

**McGrath, Sean. J., *The Early Heidegger & Medieval Philosophy. Phenomenology for the Godforsaken*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press 2006, 268 pages.**

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Scholarship in Heideggerian philosophy can be broadly differentiated into three groups, which evolved in the European and Anglo-American discourses after WWII, namely, first a transcendental (idealist Kantian) approach; second, an Aristotelian approach; and third, a Christian approach to Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* and his fundamental ontology. All of these basic positions are a result of Heidegger's philosophy on his way to *Being and Time* (1927) which he developed both in his broad ranging and fascinating lecture courses in Freiburg, where he taught as Husserl's assistant between 1917 and 1923, and in Marburg, where he taught between 1923 and 1927 (before he returned to Freiburg in 1928 as Husserl's successor). Interestingly, the analytic reception of Heidegger focuses on Heidegger's main work *Being and Time*, whereas the European and "Continental" discourse is oriented towards larger issues, which include philosophical anthropology, theology, hermeneutics, and the history of philosophy. McGrath's study belongs to the theologically motivated studies on Heidegger's phenomenology and ontology and thereby contributes to the recent renewed interest in Heidegger's early philosophy, which arose after his early lecture courses were published in his *Collected Works* and after it became clear that Heidegger's way to *Being and Time* (and his later thinking) not only was heavily influenced by Scholasticism, especially by Duns Scotus, but also by Augustine, Eckhart, and Luther, all of which took effect before Heidegger encountered Husserl's phenomenology, Neo-Kantianism or Aristotle's philosophy. The greatness of *Being and Time* is indeed a result of the ingenious transformation of all these sources into something new.

McGrath's study focuses on Heidegger's reception of the Christian tradition, especially on Duns Scotus, Eckhart, and Luther. The book is divided into nine chapters, beginning with a general introduction to Heidegger's early phenomenology, followed by his reception of the aforementioned authors and movements, as well as by an evaluative component developed throughout the whole book by means of which McGrath takes a critical stance against Heidegger's phenomenology of what the author calls "Godforsakenness." With this term McGrath refers to Heidegger's attempt to work out an analytic of existence that no longer refers to the infinite in order to determine finitude, which may be even more interesting, given that Heidegger struggled with his own "Godforsakenness" throughout his whole life. McGrath shows that Heidegger's interest and study of Protestant theology around 1919 was motivated by his critique of Scholasticism as a wrongheaded mixture of Greek metaphysics and a *theologia gloriae* that, according to Heidegger, lead to a covering up of the experience of primal Christianity, which Heidegger primarily takes up from Dilthey's studies of Augustine and Christianity (188pp.).

The book is characterized by a very stimulating mixture of positive reconstruction and a negative attitude towards Heidegger's critique of Scholasticism. In his reading of Heidegger McGrath shifts back and forth between, on the one hand, open admiration for the force of Heidegger's thought and, on the other hand, a critique of Heidegger's phenomenological interpretations of the tradition. For example, after an impressive reconstruction of Heidegger's reading of Eckhart and Clairvaux, McGrath criticizes Heidegger's interpretation of mystic philosophy as expressing a form of life, which can be described and laid out in general structures of the self and human life. According to McGrath, Heidegger covers up the *specific* theological positions that are worked out by the mystic authors. As McGrath claims, the price Heideggerian

phenomenology has to pay for its radical interpretations, is the total loss of *specific* theological possibilities of laying out the religious dimension of human life. In this vein, Heidegger interprets Eckhart's concept of *Hingabe* (devotion, literally "given over") as a general structure of experience in his early hermeneutics of facticity. Clearing *Hingabe* of its specific theological significance, Heidegger uses the concept "to describe our categorical immersion in the world" (139). Before we are reflectively related to ourselves or to other entities, *Hingabe* (for Heidegger) indicates the way in which life is given over to itself and surrendered to the world. Heidegger's strategy of taking the religious discourse as an indication of a deeper, universal structure, according to McGrath, unfortunately leads him to a distortion of the historical material (141); however, as a consequence, McGrath goes as far as calling Heidegger a "theological terrorist" (177) due to his attempt to "remove the notion of *ens infinitum* from ontology" (119). It is interesting to note though, that McGrath's struggles with Heidegger's interpretations coincide with Heidegger's own development and his appropriation of Christian philosophy (before Heidegger came to the result that "Christian philosophy" is impossible and must be given up).

According to Heidegger, the phenomenological philosopher must take every instantiation of how life lays itself out on the theoretical (theological) level as being dependent on and tied to a non-religiously defined structure of pre-theoretical understanding. Consequently, the critique of Scholasticism in Heidegger is closely tied to his discovery of Luther as a form of theology that indicates a closer relationship to how human beings encounter themselves on a pre-theoretical level. What Heidegger found interesting in non-Scholastic Christian philosophy was the tendency to overcome the metaphysical set up of theology, since this move pushes non-Scholastic philosophy closer to how human life lays itself out *before* it reflects on itself in theoretical constructs. The task of what Heidegger called "hermeneutics of facticity" is to render

this pre-theoretical understanding visible. If interpreted through the phenomenological lens and a philosophy of life, non-Scholastic philosophy is more authentic than Scholasticism.

According to McGrath though, Heidegger's project fails for two reasons: he fails to consider the specific theological dimension and he misinterprets Scholastic philosophy. Those two moves become combined with Heidegger's fascination of Luther's "soteriology of extreme corruption" (156), which Luther takes to be an essential element of human nature, thereby positioning himself against the Scholastic claim that fallenness has left the "natural orientation of intellect and will to God" (ibid.) intact. Luther's position not only is echoed in Heidegger's transformation of Luther's concept of fallenness in *Being and Time* into an existential concept, but, according to McGrath, should be understood as a "philosophy that can enable a radical (albeit ontologically neutered) theology of revelation" (184).

From here it is clear that McGrath – who does not hide his sympathy for Scholasticism – remains dissatisfied with Heidegger's reinterpretation of the religious tradition and with his take on Aquinas. As McGrath claims, Heidegger totally overlooks the "radical break with Greek ontology in Aquinas's notion of being" (225). He also takes stance against Heidegger's critical comments on the mixture of the concept of being with the concept of a first cause (216pp.). In particular, McGrath takes a stand against Heidegger's thesis (developed around 1927) that theology should be conceived as a positive science directed towards a region of being and that – seen from a phenomenological point of view – it is based on a *specific* existential comportment that we should not universalize (xii, 178pp.). Against Heidegger and in agreement with Aquinas the author claims that religiousness is an ontological characteristic of human beings and that it belongs to their nature in the form of a universal potency (252). This "directedness" towards God (247) is the condition of the possibility of faith. Even if we follow McGrath in his attempt to

correct the Heideggerian way of addressing religion, the move McGrath subtly introduces from religiousness in general to a *Christian* religiousness in particular remains unclear. For example, McGrath writes: “We are called to a self-emptying, kenotic ecstasy of unity with the self-emptying, kenotic ecstasy of unity with the self-emptying divinity whose perfection is manifest in the Crucified. Religiousness is agitation with our present state of being, the overwhelming feeling of a possible fullness that is not now and not ours, but yet *could be*. Without religiousness, there would be no religion” (250). The move from the “Crucified” to religiousness in general is nowhere clearly addressed by the author.

Moreover, even if we agree with McGrath that human nature is characterized by a feeling of absence, by a longing to transcend one’s existence (248), mattering (253), and a “being before God” (252), he overlooks that it is precisely the attempt of *Being and Time* to re-interpret the categories that McGrath uses for these descriptions, such as “feeling,” “longing” and “ought,” on new grounds. According to Heidegger, the anthropological terms used by McGrath are temporal instantiations of broader structures, including those of thrownness/attunement as the condition for the possibility of feelings, futurity as the condition for the possibility of longing, and care as the condition for the possibility of ought. The different temporalizations of our being-in-the-world are all transcendently presupposed for McGrath’s categories and *therefore* religiousness is not part of the existential structure of *Dasein*. According to McGrath, however, religiousness is a “formal feature of human being-in-the-world” (247) and “the human being seems to be spontaneously religious” (21). McGrath thereby forgets that the encounter of oneself as *human* is *not* identical with *Dasein*, inasmuch as the discovery (*Entdecktheit*) of oneself as something *in* the world (being human, i.e. having a body, having mental states, etc.) already presupposes temporality, care, and transcendence. Accordingly, from a point of view that takes the

transcendental setup of Heidegger's philosophy into account, one should remain skeptical about McGrath's attempt to reintroduce Christianity into the Heideggerian framework, even though the *struggle with* the status of religion in human life, which indicates a being troubled with one's own futurity, should be acknowledged. Indeed, perhaps what Heidegger found most fascinating elements in Augustine and Luther was precisely this struggle and being anxious about one's future. However, McGrath takes this to be a distortion in Heidegger's interpretations (p. 203).

Finally, these critical remarks should be taken as an indication of the strength of the book: for McGrath's book is an impressive study of Heidegger's philosophy, which sheds light on almost all aspects of the early Heidegger and undoubtedly the book is an important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and theology.