HEIDEGGER'S METHOD: PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS AS FORMAL INDICATIONS

DANIEL O. DAHLSTROM

> To give them as much credit as possible, words possess only sufficient efficacy to remind us in order that we may seek things, but not to exhibit the things that we know by them.
>
> Augustine, *De magistro*.[1]

In 1929, after rejecting the suggestion that contemporary Christians may be expected to feel "threatened" by Kierkegaard's criticisms, the Protestant theologian Gerhardt Kuhlmann remarks:

> But present-day Christianity perhaps *is terrified* instead about the fact that everything that the spokesmen of its theology put out as revelation, according to the original Christian and reformational understanding of the term, has been set forth by a philosopher devoid of mythologizing, that is to say, exactly and profanely.[2]

One of the questions ultimately raised by the following paper is whether Heidegger in his analysis of existence does in fact, as Kuhlmann suggests, purge Kierkegaard's thought of every theological or mythological element.[3] Kuhlmann's remark is part of a broader salvo launched against what he regards as his contemporaries' naive appropriation of an atheistic existential analysis that reduces the

---

[1] "Hactenus verba valuerunt, quibus ut plurimum tribuam, admonent tantum ut quaeremus res, non exhibent ut noverimus"; *S. Augustini Operum*, Patrologiae Latinae Tomus 32 (Paris: Migne, 1841), 1215; *Concerning the Teacher and On the Immortality of the Soul*, trans. George G. Leckie (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1958), 46.

[2] "Aber vielleicht *erschrickt* die heutige Christenheit vielmehr darüber, daß all das, was die Wortführer ihrer Theologie als Offenbarung nach urchristlichen und reformatorischen Verständnis ausgeben, von einem Philosophen ohne Mythologisierung, also exakt und profan hergestellt wird"; Gerhardt Kuhlmann, "Zum theologischen Problem der Existenz (Frage an R. Bultmann)," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 10, no. 1 (1929): 51n. Unless a translation is indicated all translations are my own.

[3] Kuhlmann, "Zum theologischen Problem," 49 and n. 1. This purging or "profane rendering" (*Profanisierung*), Kuhlmann argues, effectively— even if inadvertently—exposes "Kierkegaard's error" of confusing existential analysis with theology.

phenomena of faith and revelation to the "projection" (*Entwurf*) of *Dasein*.[4]

The following paper moves along a path similar to Kuhlmann's, but in an opposite direction. The paper is concerned, not with Christian theologians' appropriation of Heidegger's analysis, but rather with Heidegger's appropriation of Christian theology's method. In lectures delivered at Marburg and in others given both immediately before and afterwards in Freiburg, Heidegger specifically outlines a "formally indicatory" method, that is to say, a philosophical method that proceeds by "formally indicating or signalling" certain phenomena. The purpose of the following paper is to reconstruct, principally in light of Heidegger's methodical reflections in his lectures, the genesis and nature of this method and to show, on the basis of that reconstruction, how it is appropriated from what he understands by Christian theology.

I

Central to Heidegger's criticism of the Western philosophical tradition is his charge that it has repeatedly "passed over" the world as a phenomenon in favor of nature, conceived as a collection of substances or things present.[5] Dominating this prevailing conception, according to Heidegger, is meta-physics, loosely understood as the tendency to regard things as being only insofar as they are in some sense present and thus potentially available and accessible to human concerns. His contemporaries' arguments for the integrity of the humanities and historical studies (*Geisteswissenschaften*) in the face of the demand for the unity of a single method drawn from the sciences of nature (*Naturwissenschaften*), come up short in Heidegger's eyes. They come up short, as do the myriad attempts to refute psychologism, because they tacitly subscribe to the same ontological assumption as

---

[4] Kuhlmann, "Zum theologischen Problem," 50–1.

[5] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (hereafter, "*SZ*") (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1972), 63–6; Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffes* (hereafter, "*PGZ*"), 2d ed., ed. Petra Jaeger, vol. 20 of the *Gesamtausgabe*: Marburg lectures of the summer semester 1925 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1988), 231–51. The *Gesamtausgabe* is cited hereafter as *GA* followed by the volume number and by the year of its publication in parentheses; all volumes of the *GA* are published by Klostermann in Frankfurt am Main.

their opponents.[6]   On that assumption, whatever else something may be said to be, what it means for it "to be" is for it to be present or, in other words, to be a scientific object in the broadest sense of the term, namely, something capable of standing over against some knowing or researching subject (*gegenüberstehend, ein Gegenstand*).

Philosophical neglect of the world is thus in Heidegger's eyes the expression of the forgottenness of what "to be" means, which, despite the tradition, is not to be confused with the mere presence of any particular thing or being or collection of the same.   Nor can the retrieval of what "to be" means be the provenance of science, at least not a science that concerns itself with some object only insofar as the latter is or can be present.   In a muscular historical narrative, the sweep of which the philosophical community has not witnessed since the likes of Hegel or Nietzsche, Heidegger recounts the difficult infancy of this *Seinsvergessenheit* in the classical Greek idea of a science of being, its dreamy adolescence in the context of the medieval sciences of theology, its maturation in the unabashed subjectivism of the modern scientific project ("mastery of nature") and, finally, its domination as technology in the twentieth century.

There is a logical as well as historical dimension to Heidegger's critique.   The tendency to regard everything as basically a more or less objectifiable presence is facilitated, he insists, by the *logical prejudice* of construing truth solely as the property of a certain class of judgments or assertions.   The logical prejudice, in other words, is the proclivity to privilege assertions or judgments as the distinctive forms of logos capable of bearing truth (*Wahrheitsträger*).[7]   Assertions, as Heidegger understands them, are communicable ways of pointing out and specifying something (specifying it by way of predication).[8]   According to the logical prejudice mentioned above, "true" is paradigmatically the predicate of a sentence designating a judgment or

---

[6] Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (hereafter, "*Logik*"), ed. Walter Biemel, Marburg lectures of the winter semester 1925/26, *GA* 21 (1976), 92.

[7] Certainly one of the most controversial aspects of Heidegger's existential analysis is his appeal to a private logos, namely, the call of conscience as the privileged or authentic logos of the truth.   This aspect of Heidegger's analysis of conscience and of public discourse's proclivities for deception can be fruitfully compared with Hegel's account of conscience and "the beautiful soul's" regard for language; see G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 428–42.

[8] *SZ*, 154–8; *Logik*, 133–4.

assertion, and is legitimately predicated of such a sentence only if some thing or object is or is believed to be present in precisely the way that the respective judgment or assertion indicates and specifies. Heidegger labels assertions that purport to point out something insofar as it is present "thematic" or "theoretical" assertions.[9] Such assertions are central to the way that a science entertains and investigates its objects. It does not matter whether the science be mathematics or theology, physics or psychology, or whether it be theoretical or practical.

Of the many grounds on which Heidegger's critique might be challenged, perhaps the most obvious and most trenchant are self-referential. Is not the fundamental ontology undertaken in *Being and Time* itself a science? Does it not make use of thematic or theoretical assertions in order to indicate, specify, and communicate what "to be" means in the paradigmatic case of *Dasein*? Insofar as the truth of these assertions is presumed, is not that meaning of "to be" thereby systematically objectified? Or, to the extent that Heidegger does succeed in demonstrating that an interplay of presencing and absencing fundamentally constitutes what it respectively means for humans, the world, and even things ready-to-hand "to be," is the demonstration not committed to the *presence* of the interplay?[10] Why, indeed, should Heidegger's method of investigating what "to be" means be different from any other?

This self-referential challenge was by no means lost on Heidegger. In the summer semester of 1925, after repeating his charge that the Western philosophical tradition has passed over the phenomena of the world, he ponders:

> Yet how, then, is the world to be determined in a positive way? How is something supposed to be said about the structure of the world, given

---

[9] *SZ*, 158; in *Logik* (p. 156n.) Heidegger distinguishes three levels or modes of assertions according to which a theoretical assertion about something present-at-hand constitutes an "extreme."

[10] Subsequently, Heidegger attempts to articulate a clearing (*Lichtung*) that is neither present nor absent, and comes into its own (*ereignet sich*) in a way irreducible to the presence/absence and manifestness/hiddenness interplays; see, for example, Martin Heidegger, "Was heißt denken?" and Martin Heidegger, "Aletheia (Heraklit, Fragment 16)," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), 128–9, 136–7, 264, 268; Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), 20–5, 72–4; Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971), 97. For a useful resume of these efforts see Thomas Prufer, "Glosses on Heidegger's Architectonic Word-Play," in Thomas Prufer, *Recapitulations: Essays in Philosophy* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 107–9.

that above all, from the outset, we shun every theory and precisely this extreme objectification?"[11]

These queries of 1925 are not the first or the last time that Heidegger entertained the self-referential challenge to his method. By his own account, Heidegger does not exactly have a methodology, but he certainly does have a method.[12] Lying somewhere between a full-blown methodology and his method are several "methodical reflections"[13] between 1919 and 1930, in the course of which he repeatedly attempts to respond to this challenge by invoking the "formally indicative" character of his method or way of conceiving things.[14]

In the summer semester of 1930, for example, he acknowledges that, as soon as philosophizing is committed to words, it is exposed to an "essential *misinterpretation of its content.*" That essential misinterpretation is precisely the view that everything, insofar as it has been articulated, has to be taken for something present-at-hand. Heidegger sets for himself the goal of "being able, at least relatively, to

---

[11] *PGZ*, 251. Heidegger also observes: "Also für die Philosophie handelt es sich gerade um radikalste Erhellung—philosophisches kategorial-untheoretisches Aufbrechen"; Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles, Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (hereafter, "*PIA*"), ed. Walter Bröcker and Käte Bröckwer-Oltmanns, Early Freiburg lectures of the winter semester 1921/22, *GA* 61 (1985), 198.

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, ed. Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, Early Freiburg lectures of the summer semester 1923, *GA* 63 (1988), 79.

[13] *SZ*, 27–8, 310–16; *PIA*, 157.

[14] *PIA*, 19–20, 61–2; Martin Heidegger, "Phänomenologie und Theologie," in Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 2d ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 65–6. Heidegger's use of *formale Anzeige* has been discussed by Pöggeler, Oudemanns, and van Dijk; see Otto Pöggeler, "Heideggers logische Untersuchungen," in *Martin Heidegger: Innen- und Außenansichten*, ed. R. Blasche, W. Kohler, W. Kuhlmann, and P. Rohs (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 75–100; Theodore C. W. Oudemans, "Heideggers 'logische Untersuchungen'," *Heidegger Studies* 6 (1990): 85–105; R. J. A. van Dijk, "Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Zur formalanzeigenden Struktur der philosophischen Begriffe bei Heidegger," *Heidegger Studies* 7 (1991): 89–109. Gadamer refers to Heidegger's earlier, frequent use of the notion of a "formale Anzeige"; see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die religiöse Dimension" (1981), in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Heideggers Wege* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), 148. Gadamer also addresses the general issue of Heidegger's nonobjectifying language in his "Heidegger und die Sprache der Metaphysik," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Kleinere Schriften III* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1972), 212–30. There is also extensive discussion of the notion of a "formale Anzeige" in Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's* Being and Time (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); regrettably, a copy of Kisiel's dense and helpful study first came into my hands after completion of the present article.

elude" that misinterpretation; "to this end," he observes, "it is neces-
sary to reflect on the general character of philosophical concepts, that
they are all formally indicating or signalling [*formal anzeigend*]."[15]

At the beginning of the same period, in his critical remarks on the
problematic preconceptions and observational method of Jaspers's
Psychologie der Weltanschauungen, Heidegger refers to a "formal in-
dication" as "a specific step of the method of phenomenological ex-
plication"; in the formal indication, he maintains, "a methodical . . .
fundamental sense of all philosophical concepts and connections
among concepts is to be seen."[16]   Though Heidegger declines to ex-
plain the notion further in the context of the Jaspers essay, his use of
the notion makes clear that he regards the "formal indication" as a
revisable way of pointing to some phenomenon, fixing its preliminary
sense and the corresponding manner of unpacking it, while at the same
time deflecting any "uncritical lapse" into some specific concep-
tion that would foreclose pursuit of "a genuine sense" of the phe-
nomenon.[17]

What Heidegger understands by a "formal indication" is exten-
sively elaborated shortly thereafter in the winter semester of 1921/22.[18]

---

[15] Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (hereafter,
"*GM*"), ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann, Freiburg lectures of the winter
semester 1929/30, *GA* 29/30 (1983), 422, 430.   One customary use of the ex-
pression "indication" is to characterize some sort of reference that provides
the starting point for further examination and inference.   Along these lines,
there is a specific use of the term in medicine paralleling a use of "Anzeige"
(Oxford English Dictionary "A suggestion or direction as to the treatment of
a disease, derived from the symptoms observed"), which according to this
dictionary is apparently the first use of the term in English.   Nevertheless,
"indication" in no way has the same rich array of uses as does "Anzeige."
Some of the connotations attaching to "Anzeige" are captured by the term
"signal," taken in a broad sense; hence, it is translated here sometimes as
"indication," sometimes as "signal."   More specifically, an "Anzeige" may
designate a notice served or a warning, an announcement (for example, of a
wedding or a death), an advertisement (including the "personals"), a public
declaration (for example, of a stock offering or of a bankruptcy, typically
appearing in a newspaper), or a prospectus.   At various times Heidegger
appeals to one or more of these accents in his use of "formale
Anzeige."

[16] *Wegmarken*, 9–11, 29.   Heidegger's first refers to a "formally indicat-
ing meaning" (*formal anzeigende Bedeutung*) in regard to fixing the sense
of the term "method"; he then speaks of the object of the inquiry "fixed in a
formal indication as *existence*."   Cf. also *PIA*, 141.

[17] *Wegmarken*, 11.

[18] These early Freiburg lectures (*PIA*) contain perhaps the most sus-
tained self-reflexive deliberations by Heidegger, as far as his philosophical
method is concerned.   They are obligatory reading for anyone trying to un-

These lectures make clear what Heidegger had in mind when he referred in the Jaspers essay to the formal indication as "a specific step of the method of phenomenological explication" and "a methodical . . . fundamental sense of all philosophical concepts." That "fundamental sense" of philosophical concepts insofar as they are "formal indications" is based upon the phenomenological insight that the object of an interpretation must be so articulated that the determination of the object (in what sense it *is*) must emerge from the manner in which one originally "has" it, that is to say, the manner in which it originally becomes accessible (*wie der Gegenstand ursprünglich zugänglich wird*).[19] The "object" of philosophy itself is "what 'to be' means" in the case of such "having"; in other words, philosophizing is nothing but a way of comporting oneself to an original, unreflected or unthematic (*unabgehobenen*) comportment, an attempt to "have" or "understand" the latter authentically.[20]

Heidegger chooses locutions such as "having" (*haben*), "comporting" (*verhalten*), or "understanding" (*verstehen*) in order to emphasize that that original, unthematic "having" or "comporting" is for the most part not some sort of deliberate, meditative act of knowing something. Instead those locutions signify any way—theoretical, practical, playful, devotional, tender, and so on—in which a human being might relate to something, whether himself, another, a natural object, an artifact, an artwork, a mathematical formula, a scientific hypothesis, a dream, and so on. The task of philosophy is to determine what "to be" means in the case of any of the latter and this determination is possible only by understanding or "retrieving" the precise and fundamental way in which a human being exists and relates to each of them respectively (where this existing and relating are in an important sense logically equivalent). Thus, Heidegger concludes, philosophy's way of relating to its object is "utterly original and radical," indeed, such "that even and precisely through the grasping it *is* what it grasps and grasps what it *is*."[21] Since philosophy's

---

derstand Heidegger's method during the first decade of his professional career and his attempts at that time to answer the self-referential challenges posed by his own critique of the Western philosophical tradition.

[19] *PIA*, 18–19, 20, 23; *SZ*, 27.

[20] Later Heidegger associates that original "having" or "comportment" with what Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 9.10 describes as *thigein* and *nous*, construed as the prepropositional having in which what cannot be differentiated (*asyntheta*) and thus is not subject to predication discloses itself (*alēthein*); see *Logik*, 179–90.

[21] *PIA*, 60–1; cf. pp. 41–2, 51, 53–4.

"object" is what "to be" means in the context of that original com-
portment, it cannot "have" (understand, retrieve) its object as it were
from the outside.   Instead philosophy must itself carry out or enact
(or more exactly, reenact) that original, unthematic "having," so as to
appropriate it explicitly.[22]

Precisely for this reason Heidegger characterizes philosophical
concepts as formal indications or signals, concepts pointing respec-
tively toward some original comportment, yet as "a concrete task to
be completed or performed by [philosophizing] alone" (*eine eigene
konkrete Vollzugsaufgabe*).[23]   What is thereby indicated is not given
"in any complete and actual sense" but only "in principle."   A philo-
sophical concept is accordingly "empty" in a certain sense and hence
purely "formal"—"formal" because it points in the direction of some-
thing that must be performed or gone through and even fulfilled or
perfected by the philosopher, a direction, moreover, that springs from
the philosophical "object" or "theme" itself.[24]   Thus, *Sein und Zeit* is
not the depiction of some fact (*Sachverhalt*), but rather an indication
of a way of approaching what "to be" means.[25]

II

In Heidegger's use and characterization of the notion of a "formal
indication" two principal, overlapping functions may be delineated.
First, it points to a phenomenon in such a way that it enjoins against
any preemptive or external characterization of it.

> The formal indication prevents any drifting off into blindly dogmatic
> fixations of the categorial meaning for the intrinsic determinacies of a
> kind of object, while what 'to be' means in its case has not been dis-
> cussed; fixations, in other words, that are independent and detached

---

[22] Ibid., 60–1, 80, 169–71; see also note 1 above.

[23] *PIA*, 34, 60–1; the German ear may well hear the notion of a prospect
in this use of the "Anzeige"; see note 15 above.   In describing the philosoph-
ical act and, as discussed below, the act of believing, Heidegger relies heavily
on the terms "vollziehen" and "Vollzug."   As in the case of "Anzeige" it is
important to note connotations that are not conveyed by a single term in
English.   In "Vollziehen" there is a sense of executing, carrying out, and
performing but also a sense of accomplishing, perfecting, and fulfilling.

[24] *PIA*, 32–4, 51, 58.

[25] Heidegger repeatedly employs the notion of a formal indication in *Sein
und Zeit*, without, however, any further explanation; see *SZ*, 52–3, 114, 116–
17, 179, 231, 313–15; see Oudemanns, "Heideggers 'logische Untersuchun-
gen'," 85.

from the presupposition, the preconception, the context, and the time of the interpretation.[26]

Heidegger refers to this function explicitly as the "referring-prohibitive" (*hinweisend-prohibitive*) function.[27]   (In what might be regarded as a specific instance of this function, the philosophical concept as a formal indication is said to provide a corrective guide [*Korrektion*, that is, *Mitleitung*] to theology.[28])   The second function of a philosophical concept as a formal indication is to reverse the customary way of objectifying whatever is entertained, a reversal that transforms the individual who philosophizes.   Accordingly, this second function is referred to as the "reversing-transforming" function.[29]

The first of these functions illuminates why Heidegger utilizes the two terms "indicating" and "formal."   The indicating as a pointing (*anzeigend als hinweisend*) is preliminary (*Ansatz*); it is binding for the investigation, giving it direction and principles, but as preliminary is not itself meant to specify in any adequate or "authentic" sense the object of the investigation.[30]   The term "formal" is employed to emphasize that the philosophical concept, insofar as it is a formal indication, is not predetermined—or at least not in any number of customary or arbitrary ways.[31]   Thus Heidegger lays great weight on the

---

[26] "Die formale Anzeige verwehrt jede Abdrift in eigenständige, von Interpretationsvoraussetzung, Interpretationsvorgriff, Interpretationszusammenhang und Interpretationszeit abgelöste, blind dogmatische Fixationen des kategorialen Sinnes zu Ansichbestimmtheiten einer auf ihren Seinssinn undiskutierten Gegenständlichkeit"; *PIA*, 142.

[27] *PIA*, 34, 141–2.   This function of the philosophical concept as a "formal indication" comprises Heidegger's way of appropriating the Husserlian epoché.   For Heidegger's account of the transcendental and eidetic reductions elaborated by Husserl see *PGZ*, 135–39.   An excellent discussion of the Husserlian epoché is to be found in Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 172–81.

[28] "Philosophie ist das formal anzeigende ontologische Korrektiv des ontischen, und zwar vorchristlichen Gehaltes des theologischen Grundbegriffe"; *Wegmarken*, 65.

[29] The "reversal" function amplifies and clarifies the "prohibitive" function by indicating that the bracketing (*Ausschaltung*) involved "ist nicht getan mit einem einmaligen methodischen Diktat, sondern sie ist der mit dem Vollzug des Philosophierens ständig gleichzeitliche Kampf der philosophischen faktischen Interpretation gegen ihre eigene faktische Ruinanz"; *PIA*, 153. While the first function, as an appropriation of the Husserlian epoché, may be regarded as phenomenological, the second function is theological in a sense that will be made clearer below.

[30] *PIA*, 32.

[31] "Für den Anzeige- und Verweisungscharakter besagt die Bestimmung

fact that the concepts he employs are neither "formally logical" nor "formally thematic," but "formally indicating" (or, one might say, "formally signalling"). Formal logic is, in his view, not really formal at all since it springs from a region of objects that has already been determined and a corresponding manner of comprehension—"assembling so as to put in order" (*ordnendes Sammeln*).[32] Similarly, a "formally thematic" interpretation makes use of "neighboring" schemata and "settled" notions, instead of itself retrieving the original access to the objects.[33] By contrast, what is "formally indicated or signalled" is not given as something already complete and understandable through comparison, contrast, and classification; instead, what is "formally indicated" is understandable only insofar as the philosopher performs or carries out some activity himself.

Several concepts characterized by Heidegger as "formal indications" exemplify this first function. The "am" in "I am" points to the manner of being that is involved, deflecting attention away from the "I," while at the same time insuring that it not be taken as an instance of "something is."[34] The concept of "death" refers to the most extreme possibility in terms of which a human being can understand himself, while at the same time thereby precluding a conception of death as something present-at-hand.[35] The "as-structure" of the hermeneutical understanding is involved in taking or using something *as* such and such, for example, using something as a chair or using a

---

'formal' etwas Entscheidendes! Gegenstand 'leer' bedeutet: und doch entscheidend! Nicht beliebig und ohne Ansatz, sondern gerade 'leer' und Richtung bestimmend, anzeigend, bindend"; *PIA*, 33.

[32] *PIA*, 20, 162–4, 178. Even the principle of noncontradiction, Heidegger contends in this connection, is conditioned by a "specific logic of ordering"; see pp. 163–4.

[33] *PIA*, 80, 174.

[34] *Wegmarken*, 10–11, 29–30; PIA, 172–4; see, however, *SZ*, 116. The list of "formal indications" and the "formally indicative" in *PIA* is extensive: "the definition of philosophy" (pp. 20, 32, 43, 59–60, 63, 66, 72); "determinations" and "observations," specifically regarding "comportment" and "content" (pp. 52–3, 55); "the determinations of philosophizing" (pp. 57, 183); "to be" (p. 61), "caring" (pp. 89–90, 98); "the object of philosophy," namely, what "to be" means in life, facticity (p. 113); the method of starting for an "existenziellen kategorialen Interpretation" (p. 134); the characterization of the kairological nature of the act of caring (p. 137); the characteristics of "ruination" (*Ruinanz*) and the "countermovement," namely, philosophy (pp. 140–1, 183); "nothing" (p. 145); the way of illuminating the sense of a philosophical presupposition (pp. 158–9); "life" and the definition of the theme (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of philosophy (p. 171), "I am" and the question "*am* I?" (pp. 174–5).

[35] *GM*, 425–9; cf. *SZ*, 240.

chair as something to sit on or something to stand on, and so on. Heidegger construes this "as-structure" as a formal indication in order to emphasize that this relation must be grasped on its own terms, and not rashly assimilated to the derivative relation of two things presumably present together and capable of being so indicated and specified (predicated) in a theoretical judgment.[36]

These examples make it evident, if it is not so already, that Heidegger's emphasis on the formality of philosophical concepts is somewhat misleading. Philosophical concepts are clearly not understood by him as being so devoid of content that they are unable to preclude errant presumptive determinations of their meaning. A philosophical concept's referring (*Hinweis*) is, as he puts it, a "binding" and "principled" one.[37] Moreover, as his remarks about formal logic and formal themes reveal, philosophical concepts as formal indications exclude concepts of objects presupposed by specific sciences—insofar, at least, as the inquiry into what "to be" means in the case of these objects (and, thereby, the original access to them) has been put off or ignored.

The methodological functions ascribed by Heidegger to philosophical concepts as formal indications are thus, as is to be expected, governed by his specific understanding of the aim and content of philosophy. This characteristic is perhaps even more evident in regard to the second function of the formal indication. Because philosophy strives for an understanding of something that is highly questionable (the significance of "to be"), it stands in conflict with the easy confidence that words in their customary usage are reliable and that, when we speak (with others or ourselves), we generally know what we are talking about. The concepts that Heidegger understands as "philosophical" and, hence, "formal indications" are not, at least for the most part, neologisms or technical concepts. Instead they are themselves derived from the way of life that informs the normal use of language. Precisely because of this origin, however, Heidegger designates such concepts "formal indications" as a warning that authentic access to what they point to is not at all common.[38] In fact, that access runs

---

[36] *GM*, 424–5.

[37] *PIA*, 19–25, 56–61, 168–9.

[38] See note 15 above. The formalization of everyday expressions creates, as Oudemans aptly observes, a certain distance to them, allowing us to look *at* them. "In diesem Mitgehen mit der Durchschnittlichkeit des Alltäglichen und mit der überlieferten Ontologie versucht Heidegger durch Formalisierung der Begriffe eine gewisse Distanz entstehen zu lassen"; Oudemanns, "Heideggers 'logische Untersuchungen'," 99.

counter to the customary "plunge" (*Sturz*) into the usual ways of con-
sidering things, where the talk is less than explicit and the interpre-
tation remains implicit.[39]   The very "possibility and factual necessity
. . . of the *formal indication* as the method from which one must
begin" lie in this "plunge" or, as he would later put it in *Sein und Zeit*,
in the "fallenness" of human existence, namely, in the propensity to
yield to the anonymity of some public opinion.[40]   In other words, the
philosopher is required to invert the normal perspective and way of
posing questions, namely, away from particular beings toward the gen-
erally unspoken and unexamined horizon within which they are re-
spectively encountered and have the manner of being that they do.
Thus, formal indications such as "life" and "existence" direct attention
to a specific but unthematized and implicit meaning of "to be," a mean-
ing the understanding of which, because it is unthematized, requires a
certain reversal.[41]

In these early lectures Heidegger elaborates how the "plunge"
into the world is a "movement" characteristic of the way we in fact
typically live: we are bent on taking care of ourselves, but on the
world's terms, that is to say, in terms of what that means in the eyes
of the world.   As a result, we no longer are familiar with ourselves,
even when confronted with ourselves.[42]   Philosophy, on the other
hand, is "a movement running counter to this plunge into the world"
(*eine gegenruinante Bewegtheit*).[43]   This movement directs atten-
tion, to be sure, at what it means "to be" within the concrete situ-

---

[39] For Heidegger's "formally-indicating" definition of this "plunge"
(*Sturz*) or ruination (*Ruinanz*) see *PIA*, 131, 136–7, 139–40, 143–55.

[40] "Sofern alles im faktischen Leben erhellt, in irgendwelcher unaus-
drücklicher Rede steht, in unabgehobener faktischer ruinanter Interpretation
'ist', liegt darin die Möglichkeit und faktische Notwendigkeit. . . der formalen
Anzeige als Ansatzmethode . . ."; *PIA*, 134.   Heidegger mentions four
"formally-indicative characters of ruination [*Ruinanz*]" in *PIA*, 140–1.

[41] *GM*, 430; *PIA*, 19–20, 80, 88.

[42] *PIA*, 136; cf. pp. 130–2, 142.   Plainly foreshadowed here is the content
of the structural division of inauthenticity and authenticity (or, perhaps bet-
ter, not being and being my own self: *Eigentlichkeit*) so central to the argu-
ment and rhetoric of *Sein und Zeit*.   In this connection Oudemans identifies
a noteworthy shift in Heidegger's thinking.   In the early Freiburg years, he
contends, philosophy is depicted as the paradoxical movement both *within*
and *counter* to the total movement of *Ruinanz*, succeeding only by pushing
the latter to its limits, characterized as and by "emptiness" and "nothingness."
By contrast, in *SZ* Heidegger ascribes a distinct topos to authenticity and,
perhaps more fundamentally, refers to a prevailing indifference toward in-
authenticity as well as authenticity; Oudemanns, "Heideggers 'logische Un-
tersuchungen'," 91–3, 101–4.

[43] *PIA*, 153.

ations of everyday life.   Philosophy can make this meaning clear,
however, only by articulating "the most fundamentally appropriate
sense of what it means 'to be' " (*das Ureigene des Seinssinns*) and
by bringing that meaning and its "binding character" to life.[44]   To
carry out this task is, in Heidegger's eyes, to live the philosophical
life.   "Philosophy is a fundamental manner of living itself, such that
philosophy in each case authentically re-trieves life, taking it back
from its downfall [*Abfall*], a taking back which, as a radical search-
ing, is itself life."[45]

   This reversal (*Umstellung*), as already noted, also entails a trans-
formation (*Verwandlung*) of the individual philosophizing.   One can-
not thematize what is initially unthematic without putting oneself in
question and, equivalently, one's comportment and world.   As Hei-
degger puts it in the winter semester of 1929/30, it must be understood
that "what philosophy deals with generally discloses itself only in and
on the basis of a transformation of human *Dasein*."[46]

   At the end of Heidegger's lectures of the 1925/26 winter semester
he employs the notion of an "indication" in order to distinguish "spe-
cifically phenomenological, categorial" assertions from "worldly" as-
sertions.   While the worldly assertions point out something present-
at-hand, phenomenological, categorial assertions refer to *Dasein*, not
as something present-at-hand, but as something the understanding of
which requires a reversal or transposition on the part of the thinker.[47]
Once again Heidegger concedes that, insofar as the "phenomenologi-
cal, categorial assertion" is articulated, it shares the structure of a
worldly (apophantic) assertion and thereby means "something at first
present-at-hand."[48] However, he adds:

> A worldly assertion about something present-at-hand, even if it is made
> in the context of a mere naming, can directly mean what has been said,
> while an assertion about *Dasein* and furthermore each assertion about
> being, each [phenomenological] categorial assertion requires, in order
> to be understood, the reversal of the understanding, a reversal in the
> direction of what has been indicated, which essentially is never some-
> thing present-at-hand.[49]

---

[44] *PIA*, 168–9.
[45] *PIA*, 80; cf. p. 88.
[46] *GM*, 423.
[47] In order to avoid possible confusion, it should be noted that this use
of "specifically phenomenological, categorial" is replaced in *Sein und Zeit* by
the use of "existential" and *contrasted with* the use of "categorial."   Heideg-
ger is plainly groping for terminology in the winter semester of 1925/26.
[48] *Logik*, 410.
[49] "Eine weltliche Aussage über Vorhandenes, auch wenn sie in einem

The uphill task that Heidegger sets for himself is obvious.   He must be able to kick away the very ladder ("worldly" or "theoretical" assertions, "objectifying" concepts, and so on) on which he is forced to make his climb.

From Heidegger's own perspective, this ladder may be characterized as a "scientific method," and it is in this regard that Heidegger's conception of a "formal indication" and a "formally indicative method" takes on added significance.   Throughout the decade of the 1920s Heidegger cautiously distinguished the sort of investigation appropriate to specific ("ontic") sciences from his own ("ontological") investigations into the meanings of "to be."   He did not eschew the term "science" in characterizing his own project, however.   After referring to "our scientific philosophy" in the summer semester of 1925, Heidegger characterizes the philosophizing logic, the topic of lectures the following semester, as "the science of truth."[50]   "Phenomenology," he declares in *Sein und Zeit*, "is the science of being" and at the end of the summer semester of 1927 he describes philosophy as the science, even the "absolute science" of being, indeed, characterizing the latter as the "objectification [*sic*] of being."[51]   In the final Marburg lectures a year later he continues to speak of a "philosophical science."[52]

Towards the close of those final Marburg lectures, however, and even more emphatically in his first lectures (of his subsequent stay) at Freiburg, the characterization of philosophy is unmistakeably altered in this respect.   Philosophy, he now urges, is "more original" than any science and it is both deceitful and degrading to characterize philosophy as a science.[53]

---

bloßen Nennen vollzogen ist, kann direkt das Gesagte meinen, während eine Aussage über Dasein und weiterhin jede Aussage über Sein, jede kategoriale Aussage zu ihrem Verständnis notwendig der Umstellung des Verstehens bedarf, der Umstellung auf das Indizierte selbst, das wesenhaft nie Vorhandenes ist"; *Logik*, 410 n. 1.

[50] *PGZ*, 2–3, 184, 190; *Logik*, 10–11.

[51] *SZ*, 37; *Wegmarken*, 48; *GP*, 15–17, 459–60, 466.   It is difficult to reconcile this last quotation ("Vergegenständlichung von Sein") with Oudemans's claim that Heidegger had no illusions about giving a scientific foundation to philosophy and that his characterization of philosophy as a science was chiefly a rhetorical means of warding off *Schwärmerei*; see Oudemans, "Heideggers 'logische Untersuchungen'," 90.

[52] Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, ed. Klaus Held, Marburg lectures of the summer semester 1928, *GA* 26 (1978), 11, 70.

[53] Ibid., 287; *GM*, 2–3, 22–4, 30; see also the previous note.   Heidegger's changing views about the scientific character of his early philosophy are traced in Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Last Word," *Review of Metaphysics* 41, no. 3 (March 1988): 593–6.

This rejection of a scientific understanding of philosophy is self-critical, to be sure, but hardly surprising especially in view of the methodological considerations prompting his demand that philosophical concepts be regarded as "formal indications." The very purpose of that demand is to avoid the sort of objectification characteristic of a theoretical or scientific thematization of things. If, indeed, "science" and "objectification" are synonymous or, in other words, if science can thematize its subject matter only by objectifying the latter, that is to say, by regarding its subject matter only insofar as it can be considered present-at-hand, then given Heidegger's understanding of philosophy, it is necessary for a philosophical thematization to distance itself from science.

For the theme of the present paper, what is particularly significant about this development (that is, Heidegger's departure from the notion of a "scientific philosophy") is the fact that the appeal to the "formally indicative" character of philosophical concepts survives it. Toward the end of the same lectures in which he declares that it is as embarrassing to regard philosophy as science as it is to regard it as the proclamation of some worldview, he insists that philosophical concepts be understood as "formal indications" in order to avoid—"at least to a relative degree"—the misunderstanding that all concepts are objectifying.

What is difficult about philosophical concepts—and the reason Heidegger stresses that they be regarded as formal indications—can be traced to philosophizing itself. Philosophizing is a way of being-in-the-world that at the same time aims at determining this way of being.[54] Being-in-the-world brings about what it is (*sich vollzieht*) *unthematically* in a fourfold way, namely, as an emotional state (*Befindlichkeit*),[55] a specific sort of understanding or projecting, an absorption into a more or less public domain, and a way of talking. In each of these mutually complementary ways being-in-the-world discloses, again unthematically or implicitly, that temporality is its most basic horizon or meaning. Therefore, the task of philosophizing is to reflect upon what unthematically "is always already there" (*immer schon da ist*). Philosophizing is a kind of "re-iterating" (*Nach-vollziehen*), repeating in an explicit fashion the path (*iter, Weg*) that we

---

[54] *GM*, 13.

[55] The difficulty of translating this term is aptly described in Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 168–9.

are constantly following (*iterare, vollziehen*), retrieving (*Wiederholen*) what it means "to be" from a well of forgottenness. Philosophical concepts such as "care," "life," "as," "world," and "existence" *indicate* (*zeigen . . . an*) "a concrete task to be carried out by philosophy alone" (*eine eigene konkrete Vollzugsaufgabe*); in other words, they point to what unthematically *is always already there* but must be expressed, which can occur only through its "retrieval" and "reiteration" (in the senses described above).

Reflection on this retrieving, "the methodical reflection" as Heidegger calls it, is itself mandatory. That is to say, the method may not be a kind of afterthought (*Nachgetragenes*), but rather must be developed through the interpretation "as an essential part of the execution of the interpretation itself."[56] In other words, the definition of philosophy is itself philosophical and hence a "formal indication."[57]

III

There is an obvious similarity between Heidegger's characterization of philosophical concepts as "formal indications" and the nature of certain artistic compositions. Much as in a score and a script—in contrast to a sketch—something is expressed and formulated but in such a way that what it is can only be realized by being performed (rehearsed, interpreted, staged).[58] Indeed, insofar as the philosophical text, on this account, is not so much a statement about what is present-at-hand as it is a score or script to be performed, in a certain sense the question, Is it possible, by means of philosophical concepts as formal indications, to thematize without objectifying what "to be" means in the case of *Dasein*? cannot legitimately be put to Heidegger. Rather the question has to be put to his readers.[59]

---

[56] *SZ*, 308, 310–16, 391; *PIA*, 80, 133–4, 157; see also Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, 4th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973), 232.

[57] *PIA*, 19–20, 32–4, 43; on these pages Heidegger elaborates "die formalanzeigende Definition der Philosophie."

[58] "In the drama, as in music, the work is a compliance-class of performances"; Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 210.

[59] This character of Heidegger's thinking figures in Rorty's rejection of Okrent's admonition to avoid Heidegger's dangerous recourse of maintaining that assertions about the truth of what "to be" means are not really assertions at all.   Rorty finds nothing reproachable in such recourse; if pragmatism does

In later reflections on language Heidegger himself pursues the close proximity of artistic composing to a nonobjectifying, philosophical thinking. Thinking, he observes, proceeds down its path "in the neighborhood of composing."[60] Similarly, in a 1964 letter to a group of theologians gathered at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, Heidegger suggests, "Poetic composition [*Dichtung*] can serve as an example of an excellent, nonobjectifying thinking and speaking."[61]

The fact that this last remark was made in a letter addressed to theologians is not insignificant. If Heidegger's characterization of philosophical concepts as formal indications possesses a significant similarity to the nature of artistic composition, it has even closer ties to what he understands as the theological formation and development of Christian belief. The relation of Christian theology to its faith and that of philosophizing to existence, on Heidegger's own understanding of theology and philosophizing, are profoundly homologous.

The deep affinity begins with parallels between belief and existence. Heidegger understands belief as "a manner of existing" that is developed (or, more literally, is "timed") from and by what becomes revealed in it and with it, namely, what is believed: the crucified God (. . . *gezeitigt . . . aus dem, was in und mit dieser Existenzweise offenbar wird, aus dem Geglaubten . . . . der gekreuzigte Gott*).[62] If "belief" is replaced with "existence," "revealed" with "disclosed," and the "believed" with "temporality," then it becomes clear just how closely this account of belief mirrors the structure that lies at the bottom of the analysis of *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit.*

Moreover, the revelation in which the Christian believes is thoroughly historical (*geschichtlich*), not only in the sense that it in fact originally happened, but above all in the sense that it continues to happen (*immer noch geschieht*). The revelation thus makes believers "participants" in the happening (*Geschehen*) that revelation is.[63] In a corresponding way what it means for *Dasein* "to be" is "constituted by historicity" (*durch Geschichtlichkeit konstituiert*), not so much in

---

have anything to say about such a truth, then he would like to see it "take the form of a proposal." See Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38n.; and Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 292.

[60] "Darum ist es gut, an den Nachbarn, an den, der in derselben Nähe wohnt, zu denken"; Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 6th ed. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1979), 173. See also pp. 195–6. Heidegger nonetheless insists on the difference between composing (*Dichten*) and thinking (*Denken*).

[61] *Wegmarken*, 78.

[62] *Wegmarken*, 52.

[63] *Wegmarken*, 53.

the sense that *Dasein* has a history as in the sense that, as existing, it has the structure of the ecstatic-temporal happening, the "hidden ground" of which is the finitude of temporality.[64]   Belief is not an "object" (*Gegenstand*) of theology as something standing over against it (*ihr gegenüberstehend*).   Theology is rather part of the development and formation of belief in the sense that it participates all the more explicitly in the happening of revelation.[65]   Likewise, the act of philosophizing completes and perfects itself (*sich vollzieht*) in a historical situation, in order to appropriate and develop that situation so as "to bring the specific theme of the philosophizing in its binding character to life."[66]

In belief, the entire *Dasein* is placed before God and, indeed, such that "the existence struck by this revelation . . . becomes revealed to itself in its forgottenness of God."[67]   The phrase "being placed before God" signifies a reversal of existence (*ein Umgestelltwerden der Existenz*).   That is to say, belief is a "rebirth as a mode of historically existing, on the part of the *Dasein* factually believing, in *that* history which begins with the happening of revelation, in *that* history to which, in accordance with the meaning of revelation, a definite uttermost end has already been posited."[68]   What here happens in belief, namely, "being placed before God" and the rebirth (*Umgestelltwerden und Wiedergeburt*), respectively become in Heidegger's method that reversal and retrieval (*Umstellung und Wiederholung*) which, again parallel to the dynamics of belief, move a finite future into the forefront of the analysis of *Dasein*.[69]

With these parallels between belief and existence, the structural similarities between theology and philosophy are already apparent. In belief—as the historical existence in the sense of the happening of revelation—theology has its origin as well as its goal.   Hence it is a uniquely "historical science," motivated and legitimated by belief, aim-

---

[64] *SZ*, 376, 382, 386; *PIA*, 161.
[65] *Wegmarken*, 51, 54–5.
[66] *PIA*, 169; see also p. 62.
[67] *Wegmarken*, 53.
[68] "Der eigentliche existenzielle Sinn des Glaubens ist demnach: Glaube = Wiedergeburt.   Und zwar Wiedergeburt nicht im Sinne einer momentanen Ausstattung mit irgendeiner Qualität, sondern Wiedergeburt als Modus des geschichtlichen Existierens des faktischen gläubigen Daseins in der Geschichte, die mit dem Geschehen der Offenbarung anhebt; in der Geschichte, der schon dem Sinne der Offenbarung gemäß ein bestimmtes äußerstes Ende gesetzt ist"; *Wegmarken*, 53.
[69] *SZ*, 391–2.

ing at doing its part in abetting the development of the state of belief.[70] In other words, theology is the conceptual self-interpretation of the historical existence of belief which "first unveils itself in belief and only for belief."[71]   In a directly corresponding fashion Heidegger explains how philosophy has its origin and its goal in factual life.   Philosophy is thereby a kind of "historical knowledge"; or, more precisely, it carries out "the temporality of the authentic historicity" through which (again much like theology) philosophy ideally lifts *Dasein* up from its fall into the world, bringing it back to authentic existence.[72]

Thus, both philosophy and theology assume the "fallenness" of human existence and accordingly employ concepts as "formal indications."   Because such concepts signal a reversal and a transformation, a person can understand them only insofar as he or she authentically exists (in the case of philosophy) or believes (in the case of theology).   To be sure, "being-in-the-world," like "the stance toward God" (*das Verhalten zu Gott*), takes place in any case; it is always already "there."   What matters, however, is the authenticity of the existence or belief and this is dependent respectively upon a "retrieval" (*Wiederholung*) or "rebirth" (*Wiedergeburt*).   Only on the basis of such a transformation, Heidegger urges in the winter semester of 1929/30, does the entire connection between inauthentic and authentic existence become conceivable.

> The *concepts* that break [this connection] open are only then capable of being understood when they are not taken as meanings of properties and furnishings of something present-at-hand, but rather are taken as *indications or signals* [*Anzeigen*] for this, that the process of understanding must first disentangle itself from the ordinary conceptions of the particular being and explicitly transform itself into the being-there [*Da-sein*] within it.[73]

Only on the basis of such a transformation is a philosopher capable of attending, not simply to what things are or how they are used, but what it means to say *that they are*.

Just as theologians do not understand themselves as closet anthropologists, so Heidegger does not understand himself as an

---

[70] *Wegmarken*, 55–7, 61.

[71] *Wegmarken*, 55.

[72] *SZ*, 384–5, 390–1.

[73] *GM*, 428.   Also, "Der Bedeutungsgehalt dieser Begriffe meint und sagt nicht direkt das, worauf er bezieht, er gibt nur eine Anzeige, einen Hinweis darauf, daß der Verstehende von diesem Begriffszusammenhang aufgefordert ist, eine Verwandlung seiner selbst in das Dasein zu vollziehen"; *GM*, 430.

existentialist.[74]   Yet the ontological question can no more be ade-
quately addressed without attending to precisely what it means for
humans "to be" than can the theological question.   What is evident
from the texts considered on the last few pages is the fact that Hei-
degger's "formally indicative" method or, more precisely, its transfor-
mational function as a directive is modeled on a Christian theological
understanding of human existence.

It is therefore hardly surprising when Heidegger in 1921 chastises
Löwith for measuring him against the likes of Kierkegaard and Nietz-
sche.   "I am no philosopher," Heidegger insists, "and have no illusions
of even doing anything at all comparable"; rather "I am a Christian
theologian."[75]   The remarks are those of a still maturing thinker, to be
sure, but they are made at a time when Heidegger, in lectures in a
philosophy department on the method and subject matter of philoso-
phy, is hammering out his methodological tactic of taking philosoph-
ical concepts as formal indications.

The aim of this paper has been to elaborate Heidegger's method,
as he conceived it in the 1920s, and to demonstrate how the method
in fundamental ways is appropriated from what Heidegger under-
stands by theology.   To be sure, despite this appropriation, Heidegger
insists that philosophy is in principle "a-theistic."[76]   On the one hand,
this claim might be taken simply as a reminder that the ontic, Christian
theological question of what a particular being is (for example, God
or revelation) is not to be confused with the ontological question of
what "to be" means.   On the other hand, some (for example, Kuhl-
mann) regard the claim as a ruse, obscuring the fact that Heidegger's
analysis of authentic human existence is not neutral, but in fact anti-
thetical to Christian theology.[77]   In the same vein, still others empha-
size how Heidegger's method calls for a transformation also on the
part of the theologian, but without providing the possibility of a return
to theology.[78]

---

[74] *Wegmarken*, 63; "La question qui me préocuppe n'est pas celle de
l'existence de l'homme; c'est celle de l'être dans son ensemble et en tant que
tel"; Martin Heidegger, *Bulletin de la societé française de philosophie*, 37e
année, no. 5 (1937), 193.   See also his "Brief über Humanismus," in *Weg-
marken*, 329–30.
[75] The remarks are contained in a private letter to Löwith, cited by Gad-
amer; see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die religiöse Dimension," 142.
[76] "Philosophie muß in ihrer radikalen, sich auf sich selbst stellenden
Fraglichkeit prinzipiell a-theistisch sein"; *PIA*, 197; see also pp. 196, 199.
[77] Kuhlmann, "Zum theologischen Problem," 51.
[78] Oudemans, "Heideggers 'logische Untersuchungen'," 96.

There is, however, another way of understanding Heidegger's "a-theism." Just as the meaning of "a-letheia" presupposes that of hiddenness, so Heidegger's method is only understandable in terms of his theism, that is to say, his understanding of the ontic science, Christian theology. Heidegger claims in *Sein und Zeit* that at the bottom of the ontological interpretation of the existence of *Dasein* there lies "a specific, ontic conception of authentic existence."[79] If Christian theology, as suggested on these pages, is a prominent source of Heidegger's philosophical method, then there is ample reason to suppose that that specific ontic conception which Heidegger refrains from elaborating, while not theological in a strict sense, is nevertheless incomprehensible apart from Christian theology. Though it is an ontic science, Christian theology consists, as Heidegger himself emphasizes, not so much in making theoretical assertions as in formally signalling the revelation and the transformation of the believer its understanding entails.[80] So, too, Heidegger's fundamental ontology consists, not in formulating theoretical propositions about what is present-at-hand, but rather in formally signalling the presencing-and-absencing of *Dasein* and the authentic transformation of *Dasein*, the thinker, its understanding entails.

The Catholic University of America

---

[79] *SZ*, 310. The ontic grounding of the ontological investigation is frequently cited by Heidegger; see *SZ*, 278; *GP*, 466.
[80] *Wegmarken*, 56–8, 60–1.