything other than a singular, bare presence.

"God is not present to things by situation, but by essence; his presence manifests itself by its immediate operation" (Leibniz).

All gods are "gods of the instant," for as long as they can or wish to endure.

22. There is the god who ceaselessly plays with the world, and the god who fashions it in a perpetual labor. There is the god who comes and offers himself selfsame with the grass, or with suffering, and the god who conceals himself in the furthest depths of the temples. There is the god who annihilates man, and the god who dwells in his gaze.

There is the god who approaches man to the extent of touching him, and the god who retreats from man to the extent of abandoning him infinitely. The two are the same: the god who touches man touches him so as to leave him to himself, not so as to take hold of him and detain him. Hence: "The first desertion consists in the fact that God does not detain, as a result of which man leaves him, bringing about the second desertion, by which God leaves him. In one of these desertions God follows and there is no mystery about it; for there is nothing strange in the fact that God leaves the men who leave him. But the first desertion is quite mysterious and incomprehensible" (Pascal).

23. Judaism is an atheism with God. Protestantism, on the other hand, is a theism without God. Catholicism is the worship of all gods in God, or the loss of God in all gods. Islam is the pure proclamation of God to the point where it becomes an empty clamor. Buddhism is the worship of God in all gods or the loss of all gods in God. Philosophy, for its part, thinks the communication beyond its confines and the absolute alienation of the infinite substance of God.

So an entire universe, for which God will prove to have been the pain and the fervor of infinite separation, comes to a close: division becoming immanent in the divine, the death of God inscribed as his life.

In a sense, all our great religions are inseparable from philosophy: that is to say from the onto-theo-logical *end*—the aim and the cessation—of religion.

And as for paganism, where do we grasp it if not at that extremity where it already offers, in the god, the death of the god: Tammouz, Attis, Osiris, Adonis, Dionysus.

The death of God is the *final* thought of philosophy, which thus proposes it as an *end* to religion: it is toward this thought that the West (which in this case excludes neither Islam nor Buddhism) will have ceaselessly tended. It signifies: the death of death, the negation of negation, the end of the separateness of God, the divinization of man, the making absolute of his knowledge and his history (or the affirmation of their total insignificance),

and the infinite suffering that his labor, his discourse, and his death become when they have as their goal and their meaning an infinite reconciliation.

The god is abandoned in thought of absolute separation and reconciliation, which is thought of the "death of God." The god does not die in that thought, since he rises again there endlessly, like the very being of nothingness that has passed through the nothingness of being. But things are worse: he is abandoned there—or else, he abandons us. He abandons us to our philosophy and our religion of the death of God.

24. But we must not jump to the conclusion that the "god of the philosophers" is a vanity pure and simple. [Every philosopher in his way, according to the order and the ordeal of thought, also experiences the approach or the flight of the divine.]

There is at the heart of every great philosophy (and this could be the measure of its greatness), [a mystery concerning God or the gods.] This is in no way to say that the mystery is the heart of the philosophy that bears it. It certainly is not; but it is placed in that heart, even though it has no place there.

An example—which is also of necessity to say, an approximation: "In divine understanding there is a system, but God himself is not a system, he is a life." You will always quite justifiably be able to demonstrate the deep-rooted equivalence, in speculative idealism, of "system" and "life," and in so doing make that statement of Schelling's contradict itself. Yet you will not be able entirely to deny that the same statement tends or pretends to something that is not exhausted by that equivalence and that testifies here to the ordeal of thought. All would seem to hang, were one inclined to attempt a commentary, upon an exegesis of the words "God *himself*." Schelling is suggesting that *the* god *himself* is something other again than "God." From Kant to Hölderlin, by way of Schelling, Novalis, and Hegel, this exigency of thought was put to the test (*l'épreuve*) and transmitted to Nietzsche, Rilke, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Lévinas, and us: the God of the philosophers has himself made god or the gods his concern.

25. Though all art is sacred, and though there is doubtless nothing sacred except where there is art, art and the divine are nevertheless two totally distinct things. Which is to say that when the divine manifests itself, art itself is reduced to nothing.

Selfsame with whatever thing the divine is made manifest (for example, a thing of nature, an animal, a stone, or else man himself), this manifestation places the thing within the sphere of art. But at the same time it reduces art as such to nothing.

Conversely, art transports what it sets to work upon into the sphere of the divine, because it is always a god—or a goddess—who offers us art. But of itself, insofar as it is art or for as long as it is art, it keeps the divine at a distance. In this sense art is always profane, no less than thought, discourse, or science.

Perhaps we are dealing here with two forms of the sublime, different to the extent of being opposites:

There is the sublime in art, going from Kant to Benjamin and from there on down to us. It signifies: to feel the fainting away of the sensible, to border on the furthest extreme of presentation, on the limit where the outside of presentation offers itself, and to be offered up to this offering.

And there is divine sublimity, that in terms of which Hegel seeks to characterize the Jewish moment in religion. In this case it is the presence of God insofar as it overwhelms the sensible. The coming of God reduces the phenomenon to nothing. Here the sublime is no longer to be found at that furthest extreme of presentation where presentation is transformed into offering. It is in a presence that ruins all presentation and all representation. It is no longer the gesture of offering, it is the imposition of glory. It is no longer the limit of forms and figures, it is the light that disperses the visible. God imposes his presence outside of all presentation. He comes in the ruin of all appearing (*le paraître*). Art, on the contrary, infinitely incises the edges of appearance (*l'apparaître*), but keeps it intact.

Between the "thing" of sublime art and the sublime "thing" of the divine, there can be said to be that infinitesimal (and in its turn sublime?) difference that lies between presentation at the limit and naked presence: it follows that each can offer the other, but also that it is impossible to confuse one with the other.

26. Whoever speaks of god risks the detestable effects of the sacralization of discourse. The language that names God is always well on the way to taking on some semblance of his glory. "God," "the divine," "the sacred," "the holy" are insuperably sacred words: how could they avoid being a prey to sacerdotal arrogance, ecclesiastical love of power, not to mention clerical cupidity? Alternatively, it is prophetic bombast that threatens them, not to mention a mystic intensity—whatever their reserve and their sobriety. In each case, discourse appropriates to its own advantage the hierophany behind which it ought to disappear.

We must not be blind to the danger today of a certain spiritual posturing, of a particular bland or sublime tone with which a "sacred dimension" is "rediscovered": it is one of the best signs of the absence of the gods. When the god is there, in fact, his presence is close, familiar, simple, and unobtrusive, even though it be strange, disconcerting, and inaccessible.

(In Africa, for example, whether conspicuous or concealed from view, the sacred appears familiar. Not that it tips over into profane or profanatory familiarity: but it offers itself—or withholds itself—with simplicity, and even in laughter and disrespect, because it has no need of a certain solemn seriousness, affected and inspired, which belongs only to Churches, States and Speeches. Need I add, the Africa of which I speak is at least in part a symbolic place.)

27. The essence of art is to be offered, and it is a god—or goddess—who offers us art. However, art does not lead to god. Indeed nothing leads to god, neither art, nor nature, nor thought, nor love. The gods come or do not come. They impose their presence or they withdraw.

28. "The god is almost always the imminence of a god, or even the mere possibility of a god" (Alain).

To keep open, available, undecided, the possibility for man of a "being-unto-god" is in itself a most resolute gesture of welcome to the divine. As if this undecidedness alone—our own—were already unto-the-god. However, it is not, by definition (and that is where Alain is wrong in the end).

29. To have done once and for all with a constantly recurring error: *being is not God, in any way.* Being is the being of beings, what is. Or rather—for it is not part of a being—what it is about a being is the fact that that being *is*. Consequently, being itself, in return, *is* not. The god, on the contrary, is. If he is not, then there is no god: whereas if being is not, then there is being (or more accurately, there is = being).[22] The god therefore is a being, and in that respect he is one being among all other beings. Being is the being of the god, as it is the being of every other being, but the god is not the god of being (that expression would have strictly no meaning; the god is always, whatever and wherever he may be, the god of man).

Of what sort is this being, god? That is the elusive question: what is god? However, it is at least possible to say this: God is not the supreme being (*étant*) (assuming that there is any sense in talking about a supreme being). God is the being we are not, but which is not a being at our disposal in the world around us, either. God is the being we are not, which is not at our disposal, either, but which appears or disappears before the face of the existing, mortal beings we are.

For example, it is only from this angle that we may understand the idea of god as *creator*, if we wish to avoid lapsing into error. God the creator is not he who makes being be. Nothing and no one "makes" beings "*be*"; they are not produced and production exists only within the world of beings.

On the other hand, being *makes the being* (*fait l'être*) of beings, and this is not a "making," it is a being.

God the "creator"

God the creator does not make be, nor does he make the being of beings. God the "creator" (if we can keep this word) means: beings appear before him, emerging from the nothingness of their being. They are summoned and appear (*ils apparaissent et comparaissent*) before him—who manifests himself or conceals himself before their face, in the visible. *"Fiat lux!"* does not mean: "I invent something like light and I make it come into existence by the sole power of my word," as a metaphysical catechism repeatedly asserted. *"Fiat lux!"* means "the light appears before my face and I send myself in it." Hegel: "This figure is the pure *luminous essence* of the dawn, which contains and fills everything, and which is preserved in its formless substantiality."

being finishes off beings

Nothing can be summoned to appear before being, for being has no face and utters nothing. Being, by not being, delivers beings up to what they are. It "is" the fact that a being detaches itself from the nothingness it is. Hence being does not make beings, but it *finishes them off:* their finite detachment takes place, infinitely, in it and from it. That is the finitude of being, in all beings. It detaches the gods as well as men. The immortality of the gods does not exclude their finitude: they appear or they disappear (whereas being neither appears nor disappears: it is). finite immortality

relations

Between beings there can be all sorts of relations. There can be, among others, that of the god to man, or that of the man to the god. Beings, on the other hand, have no relation to being, since it is nothing other than the fact that beings are. From this point of view the god is (or is not) in the same way as man—or a star—is. The divine is not the fact that man—or the star—is. The divine is that, or he, with which or with whom man finds himself involved in a certain relation, be it one of presence or of absence, one of appearance (*parution*) or of disappearance. He involves the star in it with him.

star

places
dis-position

That is why the gods necessarily have places, just like a person, a star, or a bird. Being has no place: it is (it "makes") the dis-position, the spacing out of beings according to their places (that is to say also according to their times), but it has itself neither place nor time. It *is* not, and this not-being "consists" in the fact that beings are dis-posed throughout their places and their times. The gods have their places and their times. They are immortal and they have a history. The gods have a history and a geography: they can move off, withdraw, spring up, or decline; they can come, here or there, now or later, and show themselves, and not show themselves.

spread out

places and times

30. "God exists," "God does not exist," "the proposition 'God exists' (and therefore the opposing proposition, too) has no meaning": these propo-

sitions have not merely been argued back and forth to excess; they have all—and a few more besides—been rigorously proved true. All of these proofs and counterproofs put together have perhaps never demonstrated anything other than the fact that being is *and* is not. For this whole array of proofs was based on a confusion, in its discourse, between being and God. It was demonstrated that there is necessarily being and God. It was demonstrated that there is necessarily being, or some being, as soon as we admit that *there is* something. Then it was demonstrated that this "there is" of being is in itself nothing that is.

On the other hand, if in the advancing or the thinking of these proofs there was anything that was at the same time preserved from this confusion and that truly had to do with the divine as such, it must have been a totally different sort of concern (*souci*). Not the concern to show that God (= necessary being) is, but the concern to intimate that God *exists*. (One can conceive of the conjunction, one might say the interweaving, of these two concerns in the writings of Descartes, and also in those of Hegel and Nietzsche.) To intimate that God exists: that is to say that he cannot, precisely, be according to the mode of what we know and grasp as positions of being, and that his is a quite different existence, a quite different ordeal of existing.

On this subject, proofs and counterproofs have doubtless always concurred: the proof of the existence of God corresponds to the ordeal of his im-mediacy (hence the idea of the infinite in me: an idea already present—and yet by which I am myself overwhelmed), and the critique of this proof again corresponds in its turn to this experience of being overwhelmed (it says, for example: God is not an object of possible experience; so leaving impossible experience open).

We thus need to ask some quite different questions. Not whether God exists, but how (or else: where and when) he exists—which is equally to say: how he withdraws from existence, how he is not where we expect him to be, how he does not duplicate in another world the mode of existence of our own, but is in ours the existence of that other world, or else how his existence is strictly inseparable from that of the world, an animal or a star, a person or a poem, and how it unceasingly remains beyond the reach of all these existences, and so forth.

(31.)

Deus, in ajutorium nostrum intende . . .
Domine, ad adjuvandum me fastina . . .
Introibo ad altare Dei,
ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam . . .

What is there to say about vanished rites, lost sacred languages, about the necessary incomprehensibility of those languages, which brought with

them at the same time a familiar truth; what is there to say about the solemn rhythms of Latin, about genuflexions, incense, versicles, and responses, about the church, that remote place full of darkness and splendor; what is there to say about signs of the cross, clasped hands, open palms, outstretched arms, chasubles on shoulders, stoles, shoes left at entrances, ablutions, prayer mats, prostration, or intoning; what is there to say about divine service?

Nothing, nothing must be said about them. It is too late or too soon. Wherever divine service takes place, we cannot be sure that it is not merely the pious and ridiculous repetition of what it once was, or else that it is not confined to being the exercising of a social convention, not to say a social obligation. Yet after all has it ever been any different? Where and when can we say that true worship takes place? We can say it when the god is present at the ceremony.

But in that case we are not far from saying that the presence of the god—in the heart, for example—replaces to advantage the mimicry of worship. And this is not what is called for by our requirement of the divine, our thought of it, our feeling for it: we feel that there must be worship, divine service; we feel that there must be celebration of the glory of the god. And yet we can say nothing about worship. We can say: there are men and women who observe rituals; there are millions of them every day, in every place. But nowadays we have also to take account of the possibility of gods wandering from place to place, without allotted temples or established rituals. *Einai gar kai entautha theous:* "Here too are the gods to be found"; these words of Heraclitus can today be given one further meaning at least (it could also be that they now only have this meaning), according to which "here" can be without place (*lieu*), nowhere, or from place (*place*) to place, a "here" wandering in and out of places.

It could well be—this is all that can be said—that it is henceforth to a wandering of the gods that divine worship and its permanent locations must be adapted: not so as to disqualify these, but so as to assert that in temples or outside of them, in rituals or with no ritual, what henceforth is divine, or that part of the divine that withdraws and confides itself, is a wandering, not to say a straying (*égarement*) of the gods. There is no ritual of wandering, nor should the significance of divine service be overstretched so as to make it, with Hegel, the equivalent of reading one's daily paper. But in divine wandering a ritual remains to be invented, or forgotten.

32. Just as former materialists or former freethinkers began intoning the mumbo jumbo (*patenôtres*) of a return of the spiritual, theologians were getting down to reading the Scriptures and understanding the message of faith in terms of all the codes of the sciences of this world: semiology,

psychoanalysis, linguistics, sociology, and so on. General anthropology was called upon with the sole end of converting the word of God into human speech, so that men might better grasp its divine import. Over and above the manifest contradictoriness of this strange logic, there is something curiously aberrant here: as if God let himself be understood, as if he made himself understood. In the time of the Scriptures, God did not make himself understood: he showed himself, his word obliged, there was no question—even when the Doctors were interpreting—of knowledge or of understanding.

It is high time we learned that no Scripture can be of any help to us, be it through a decoded message or a mystery held in reserve. The Book is no longer. (I am not saying "there is no longer a Book," for there is undeniably, to the same extent that there is divine service, in every temple, church, synagogue, or mosque; but I am saying that *the Book is no longer,* as we ought to know since Mallarmé and Joyce, Blanchot and Derrida.) It is not in vain that the text has proliferated, has become scattered and fragmented in all our writings. The writing we practice, which obligates us and is infinite to us, is in no way the *Aufhebung* of Scripture. Scripture, on the contrary, is undone and swept away in it, without end, without god, definitively without God or his Word, toward nowhere except this carrying away, and this disaster, and this fervor bereft of faith and piety.

Writing and its trace lie outside of Holy Scripture, along its outer edge, which they contribute endlessly to fraying and breaking down. The age when the Book was placed on the altar and read is past and gone. Writing will no longer speak of the divine: it no longer speaks of anything but its own insistence, which is neither human nor divine; it inscribes the undone edges of Books, altars, and readings, it inscribes the disjoining (*déliaison*) of their religions, it traces a divesting of the divine, the denuding of the gods that no word announces.

Face to face, but without seeing each other from now on, the gods and men are abandoned to writing. This abandonment is the sign given to us for our history yet to come. It has only just begun. My god! We are only just beginning to write.

33. But after all, all gods are odious (*tous les dieux sont odieux*). All sacrality is oppressive, either through terror or through guilt. (As for separating the divine from the sacred altogether, is it possible without yet again nullifying the divine?) All sacrifice is a traffic in victims and indulgences. Christ's sacrifice sums it all up: mankind redeemed as if it were a band of slaves, at the cost of the most precious blood. (How can anyone have sought to argue that Christianity was a nonsacrificial religion? Because it is a

religion, it is sacrificial. And because it represents faith in a god, it is a religion.)

The gods are odious to the extent that they saturate the universe and exhaust mankind: that extent is no doubt always measured by religion as such, and religion, whatever we try to make words mean, religion and the sacred remain the measure of the divine: the god who deserted religion would no longer be a god (Lévinas, among others, knows this; he even speaks of atheism, but it is an atheism of God, there is no getting around the fact).[23] The god keeps an eye, an ear, a hand on everything, he holds or pronounces "the alpha and the omega," he accounts for everything and in the end we must give account of everything to him. The gods prevent the supreme undecidedness of man; they close off his humanity, and prevent him from becoming unhinged, from measuring up to the incommensurable: in the end God sets the measure. The gods forbid that man should be risked further than man. And most serious of all, they take away his death.

That is to say they take away his sacrifice—this time in the sense of his abandonment. For there is an abandonment that is not a traffic, but that is an offering, an oblation, a libation. There is that: a generosity and a freedom outside of religion—however, I am not sure whether this abandonment is still to gods, to another god said to be coming, or to "no god." But it has death as its generic name, and an infinite number of forms and occasions throughout our lives.

No doubt this abandonment has always forged a path for itself through the religions. In the end, though, these religions have failed to allow it to be accomplished. They have irresistibly diverted it and misappropriated it—not modern religions only, but all religions, all forms of worship, all rites.

What there is to say here can be said very simply: religious experience is exhausted. It is an immense exhaustion. This fact is in no way altered by the upsurge in the political, sociological, or cultural success of religions (Islam in Africa; the Catholic church in Poland or, from another angle, in South America; Protestantism in the United States; Jewish, Islamic, or Christian fundamentalism; sects; theosophies; gnoses). There is no return of the religious: there are the contortions and the turgescence of its exhaustion. Whether that exhaustion is making way for another concern for the gods, for their wandering or their infinite disappearance, or else for no god, that is another matter: it is another question altogether, and it is not something that can be grasped between the pincers of the religious, nor indeed between those of atheism.

No god: this would be, or will be, unrelated to atheism—at least to that metaphysical atheism that is the counterpart of theism, and that wants to put something in the place of the god that has been denied or refuted. No

god: that would mean God's place really wide open, and vacant, and abandoned, the divine infinitely undone and scattered. It could equally well be the god so close that we can no longer see him. Not because he has disappeared inside us, but, on the contrary, because in coming closer, and disappearing the closer he comes, he has made all our inside, all subjectivity, disappear with him. He would be so close that he would not be, either before us or in us. He would be the absolute closeness to ourselves—at once tormenting and glorious—of a naked presence, stripped of all subjectivity. A presence that is no longer in any way a *self-presence,* neither the self-presence of a consciousness nor the presence to that consciousness and its science of its representations (of Self, World, God). But a naked presence: less the presence of some*thing* or of some*one,* than presence "itself" as such. But presence "itself" as such does not constitute a subject; it does not constitute a substance—and that is why "no god." The accomplishment of the divine would be no god's presence.

To return to the problem: this would not be a dialectic of death and resurrection. It does not lie by way of a death of subjectivity (which for Hegel is precisely the definition of death, and more particularly of the death of Christ), in which death is defined as the very moment at which the subject is constituted, discovering itself and accomplishing itself in the suppression of its particularity. God, in this sense, has always signified the very idea of the Subject, the death of death, truth and life in the suppression of existence and of singular exposure in the world, in the suppression of place and instant.

The presence of no god would be what thinking on the Subject has never been able to approach—even though it was only ever separated therefrom by an infinitesimal distance, indeed an intimate distance. It would be death that is not the *Aufhebung* of life but its suspension: life suspended at each instant, *hic et nunc,* suspended in its exposure to things, to others, to itself; existence as the presence of no subject, but the presence to an entire world. An invisible presence everywhere offered selfsame with being-there, selfsame with the *there* of being, irrefutable and naked like the brilliance of the sun on the sea: millions of scattered places.

This presence of no god could however carry with it the enticement, the call, the *Wink* of an à-dieu: a going to god, or an adieu to all gods—together, inextricably, divine presence and the absence of all gods. The place—*hic et nunc*—in place of the god. Perhaps that was written between the lines of the very principle of onto-theo-logy: *Deus interior intimo meo;* there is a place more remote than the place of any subject, a place without substance consisting entirely of exposed presence, sheer invisible brilliance (*éclat*) where the subject—God—flies into pieces (*éclats*).

34. Why Christianity?

That is to say: why did Hellenistic Judaism, given Roman form, have to engender that new era by which we once lived?

In a sense, nothing new came of it, apart from a new configuration for a Western world already at least ten centuries or so old. St. Paul drains from the language of Hellenistic mystery religions (a language impregnated at the same time with philosophy, and dating back to Egypt) the thin trickle of water from one or two marginal Jewish baptisms, and offers it in the imperious style of Roman activism to a world given over totally to morals. (I mean morals here in Hegel's sense: the reign of *Verstellung*, of a ceaseless shifting between the pragmatic density of the here below and the transparence of values and wills in the beyond. I also therefore mean it in Nietzsche's sense: *ressentiment* against this world, servility, the organization of weakness—and in addition, work, technology,[24] subjectivity, the modern State, which will all nevertheless still have been, to use Heidegger's terms, missives from being.)

Morals did not come from Christianity: Christianity, on the contrary, originated in them. They are neither religious nor philosophical. In philosophy they are a forgetting of thought, and in religion a forgetting of the divine. Morals are Socratic thought without Plato, and Socratic thought is the impiety of Greece without art.

What was new was merely the *ordo romanus* (which tended both to be a religion on its own, not to say an absolute religion, and to dissolve in itself all religion), which provided morals with a frame. In that sense, Christianity was the Empire depoliticized and rendered moral, which is also to say unburdened of strictly Roman sacrality—and it was morals rendered imperial, that is, preserved from the adventures that they had after all been through from the Cynics to the Epicurians (and perhaps down to the Essenes).

But what then was radically new was the twilight of the gods in morals, the opening out of humanism and atheism—and the simultaneous invention of theodicy considered as the general matrix of modern historical thinking, of technology, or of politics. Theodicy can only emerge when the god is in decline and finds himself tangled up, as he declines, in the affairs of the world: it is then that he must be justified, shown to be provident and considerate, because the ways of the world and its affairs must be justified. Theodicy is thinking about *meaning* and the *guarantee* of meaning: in this thinking it engulfs the gods.

Theodicy—that is to say anthropodicy, and logodicy—is the truth of Christianity, of that religion that abolishes all religions and itself—having completed the task of making the gods odious. It consists in providing the meaning of morals by means of a morals of meaning: God is resolved into

a justified history (the history of a subject, history itself as Subject), and the ultimate justification of this history lies with man coming everywhere onto the scene in place of the gods.

He is the last species of odious god: the man-God, himself abandoned by God, the totally secular divinity of humanity, in its arrogant forcefulness (*in hoc signo vinces*) and in its complacent effusions (the Sacred Heart of Jesus).

Something else was offered simultaneously, however. It was a prayer: "Let us pray to God to release us and free us from God" (Meister Eckhart). This marked the return, in the modern guise of dialectical thinking, of the old ordeal of the religion of the God who abandons, the religion that the Western world looks upon as that of the Jewish people, the people whom "God had kept aside to be the age-old anguish of the world," and that was "destined to witness the agony" of the end of the world of the gods (Hegel). With the Judeo-Christian religion, moral assurance and anguish at the passing of the gods progressed side by side. Our atheism will turn out to have been inextricably woven from these two strands: morals that dissolve the gods, and prayer to God to be abandoned by him.

If we are to pass beyond our atheism one day, it will be because we no longer even pray to God to deliver us from God.

35. However, Christian faith—not to say Christianity (but it is advisable not to have too much faith in that sort of distinction)—exposed something else again, a thing apart: Christ. That is to say something to be confused neither with the personage whose moral preaching is told of in the Gospels, nor with the sublime or bland figure exploited by centuries of piety. Set apart from the doctrine of the Gospels and from the exploits (*la geste*) of Jesus, Christic theology propounds the mystery of the man-god. This *mystery* corresponds to the fact that the essence or the instance or the presence of the man-god is neither the fruit nor the product of any process, of any operation. It is not a union, and strictly speaking the term "incarnation" is not appropriate to it. The strict canon of Catholic faith lays down that in Christ "the two natures are not united solely by homonymy, nor by grace, nor by relation, nor by interpenetration, nor by naming alone nor by worship, nor by the conversion of one nature into the other, but through subsistence (*hypostasis*)." There is only one hypostasis for the two natures of man and the god. There is neither fusion nor differentiation, but a single place of subsistence or presence, a place where the god appears entirely in man, and man appears entirely in god. This is neither a divinization of man nor a humanization of God. What there is is this: how man appears to the god, in the god, how the god appears to man, in man, and how that itself is totally unapparent.

In this unapparent appearing (*parution*), faith and theology (and in theology, thought) somewhere link up, while religion and philosophy (and in philosophy, theology) turn obstinately away from this point. At least, that is what one might be tempted to say, but this opposition is too simple, and vain. What the mystery of Christ borders on, that is to say what all divine mystery has eventually bordered on—from whatever religion we extract it henceforth—this point of the naked appearing (*parution*) or the dis-lodging of man before god and of the god before man, this point of their im-mediacy can no longer be preserved as if it belonged to an order of faith distinct from an order of reason and of institution. On the contrary, this is what we must affirm: *with the gods, faith too has disappeared.* That is our truth, and against it the evidence of the heart and inward conviction are powerless: for faith, as long as it is faith, belongs neither to the inwardness nor to the feelings of the faithful. Faith is entirely an outward act of presence (*une comparution à l'extérieur*), of the order of presence and of manifestation: because it is (or was) faith in god, it is (or was) like clearly turning one's face toward the manifest heavens.

There is no faith in a vanished god: as he withdrew he took faith with him, for faith had never addressed itself to darkness, but solely to the radiance of the divine. What henceforth puts us face to face with the no-return (*sans-retour*) of the gods cannot be a faith, nor even—nor especially—a faith in the mystery of this no-return, or this "no god." Faith is faith in mystery, which is god made evident. Along with the god and with faith, mystery has withdrawn. There is no more mysterious revelation, no more mystical revelation—not even the soberest, most reserved sort, the sort most given up to its own darkness or its own unapparentness.

There is in a way *a zero mystery* (*mystère nul*), inscribed in the margins of holy books, on temple courts, at the close of the prayers of those who still meditate before the mystery, inscribed also on our artificial suns and moons, in our calculations, and always selfsame with the heavens. This is much more and much less than a death of the gods, or their absence, or their withdrawal. It is something else again, something totally different. *Zero mystery* means no mystery, and the mystery of there being none. And always it is a matter of the appearing (*paraître*) of the god to man and of man before the god. This dual appearing is without mystery: everything has been explained. One has only to read *The Essence of Christianity* or *The Future of an Illusion*[25] (and it is not worthy of thought to look down, as is very near to happening, upon such arguments: for the gods that these arguments laid to rest or denounced had themselves long since become unworthy of thought and of faith). One has only to read *De Rerum Natura:* it is the poem of clarity wrested from mystery—which promptly plunges into insignificant obscurity. But there is a mystery—a zero mystery—about

this very clarity, about this peak of clarity regarding the nature of the things among which and to which our existences appear. It is a zero mystery: there is nothing to seek, nor to believe—no god; but it is a mystery: this closeness of things, this manifest world is precisely what conceals itself.

36. (In the end, something resists. To all of the harshest and most justified criticism of Christianity—of its political and moral despotism, its hatred of reason as much as of the body, its institutional frenzy or its pietistic subjectivism, its traffic in good works and intentions, and ultimately its monopolization and its privatization of the divine—to all of that something puts up a resistance, beneath the horizon of everything: something that, it is not impossible to claim, has [in spite of all the mumbo jumbo] left upon the form of the *Pater noster*—that prayer which Valéry in his unbelief judged to be perfect—a mark that is difficult totally to erase: a generous abandonment to divine generosity, a supplication out of that distress to which the divine alone can abandon us—the divine or its withdrawal.

No doubt something in us resists that resistance: the title "Father" appears suspect to us; we see only too well what this god is modeled on. But perhaps we see very badly. Perhaps the "Father," for those who made up this prayer, and for those who prayed it, was not something paternal on the lines of our petty family affairs; perhaps paternity was nothing more, but also nothing less, than the obscure evidence of a naming.

However, in the end, beyond the end if necessary, we can yet but say: the *Pater noster* is finished, in Latin as well as in all languages. For we speak another language than its language of prayer. We speak another language, one whose *names*, proper and common, profane and sacred, have yet—in a still unheard of sense—to be *sanctified.*)

37. To strive against idolatry presupposes that one has the highest and most demanding idea of God, or of the absence of all gods. That is precisely what shows up the limits of criticism of idols. For in opposition to the idol there is no *idea* we can form of God, nor of his absence (apart from a moral or metaphysical idea, which in essence has nothing to do either with the gods or their absence).

I am not proposing a return to idols (in any case there is nothing to be *proposed*). I would merely posit that idols are only idols with regard to the Idea. But above and beyond idol and Idea, in the effacement of every God, be he old or new, it could be that we see emerge, like an Idea imprinted upon an idol, serene and secret, the unmoving smile of the gods.

Their smile would be there, on their clearly delineated lips. They would not be idols. They would not be representations. But the outline of divine place would be in the smile of their face, a face effaced but exposed, here

or there present, offered, open—and barred across, withdrawn by that same smile.

This place of the gods has no place—though there are archaic statues that suggest that it does. But it is not just anywhere. It is delimited by the smile of the gods: that thinnest tightening of their lips, which do not even part. In that singular feature, the smile of the gods—a feature (*trait*) as singular as a stroke (*trait*) of the pen—there is this: where the god presents himself, he withholds his divine name and his divine knowledge; but this withholding appears in his smile as an Idea imprinted on an idol. (Idea and idol undo each other infinitely. All that remains is their speechless, smiling, ideal, and divine exchange.)

38. "The gods, whose life is nought but joy" (Homer).

(We too once had a word or a shout for that: Alleluia! Henceforth our joy and the thought of our joy will keep themselves more secret. But when what concerns us is the gods, or no gods, then we are concerned with nothing else but joy.)

39. A dual temptation is constantly recurring: either to baptize with the name of "god" all the obscure confines of our experience (or our thought), or on the contrary to denounce such baptism as superstitious metaphor. For as long as the Western world has existed, perhaps not a single argument concerning God has avoided yielding to one or other of these temptations, or even to both at once. But god is not a manner of speaking—and of protecting ourselves—nor is he the ultimate truth of humankind. Men and women are men and women and the gods are the gods. They are distinct and can never mix. Living in the same world, they are always face to face with each other, on either side of a dividing—and a retreating—line. They are, together, the vis-à-vis itself, the face-to-face encounter in which the unreserved appearing (*paraître*) of one to the other engages them in an irredeemable strangeness. The gesture of the gods is to conceal themselves, on this very line, from the face of men. The gesture of men is to stand back from this line where it encounters the face of the god.

They thus have no names for each other. For the gods, man is unnameable, for there are no names in the language of the gods (it knows only the summons, the order, the expression of joy). And the name of God, among men, names only the lack of sacred names. But men and the gods find themselves brought together face to face in this way; unnameable, and perhaps absolutely intolerable to each other.

40. God is for the community, the gods are always the gods of the community—and a community, in return, is what it is only before the face of the gods.

"Finite consciousness only knows God to the extent that God knows himself in it; hence, God is spirit, and more precisely he is the spirit of his community, that is to say of those who honour him" (Hegel).

If there are no more gods, there is no more community. That is why community has been capable of becoming horrifying, massive, destructive of its members and itself, a society burned at the stake by its Church, its Myth, or its Spirit. Such is the fate of community without god: it thinks it is God, thinks it is the devastating presence of God, because it is no longer placed *facing* him and his absolute remoteness. But it cannot be brought back face to face with its vanished gods—the less so in that it is with the withdrawal of the gods that community came into being: a group of men facing its gods does not conceive of itself as a community, that is to say it does not seek within itself the presence of what binds it together, but experiences itself as this particular group (family, people, tribe) before the face of the god who holds and preserves in his innermost self the truth and the power of its bond.

(That is why we should not say that God is for the community. Community as such indicates that the gods have taken their leave. We should say rather that the god is always for several people together, including when he is *my* god: as soon as I name my god, or as soon as I am summoned and appear before him, I find myself precisely thereby placed alongside other mortals like me—which is not to say that they are always those of my tribe or my people.)

We should therefore rather lead community toward this disappearance of the gods, which founds it and divides it from itself. Over divided community, selfsame with its expanse, like a sort of ground plan, the traces of the paths along which the gods withdrew mark out the partition of community.[26] With these traces community inscribes the absence of its communion, which is the absence of the representation of a divine presence at the heart of community and as community itself. Communion is thus the representation of what the gods have never been, when they were or when they are present, but what we imagine to ourselves, when we know they are no longer present. In place of communion, in fact, there is the absence of the gods, and the exposure of each of us to the other: we are exposed to each other in the same way as we could, together, be exposed to the gods. It is the same mode of presence, without the presence of the gods.

In place of communion there is no *place*, no site, no temple or altar for community. Exposure takes place everywhere, in all places, for it is the exposure of all and of each, in his solitude, to not being alone. (This does not only or necessarily take place at the level of families, tribes, or peoples: on the contrary, these, as we know, can all circumscribe solitude. But on

the contrary, because in our great metropolises, where more and more different "communities" exist side by side, intersect, pass each other by and intermingle, the exposure to not being alone, the risk of face-to-face encounter, is constantly becoming more diverse and more unpredictable—before whom, at this precise moment, am I writing? Before what Arabs, what Blacks, what Vietnamese, and in the presence or the absence of which of their gods?)

Not to be alone, that is divine (but I shall not say: that is the divine; that would be another baptism). For the god is never alone: he is always presenting himself, to the other gods or to mortals. Solitude only has meaning and existence for mankind, not for the god. He is always addressing himself, assigning himself, sending himself, or else—and it is the same thing—he is being invoked, or encountered, or worshipped. How are we not alone when we are neither before the gods nor within the bosom of the community? That is what we have to learn, through a community without communion, and a face-to-face encounter with no divine countenance.

41. What if we were to shift the question very slightly, and instead of asking "what is God?"—a question of essence that it is impossible for us to answer, since God has already provided an answer to the question of essence itself, and even to the question of "superessence"—we were to ask "what is a god?" We would not have gained very much, no doubt, but at least we would have gained this: "God" is indistinguishable from his own essence; "a god" would be a presence, a some "one" present—or absent—that is not simply indistinguishable from divine essence, that does not represent it either, or individualize it, but that rather puts it as it were outside of itself, revealing that "a god" does not have "God" or "the divine" as its essence. Essence here comes to be indistinguishable from the mode of presence—or absence—from that singular mode of manifesting, *hic et nunc*, *a* god, never God, the god of one instant, in one place—and so always another god, or always another place, and no god.

"Come . . . I cannot see you, and yet my heart strains toward you and my eyes desire you. . . . The gods and mankind have turned their face toward you and weep together." This is the lament of Isis to Osiris—the god whom the gods themselves cannot perceive.

"This God who quickens us beneath his clouds is mad: I know, I am he," wrote Bataille. These words count less for their meaning, which is clear, evident, dazzling, and mortal, than for the impetuousness that bears them along and in which in their turn they carry me away: in the infinite anguish or infinite joy at the fact that God is always outside of God, that he is never what God himself would wish him to be (if in general God

wished anything at all). It is this impetuousness itself—which is not mad, which is something other than madness—of which we should say that it is no longer atheist, but indefinitely loosed from God in God, and divine beyond the divine.

42. *"I am God"*: it is perhaps impossible to avoid this answer, if the question "what is God?" presupposes that God is a Subject. And either it does presuppose that—or else it must take the extreme risk (as Hölderlin perhaps wished) of giving no meaning to the word "God" and taking it as the pure proper name of an unknown.

If this answer is mad, its madness is no different from that of thought that seeks to identify itself, it and its "thing," as subject, as its own substance and its own operation: something that happens continually in ontotheology.

But I cannot answer the question "what is a god?" by saying I am he. "A god" signifies: something other than a subject. It is another sort of thought, which can no longer think itself identical or consubstantial with the divine that it questions, or that questions it.

43. "The gods went away long ago," said Cercidas of Megalopolis, in the third century B.C.

Our history thus began with their departure, and perhaps even after their departure—or else, when we stopped knowing they were present.

They cannot return in that history—and "to return" has no sense outside of that history.

But where the gods are—and according as they are, whatever the present or absent mode of their existence—our history is suspended. And where our history is suspended, where it is no longer history, that is to say where it is no longer the time of an operation but the space of an opening, there something may come to pass.

44. "God is something extended" (Spinoza).

Alone among painters of our time, Cy Twombly ceaselessly paints the Gods: Apollo, Pan, Venus, Bacchus, others besides. There is never a face, there is often—not always—the name of the god, written in broad, unsteady letters. There is no really identifiable outline, though forms do from time to time fleetingly appear: a breast, a sexual organ, a palm, a wave. But also a lot of patches, of lines leading nowhere. And always a lot of light.

Selfsame with every canvas, without there being a face, there is a divine smile, secret and serene.

Nothing is dumb
More than the mouth of a god. (Rilke)

face of the divine body of the god so many divine places

45. The face of the divine is not a countenance (it is not the other [*autrui*]). But it is the material, local presence—*here* or *there*, selfsame with somewhere—of the coming, or the noncoming of the god. All presence is that of a body, but the body of the god is a body *that comes* (or that goes). Its presence is a face; it is that before whose face we are offered, and this is inscribed in space, as so many divine places. ("My principle . . . : in the notion of 'God as spirit', God considered as perfection is *denied*." [Nietzsche])

naming calling

46. Naming or calling the gods perhaps always necessarily resides not in a name, even one equipped with sublime epithets, but in whole phrases, with their rhythms and their tones.

whole phrases

The gods will go away one day, as mysteriously as they came, leaving behind them a shell in human form, enough to fool the believers. (Henry Miller)

rhythms

This is the true history of the gods: this fading. The gods: what I call thus so as to help you. A name. But I do not call the gods. They are. (Jean-Christophe Bailly)

semiotic

Gathering together the fragments of the divine, even piecing together what will be lacking. (Jean-Claude Lescout)

chora

God keep us! And ho! Eh? Amen on earth to all phenomena. What? (James Joyce)

No image is permitted. The background on either side might be accessible to the living. . . . But it has been clouded over, out of respect, with a dark glaze. He alone—god wishes to be apparent. (Victor Segalen)

Every gesture you make repeats a divine pattern. (Cesare Pavese)

The divine name, like an immense bird,
Has escaped from my breast
Before me the wreaths of a dense fog
And behind me an empty cage. (Osip Mandelstam)

God
(when a complete phosphorescence warns)
is linear by nature. (Jean Daive)

God shines, man hisses, echoing the snake. (Victor Hugo)

I sat astride God in the distant-the close by, he was singing,
it was
our last ride above
the hedgerows of men. (Paul Celan)

Hybris is the belief that happiness could be anything other than a present from the gods. (Walter Benjamin)

And our dead hearts live with the lightning in the wounds of the Gods. (Norman Mailer)

We all pray to some god, but what comes of it has no names. (Cesare Pavese)

Then the Gods are seized by dizziness. They stagger, go into convulsions, and vomit forth their existences. (Gustave Flaubert)

47. The god expels man outside of himself.

For Lucan, when the god penetrated the Pythia, "mentemque priorem expulit atque hominem toto sibi cedere iussit pectore" (he expelled all prior thought and ordered that she should yield herself up wholeheartedly to him).

However, outside or inside of himself, man, insofar as he is the place of the god (on that account, perhaps, another name than man would suit him better, since we are no longer accustomed to hearing that name as the name that stands face to face [*vis-à-vis*] with the name of the god), finds himself first and foremost in a state of destitution.

It is always in extreme destitution, in abandonment without shelter or protection, that man appears, waxes, or wanes before the face of the god. Wherever he presents himself, God brings about destitution and denuding. Whether he presents himself or absents himself—and that is the secret of God—he denudes man and leaves him destitute.

Destitution should not be contrasted with the magnificence of worship or with the splendor of hymns. All of these, on the contrary, are apt to reveal the infinite abandonment and fragility of the one who performs the rites. One might even say: destitution before the face of the god is the experience of the temple.

48. In the temple, worship, prostration, celebration take place. Hieratic postures, sacred recitations, consecrated actions bring us into contact with divine mystery, with the nakedness of god himself. The altars where according to ritual sacred substances are touched are always basically theatres of obscenity—and places of obscenity in turn are altars: the eye of Horus between the thighs of Pharaoh's wife.

Henceforth all experience of temple and altar has passed into experience of the obscene. To name God as Bataille did in the heat of love and in a brothel[27] is still to yield to a modern temptation. Altars and temples—does it need repeating?—are deserted. Obscenity, love, their agony and their ecstasy, have devolved to us alone, as have the dereliction of *Dasein* or the disquieting essence of power. There is positively no use wishing to find or name the divine in all that: for the gods have left it all behind for us.

If I say the divine has deserted the temples, that does not mean, as a ruse of dialectic is always ready to suggest, that the emptiness of the temples now offers us the divine. No: it means precisely and literally that the temples are deserted and that our experience of the divine is our experience of its desertion. It is no longer a question of meeting God in the desert: but of this—and *this* is the desert: we do not encounter God; God has deserted all encounter. Let us not precipitately see this as the very sign of the divine.

From all the rites and all the liturgies, not the least canticle is left over: even the *believer* who prays can only *quote* his prayer. Not the least genuflection remains. Music, theater, or the dance have taken it all over. That is our portion: the fact that the divine can no longer find refuge anywhere. There is no more meditation.

All that remains of the experience of the temple or the desert is destitution before the empty temples. These are not merely the temples of the West. God died in the West, and because of it, he died of the reason and the poetry of the West, of its cupidity and its generosity, of its coldness and its ardor, of its hate and its love. More perhaps than of anything else, God died of the love of God, of that intimacy with man—and to this extent, the dead God was still only the God of the West. But everywhere else, wherever there can be said to be somewhere other than the West, the gods have long since—perhaps since the beginning—exhausted themselves in a surfeit of signs and powers, in clergies, clans and castes, in the scrupulous observance and the firm ties that form the two possible meanings of the word *religio*.

If a god can still come, he can come neither from the East nor from the West, nor through a birth, nor through a decline. (If he comes, he comes just as much in the rites and the prayers of those who honor gods as in the indifference and the blasphemy of others. If he withdraws, it is just as much from the former as from the latter.) But the mere formulation of this possibility—"that a god might come"—is devoid of sense. Space is everywhere open, there is no place wherein to receive either the mystery or the splendor of a god. It is granted us to see the limitless openness of that space, it falls to our age to know—with a knowledge more acute than even the most penetrating science, more luminous than any consciousness—

how we are delivered up to that gaping naked face. It reveals to us nothing but us—*neither gods nor men*—and that too is a joy.

49. What presents itself is destitution. The only thing we can still receive into ourselves, aside from all the rest (the erotic, the political, the poetic, the philosophical, the religious) is such a destitution.

We must no longer seek either temples or deserts; we must abandon meditation. We must let ourselves be delivered up to dispersal and destitution. Yet we must not even do this: neither the god nor the destitution of the god can impose any obligations. God has no part in law. He simply indicates this: there is no longer any divine meditation. There are the heavens, more manifest than ever, and there is our destitution, set apart from the heavens and the earth.

Where does this take place? Nowhere, if there is no longer any place for the gods. And yet it does take place: we happen to find ourselves destitute. That opens something up, outside of all places, it makes a spacing out. If we are in it, we do not stand in it; there is no place there—but we ourselves are opened up there, parted from ourselves, from all our places and all our gods. We are in this place, denuded, before the destitute (*dénué*) face of the god.

50. Does there not remain, in spite of everything, a possibility that God may rise again, once more, and perhaps again and again?

No doubt this possibility exists, in defiance of everything. It is written into the most stringent logic of our philosophy, that is to say into the power of the negative: that God is not "God," that is divine. That is ontotheological ecstasy, from St. Paul to St. Thomas and from St. Thomas to Eckhart, Luther, and Hegel. Divine is the *kenosis* whereby God empties himself of himself, of his separation from man, of his abstract absoluteness. God is precisely that: the negation of his own particularity, his becoming man and corpse, and the negation of that negation—his resurrection, and his transfiguration into the universally radiant countenance of his own mystical body.

But the final resurrection of God left upon this countenance some strange features. God is resurrected a final time with Nietzsche, with the parodic and dizzying uttering of the inevitable "I am God" of self-consciousness. I am Dionysus, the Crucified, and all gods. A sort of monstrous spasm brings to completion, in *Ecce Homo,* both Hölderlin's fraternity of gods strange to the world and the "simple most intimate knowledge of self" where in Hegel there resounds "the harsh word that God himself is dead." God rises again, God gambles his own resurrection in the madness of Nietzsche, which combines the madness of Hölderlin with that of Hegel:

the madness of derangement in an exhausted calling to the gods, and the madness of the night of consciousness that knows the Self as negated ("that harsh expression is the expression of the most intimate self-knowledge, the return by consciousness into the depths of the night of Me = Me, which no longer perceives or knows anything outside of that night").

The last God to rise again went mad. His madness is both what arises at the furthest extreme of the *cogito*: the "*ego sum*" uttered in the negation of its own substance—and what is set off, mechanically, in the infinite reciting of the extreme edge of language, that is to say in the impossible naming of all divine Names, which are lacking. God has become the twofold madness of the absolute subject of utterance (*l'énonciation*) and of the infinite number of subjects of the uttered (*l'énoncé*) in our *logos*.

His mouth can no longer smile, his hands can no longer bless. He has lost charity as well as serenity. Those who can still pray, those who still understand mercy no longer recognize him.

The madness of God is not a new death. The mad god can no longer either die or rise again. He no longer has any freedom. He is fixed, frozen in his madness, in the absolute *logic* of a being identical to its own utterance, in the implacable automatism of the subject who is himself his own *acting out*.

The im-mediate and incommensurable presence, everywhere manifest and everywhere concealed, before the face of which we are bereft (*dénués*) of discourse and of *cogito*, is not in turn the negation of the mad God. It does not have that power, and even if it had, it could not use it, for it does not take place within the logic of the mad God.

That is why we shall not call this presence "god," we shall not even say it is divine: we shall not say it—we shall leave it to set out the places of its reserve and its generosity.

51. Divine places, without gods, with no god, are spread out everywhere around us, open and offered to our coming, to our going or to our presence, given up or promised to our visitation, to frequentation by those who are not men either, but who are there, in these places: ourselves, alone, out to meet that which we are not, and which the gods for their part have never been. These places, spread out everywhere, yield up and orient new spaces: they are no longer temples, but rather the opening up and the spacing out of the temples themselves, a dis-location with no reserve henceforth, with no more sacred enclosures—other tracks, other ways, other places for all who are there.

Translated by Michael Holland

2. The French text reads, "l'être dans l'amour," but it is important to remember that the English expression "being in love" does not translate literally into idiomatic French. That might, then, be one of the meanings invoked here, but it is not necessarily the sole or dominant one.—Trans.

3. René Char, *Hypnos Waking,* trans. Jackson Mathews (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 59.

4. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1978), p. 148.

5. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 50ff.

6. There is no adequate translation for the French verb *"jouir."* Translated as "to enjoy," *"jouir"* loses its sexual connotation; translated as "to come," it loses its relation to "joy." Following a suggestion by Nancy, I have created a new verb to translate *"jouir":* "to joy."—Trans.

7. The citation is in English in the original.—Trans.

5. Of Divine Places

All notes to Chapter 5 are provided by the translator.—Ed.

1. The use of the term *épreuve* in relation to thought is a reference to a work by Heidegger entitled *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Pfüllingen: Neske, 1954). (Thanks to Marian Jeannert for this lead.) This work has been translated into French under the title *L'expérience de la pensée* (in *Questions III* [Paris: Gallimard, 1966]). Nancy's use of *épreuve* would seem to be an attempt to refine upon the much-used term *expérience,* and carry over in translation some of the significance of the verb *erfahren,* which is defined as *fahrend erkunden:* to find out while or through traveling. My choice of *ordeal* does not achieve an analogous effect. The word is close to the German *Urteil* (judgment), rather than to *Kund* (knowledge) or *erkunden.* Nevertheless, I hope that *ordeal* will serve to specify the particular process to which Heidegger and Nancy refer. It is also possible to point to a posthumous work of Edmund Husserl's in justification of the choice of word: *Erfahrung und Urteil* (Hamburg: Claasen and Goverts, 1948), trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks as *Experience and Judgement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

2. Works by Jean-Luc Marion include *L'idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977); *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981); *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

3. Jean-Marie Pontevia, *La peinture, masque et miroir* (Bordeaux: William Blake, 1984), p. 69.

4. In "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" (Hölderlin and the essence of poetry), Heidegger writes:

> Dichten ist das ursprüngliche Nennen der Götter. Aber dem dichterischen Wort wird erst dann seine Nennkraft zuteil, wenn die Götter selbst uns zur Sprache bringen. Wie sprechen die Götter?
>
> " . . . und Winke sind
>
> Von Alters her die Sprache der Götter."
>
> Das Sagen des Dichters ist das Auffangen dieser Winke, um sie weiter zu winken in sein Volk.

[Poetry is the original naming of the gods. But the poetic word only receives its power to name when the Gods themselves bring us to speech. How do the Gods speak?

"... and nods have been
Since time immemorial the language of the Gods."

The poet's utterance is the act of being receptive to these nods so as to pass them on to his people.]

(In *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* [Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1951], pp. 42–43. An English version of this particular study can be found in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock [Chicago: Regnery, 1968], pp. 270–91.)

5. The French *nom* means both "noun" and "name," and the text plays on this constantly. English is slightly handicapped in having two words. What is more, although there are proper nouns, common nouns, and proper names, "common names" is not a relevant term here. It was thus rather difficult sometimes to decide which of the words "noun" or "name" to choose. In each case, the reader should always be aware of the pressure constantly exerted in the original by the play of meaning that the word *nom* sets up.

6. Paul Verlaine, "Le ciel est par-dessus le toit" (*Sagesse* 3, p. 6).

7. The term onto-theo-logical—its sense and its form—belongs to a particular stage in Heidegger's thinking as it relates to the divine. At first he simply bracketed the question of God, so as to devote himself to laying the foundation of metaphysics. This done, he believed, the question of God could then properly be addressed. A coherent ontology would provide the basis for a coherent theology. Subsequently, however, he came to consider metaphysics and ontology as an obstacle to thinking about being, and he included theology in this condemnation. His articulation of the term onto-theo-logical is intended to bring out the separate components of this obstacle. For a full discussion of what is usually called this *Kehre* or turn in Heidegger's thinking, see James L. Perotti, *Heidegger on the Divine* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974). See also John D. Caputo, "Heidegger's God and the Lord of History," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983), 439–64.

8. In the *Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite distinguishes between differentiated and undifferentiated names for the Godhead. One of the undifferentiated names is *hyperousion*. Nancy translates this as *superessence*, and I follow suit. William J. Carroll, however, prefers the translation *suprabeing*. Carroll distinguishes between the prefixes supra- and super- as follows: the latter "indicates an exceptional or outstanding member of a group," while the former "indicates that which transcends or is beyond a particular category" ("Unity, Participation and Wholes in a Key Text of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Divine Names*," *New Scholasticism* 57 (1983), 253–62 (p. 254, note). See also *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, translated with an introduction by C. E. Rolt (New York and London: Macmillan, 1920).

9. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être, ou au-delà de l'essence* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. x: "Mais entendre un Dieu non contaminé par l'être est une possibilité humaine non moins importante et non moins précaire que de tirer l'être de l'oubli où il serait tombé dans la méta-physique et dans l'onto-théologie" (But to comprehend a God uncontaminated by being is a human possibility that is no less important and no less precarious than to rescue being from the oblivion into which it is said to have fallen in meta-physics and onto-theology). This is a clear statement of Lévinas's position as it relates to Heidegger's. (The work appears in English as *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Hingham: Kluwer Academic, 1981].)

10. These words are from verse VI of the Elegy *Heimkunft*, where Hölderlin says of the god:

> Ihn zu fassen, ist fast unsere Freude zu klein.
> Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Namen,
> Herzen schlagen, und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?

(Our joy is almost too small for us to grasp him.
We must often be silent; sacred names are lacking,
Hearts beat, and yet speech hangs back?)

11. Heidegger's *Erläuterungen* also contains the study entitled "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten," pp. 9–30 (translated as "Remembrance of the Poet" by Douglas Scott, in *Existence and Being*, ed. Brock).

12. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, 5. Translation taken from *The Isis-Book: Metamorphoses, Book XI*, edited, with an introduction, translation, and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

13. For an English introduction to Lévinas see "Ethics of the Infinite," in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 47–70. Of man's relation to God Lévinas says:

> Time is the most profound relationship man can have with God precisely as a going towards God. There is an excellence in time which would be lost in eternity. . . . To accept time is to accept death as the impossibility of presence. To be in eternity is to be *one*, to be *oneself* eternally. To be in time is to be for God [*être à Dieu*], a perpetual leavetaking [*adieu*]. (p. 59)

See also *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1982), especially p. 250:

> Dieu . . . n'est pas terme, mais Infini. Infini auquel je suis voué par une pensée non-intentionnelle dont aucune préposition de notre langue—pas même le *à* auquel nous recourons—ne saurait traduire la dévotion. *A-Dieu* dont le temps diachronique est le chiffre unique, à la fois dévotion et transcendance. Il n'est pas certain que la notion du "mauvais infini" de Hegel n'admette aucune révision.
>
> (God . . . is not a term, but an Infinite. An Infinite to which I am destined by a non-intentional thinking whose devotion can be translated by no preposition in our language—not even the *to* which we have recourse to. An *à-Dieu* for which diachronic time is the sole index and which is simultaneously devotion and transcendence. It is by no means certain that Hegel's notion of "bad infinity" allows of no revision.)

Nancy alludes to this last reference in section 2.

For another dialogue with Lévinas in English see *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen (Atlantic Highlands: Duquesne, 1985).

14. See Martin Heidegger "Vom Wesen des Grundes" (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1949).

> Durch die ontologische Interpretation des Daseins als In-der-Welt-sein ist weder positiv noch negativ über ein mögliches Sein zu Gott entschieden. Wohl aber wird durch die Erhellung der Transzendenz allerest ein zureichender Begriff des Daseins gewonnen, mit Rücksicht auf welches Seiende nunmehr gefragt werden kann, wie es mit dem Gottesverhältnis des Daseins ontologisch bestellt ist.
>
> (The ontological interpretation of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-World tells neither for nor against the possible existence of God. One must first gain an adequate concept of *Dasein* by illuminating transcendence. Then, by considering *Dasein*, one can ask how the relationship of *Dasein* to God is ontologically constituted.) (*The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terence Malich [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969].)

This early text expresses an attitude to God and the divine that Heidegger will subsequently reject. See note 18.

15. See, for example, Guy Lardreau and Christian Jambet, *L'Ange* (Paris: Grasset, 1976); Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Testament de Dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1979); Maurice Clavel, *Dieu est*

Dieu, nom de Dieu! (Paris: Grasset, 1976); Philippe Némo, *Job et l'excès du mal* (Paris: Grasset, 1978). Mention should also be made of two works by René Girard: *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), trans. Patrick Gregory as *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1978). See also Philippe Sollers, "La lettre volée de l'Evangile," in "Dieu est-il mort?" *Art Press* 19 (1978), pp. 6–8. Referring to Girard, Sollers writes: "L'idée que la Bible et les Evangiles sont ce qu'on ne voit pas parce qu'on l'a trop sous les yeux m'est venue en poursuivant mon expérience d'écriture. . . . Il ne s'agit pas de retour du refoulé. C'est le fait que quelque chose s'éclaire qui était la depuis toujours. C'est le retour de vous-même comme refoulé. C'est le retour d'un sujet qui n'est pas 'vous,' le retour du *nom*, du sujet dans le nom." (The idea that the Bible and the Gospels are what we do not see because we see it too much came to me during the course of my experiences (and experiments) with writing. . . . This is no return of the repressed. It is the fact that something is brought to light that has always been there. It is the return of yourself as repressed. It is the return of a subject that is not "you," the return of the *name*, of the subject in the name.)

16. These lines come from Hölderlin's poem "Was ist Gott? . . . ," whose opening words are echoed by Nancy at the beginning of this text. The original reads:

> Was ist Gott? unbekannt, dennoch
> Voll Eigenschaften ist das Angesicht
> Des Himmels von ihm. Die Blitze nähmlich
> Der Zorn sind eines Gottes. Je mehr ist eins
> Unsichtbar, schicket es sich in Fremdes.

17. "Selfsame with" is used to translate the preposition *à même* throughout. In justification of my use of such a neologism I would quote Philip E. Lewis who, in a recent study of translation effects, posits an "abuse principle" whose application he describes as follows: "The abusive move in the translation . . . will bear upon a key operator or a decisive textual knot that will be recognized by dint of its own abusive features, by its resistance to the preponderant values of the 'usual' and the 'useful'" ("The Measure of Translation Effects," in *Difference in Translation*, edited with an introduction by Joseph F. Graham [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985], pp. 31–62 [pp. 42–3]). *A même* is used by Nancy in just such an abusive fashion, I would claim. And though its usual translation, "on the surface of," would have linked it to the topic of *face*, it would have eliminated all reference to the question of identity and sameness that is found in the word *même*, and that is crucial to the problematic of Nancy's text. In justification of my choice of term, I would refer to the entry for *selfsame* in the OED, which quotes two instances of its use, each of which seemed to fit it for my purpose: "That we should believe in Him as He who is, the self-existing, the self-same" (Thomas Pusey, 1860); "Always selfsame, like the sky" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1870).

18. Each of these German terms is a neologism coined from a term that is basic to Heidegger's thinking: *er-lichten* comes from *Lichtung* (clearing), which he uses to describe the opening up and the illumination that constitute the event (*Ereignis*) of being; *ent-borgen* is the past participle of the neologism *ent-bergen*, by means of which he reinterprets the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, as an un-concealing. Nancy translates *ent-bergen* as *dés-abriter*, which is also a neologism. Consequently, the English translation should perhaps have been something like *un-shelter*. The term *dis-lodge* seemed, however, despite its lexical orthodoxy, to translate *ent-bergen* so well that I decided to use it in preference to un-shelter, and to try to reproduce some of the effect of the neologism by means of the hyphen.

19. See Gilles Aillaud, John Berger, and Catherine Tieck, *Le proche et le lointain* (Paris: Regard, 1980); Gilles Aillaud, *Peintures et préambules* (Paris: Galerie Karl Flinker, 1982).

20. This passage occurs in Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, section VII, C, "Revealed Religion."

21. Hermann Usener, *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn, 1896).

22. In *Sein und Zeit,* Heidegger writes, "Sein liegt im Dass- und Sosein, in Realität, Vorhandenheit, Bestand, Geltung, Dasein, im 'es gibt'" (Being lies in the fact that something is, in its Being as it is, in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the "there is") (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973], p. 26).

Lévinas translates *es gibt* as *il y a*, and makes this specific mode of being his main preoccupation. See *De L'existence à l'existant* (Paris: Vrin, 1947). Relevant to the present discussion is his declaration in that work that "plutôt qu'à Dieu, la notion de l'il y a nous ramène à l'absence de Dieu" (rather than to God, the notion of there is leads to the absence of God) (p. 99).

23. See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), pp. 29–30:

> On peut appeler athéisme cette séparation si complète que l'être séparé se maintient tout seul dans l'existence sans participer à l'Etre dont il est séparé—capable éventuellement d'y adhérer par la croyance. La rupture avec la participation est impliquée dans cette capacité. On vit en dehors de Dieu, chez soi, on est moi, égoïsme. L'âme—la dimension du psychique—accomplissement de la séparation, est naturellement athée. Par athéisme, nous comprenons ainsi une position antérieure à la négation comme à l'affirmation du divin, la rupture de la participation à partir de laquelle le moi se pose comme le même et comme moi.
>
> (We can term atheism this separation that is so complete that the separate being subsists all alone in existence, and does not participate in the Being from which it is separated—while remaining capable on occasions of adhering to it through faith. The break with participation is implied by this capacity. You live outside of God, within yourself, you are an 'I', an egoism. The soul—the dimension of the psychic—which is consummate separation, is naturally atheist. By atheism I thus mean a position prior to both the negation and affirmation of the divine, the breach of participation from which the 'I' goes on to posit itself as self and as I.)

For an English version of this work see *Totality and Infinity,* trans. Henry J. Koren (Atlantic City: Duquesne, 1969).

24. Technology *(die Technik)* is the term by which Heidegger characterizes the modern relationship to being. It is the technological or calculative relationship to the world that, he claims, is responsible for our forgetfulness of being. For a discussion of this crucial notion, see *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger,* translations, notes, and commentary by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 152–67, "Some Heideggerian Pathways to Technology and the Divine."—Trans.

25. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841); Sigmund Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927).

partage (cf. Rancière)

26. The question of partition *(le partage)* is examined by Nancy in *Le partage des voix* (Paris: Galilée, 1982), and again in "La communauté désoeuvrée," where the author revises his position somewhat. It is a difficult term to translate. The expression *un partage des voix* means the casting of votes equally on both sides. This sense is present in Nancy's use of the term. However, the two main senses of the verb *partager,* to divide or share, and to be torn *(être partagé)* are also brought into play by Nancy, and they in turn have a considerable

amount of play in them. There is no equivalent English verb. My choice of partition, which is not totally satisfactory, seemed justified by the semantic richness of the term as it appears in the OED.

27. Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963). Also in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 9–31.