

Heidegger, Wittgenstein and St Paul on the Last Judgment: On the Roots
and Significance of the ‘Theoretical Attitude’

Heidegger’s emergence as a distinctive thinker coincides with a dawning sense of dissatisfaction with Husserlian phenomenology. Among other things, that phenomenology promises to draw attention to the diverse forms that consciousness takes and thereby to the diverse forms that the objects of that consciousness take too. But this promise goes largely unfulfilled, Heidegger believes, because of prejudices to which Husserl remains unwittingly subject. In particular, he accuses him of remaining in the grip of ‘the theoretical attitude’.

I have argued elsewhere that this notion is much more difficult to pin down than is typically recognized;¹ and here I want to explore one of the two distinctive forms of consciousness an awareness of which seems to give the young Heidegger a vivid sense of a ‘theoretical attitude’ at work within – and constraining - the Husserlian phenomenological project.² One – the ‘environmental experience’ (IPPW 59)³ - goes on to play a prominent role in the fundamental ontology of BT; the other - ‘the specific experience of the finding of God’ (PRL 231) – recedes at least into the

¹ Cf. McManus forthcoming.

² Whether Husserl really is in the grip of any such ‘attitude’ is not at all clear: well-balanced treatments are Dahlstrom 2001 and Crowell 2001.

³ In what follows, references to Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s works use abbreviations given in the bibliography, followed by page numbers except where indicated. For BT, the figure in brackets is the German page number. I am grateful to Adam Beck for access to his translation of EP.

background of his thought and arguably vanishes from there altogether.⁴ The former ‘experience’ has been discussed extensively, the latter much less so.⁵

While it has long been appreciated that religious concerns influence Heidegger’s thinking, it is only relatively recently that the documentary evidence has become available that might turn this topic from one about which one might speculate into one about which one could arrive at concrete views. A crucial item of such evidence is his *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (PRL), a collection of notes and lecture transcripts from 1918-21, published in 1995 and translated into English in 2004. The present paper focuses on Heidegger’s lectures on St Paul and provides, in particular, a reading of their discussion of the remarks on the Last Judgment in the letters to the Thessalonians. This reading serves a number of further purposes. First, it makes clear how his appropriation of a certain ‘anti-theological’ tradition helped first give a sense for Heidegger to the notion of the ‘theoretical attitude’. Secondly, it illustrates, and thus helps to refine the identity of, a particular kind of recognizably ‘phenomenological’ reflection that attempts to distance itself precisely from that ‘attitude’; and thirdly, it points to a new perspective on some central and problematic themes in Heidegger’s better known early writings – including BT itself – and, in particular, their discussion of assertions. An identification of some remarkable similarities between Heidegger’s remarks and remarks of Wittgenstein’s also on the Last Judgment will help identify this perspective.

1. The Young Heidegger’s Appropriation of an ‘Anti-Theological’ Tradition

For Heidegger, the ‘environmental’ and ‘religious’ ‘experiences’ not only represent distinctive and overlooked forms of consciousness; if properly appreciated,

⁴ Opinions on this matter do differ. Cf., e.g. van Buren 1994, Caputo 1993, Crowe 2008 and Rickey 2002.

⁵ Notable exceptions are Sheehan’s early 1979 study, Kisiel 1993, van Buren 1994, and more recently, McGrath 2006, Crowe 2006 and 2008, McGrath and Wierciński 2010.

they also cast doubt on whether a philosophy uncritically oriented by notions of ‘consciousness’, ‘experience’ and indeed ‘subjectivity’ (and their corresponding ‘objects’) can possibly be adequate. Such notions direct attention away from a diversity that Heidegger wishes to highlight and its true philosophical import. He initially talks of the need to recognize the diversity of ‘subject-correlates’ [Subjektkorrelate],⁶ of the forms that ‘subjects’ must take in order to encounter the diversity of ‘objects’ they encounter; but soon, as Dahlstrom notes, Heidegger turns to

locutions such as ‘having’ (*haben*), ‘comporting’ (*verhalten*), or ‘understanding’ (*verstehen*) in order to emphasise that [our] original, unthematic ‘having’ or ‘comporting’ is for the most part not some sort of deliberate, meditative act of knowing something. (Dahlstrom 1994: 781)

For Heidegger, ‘the specific experience of the finding of God’ (PRL 231) provides a crucial example of such an ‘original’ ‘having’ and his efforts to identify that ‘specific experience’ are guided by his exploration, in the late 1910s and early 1920s, of a certain ‘anti-theological’ tradition. That tradition achieved one of its earliest canonical statements in Tertullian’s famous questions, ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the church?’⁷ But, as we will see, the tradition runs back to St Paul.

In the early years of the church, attempts were made - for apologetic and evangelical reasons - to elucidate the message of the Gospels in terms drawn from broader classical traditions, in particular those of Greek philosophy. The anxiety that Tertullian’s questions express is that this translation into pagan categories, so to speak, threatened to distort that message. One particular form that this anxiety takes is that the ‘Hellenized’ theology that this ‘translation’ created turns attention towards questions of doctrine and dogma and away from the moral and existential demands of Christian existence. Such anxieties were echoed in St Augustine (in his question, ‘What do I love when I love my God?’ (St Augustine 1961: 211, quoted in PRL 130)),

⁶ Cf., e.g., IPPW 37, PRL 240, 241 etc.

⁷ Tertullian, *de praescriptione haereticorum*, 7, quoted in A. McGrath 2001: 17.

in Luther (in his rejection of a contemplative *theologia gloriae*),⁸ and - in the 19th century – in Schleiermacher (in his insistence that ‘the measure of knowledge is not the measure of piety’ (Schleiermacher 1958: 35, quoted PRL 243)), Overbeck (in the pointed title of his 1873 book, *How Christian is Our Present-day Theology?*), Harnack (in his characterisation of what he called ‘dogmatic Christianity’ as ‘*the work of the Hellenic spirit upon the Gospel soil*’ (Harnack 1893: 4)),⁹ and perhaps most important of all, Kierkegaard (in his assault on speculative theology and his insistence that ‘it is only in subjectivity’, or ‘inwardness’, that Christianity’s ‘truth exists’ (1941: 116)).

Heidegger engaged deeply with this tradition. PRL contains the lectures he gave on St Paul in 1920-21 and on St Augustine in 1921; Heidegger studied Luther intensively, one legacy of this being his talk, ‘The Problem of Sin in Luther’;¹⁰ Heidegger discusses Harnack in PRL (50, 117-18, 120-23); we have detailed notes that Heidegger made on Schleiermacher (PRL 241-44 and 249-51) and we know from Gadamer (1994: 175) that ‘Heidegger referred repeatedly’ to Overbeck during his Marburg years (1923-27).¹¹ Perhaps the most difficult influence to trace here is Kierkegaard because Heidegger seems to have gone out of his way to minimize it.¹² But it is difficult to believe that this was anything but significant and Kierkegaard is

⁸ Cf. *Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation*, theses 19-20, in Luther 1962.

⁹ Translation quoted from McGrath 2007: 43.

¹⁰ A transcript of this talk is published in S.

¹¹ Cf. also PT 39. For further evidence of Heidegger’s engagement with these figures, cf. Kisiel 1993 and van Buren 1994.

¹² Cf., e.g., MFL 190-91, his letter to Löwith regarding ‘Kierkegaardianism’ (quoted in Kisiel 1993: 541) and his description of Kierkegaard as ‘not a thinker but a religious writer’ (QCT 94).

referred to and quoted on several occasions in the St Augustine lectures, as well as in later works, including BT.^{13 14}

That Heidegger shares the anxiety that unites this ‘anti-theological’ tradition is already apparent in Heidegger’s 1916 supplemental conclusion to his *Habilitationsschrift*. There he declares that ‘the theoretical attitude is only *one* kind of approach’, only one of ‘the wealth of directions of the formation of the living spirit’ (DSTCMC 66); this claim is accompanied there by an insistence on the philosophical significance of mysticism (DSTCMC 68), which Heidegger was to describe two years later as a ‘counter-movement’ to ‘a theorizing, dogma-promoting influence’ which ‘severely endangered precisely the immediacy of religious life, and forgot religion in favour of theology and dogma’ (PRL 238).¹⁵ Without this kind of ‘counter-movement’, philosophical reflection becomes ‘powerless’, becomes ‘a rationalistic construction detached from life’ (DSTCMC 68). It seems then that, for philosophy of religion to have power and avoid a kind of emptiness, it must turn from theory and dogma, which represent only one ‘direction’ of ‘living spirit’, and return to the touchstone of the ‘immediacy’ and ‘involvement’ of life in its ‘wealth of directions’. If Christianity is an activity of the ‘living spirit’ then articulating merely what a Christian *believes* – which is what we might imagine a theology does – will not articulate what a Christian *is*. One way to articulate the danger inherent in such an assimilation is to say that we need a ‘counter-movement’ that will focus on the character of Christian life or ‘experience’, as mysticism characteristically does; and these are the terms Heidegger uses.

¹³ Cf., e.g., PRL 130, 141, 186, 192, 199 and 202, BT 388 (338) n. iii, PIA 137, OHF 25, MFL 141 and passages cited in the previous note.

¹⁴ There are, of course, other relevant influences here, including Pascal, Dilthey, Reinach and Scheler.

¹⁵ 1919-20’s GP talks of the ancient Christian achievement being ‘distorted and buried’ through Hellenization: ‘From time to time it reasserts itself in violent eruptions (as in Augustine, in Luther, in Kierkegaard) [and o]nly from here is medieval mysticism to be understood.’ (Translation quoted from van Buren 1994: 146.)

Such formulations raise important questions – to one of which I will return below, namely, isn't believing a part of life, an aspect of experience?¹⁶ – but it seems to be in such broad terms that Heidegger comes to understand the project of his own distinctive brand of phenomenology: as a striving to recover our understanding of our lives,¹⁷ and in particular those aspects of those lives that are obscured by one might well label a 'theoretical attitude'.

The above concerns emerge vividly in Heidegger's notes for a lecture course which he was to - but ultimately did not - give in 1918-19, a course on 'The Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism'. Here Heidegger insists that we 'sharply divorce the problem of theology and that of religiosity' because of the 'constant dependency' of theology on 'theoretical consciousness'; instead we must look to '[t]he basic kinds of fulfilment of religious experience' – "revelation", "tradition", "congregation"" (PRL 235):

The independence of religious experience and its world is to be seen as an entirely originary intentionality with an entirely originary character of demands. (PRL 244)

We may also obtain a sense here of how reflecting on this 'original having' could alter our understanding of that which is 'had' - the '*object*' of that understanding – and thereby also a sense of how phenomenological reflections could have a

¹⁶ Thus, for reasons to be discussed below, one might claim not that a theological articulation of what a Christian believes fails to articulate what a Christian is (as above) but instead that articulating what a Christian believes cannot even be done without appreciating what a Christian is. One might then say that one underestimates the failings of a theology which lacks that appreciation when one claims that it confines its attention to the articulation of belief; rather it cannot even manage that.

¹⁷ Cf. PRL 50's call for 'a return to the original experience', for a 'going back into factual life' (PRL 97): 'Experience ("life")' (PRL 233). Such thinking also underlies Heidegger's appropriation in the early 1920s of a Husserlian call for a 'return to origins' and for a certain respect for 'intuition'.

philosophical (and, in particular, ontological) pay-off, reflections which, from an analytic perspective, may otherwise seem oddly fixated on what our engagement with objects ‘is like’, on how those objects ‘first strike us’ or ‘initially seem to us to be’.¹⁸ In his lectures on St Paul and St Augustine, Heidegger insists that ‘the task arises to determine the sense of the objecthood of God’ (PRL 67) - ‘[t]he sense of the Being of God’ (PRL 84) – and that one way to undertake that task is to start ‘from the modes of access’, from a proper appreciation of the ‘original region of life and performance of consciousness (or feeling), in which religion alone realizes itself as a certain form of experience’ (PRL 222, 243). By placing such ‘subject-correlates’ first in our thinking, we shake off the temptation to begin our reflections on God ‘by analogy with the theoretical and the constitution of the object of cognition’, which leads us to imagine ‘inquir[ing] only, raw and naked, into the religious thing or object’ (PRL 232). That analogy leaves us with a distorted picture of our ‘experiential comportment to God’ as a ‘holding-as-true’, a ‘raw and naked’ theoretical belief, and at the same time encourages us to regard the ‘object’ of Christian faith as the ‘object’ of a ‘holding-as-true’ or theoretical belief: God emerges, as the St Augustine lectures put it, as ‘simply a special object’ (PRL 149). By reflecting on God as the ‘correlate of the act-character of “faith”’ (PRL 252), as the recipient of prayer and the object of meditation, we resist that corresponding assimilation: through a recognition of this ‘original having’, we also recognize ‘an originary objectivity [*Objectität*]’ (PRL 252). In this way, we expose a *Seinsvergessenheit* (as BT was to put it) by exposing what one might call a *Verstehensvergessenheit*.

In his subsequent lectures on St Paul and St Augustine, Heidegger explores the ‘entirely originary intentionality’ of religious experience. I cannot give a comprehensive account of these lectures here;¹⁹ but will examine a central theme in

¹⁸ As McManus forthcoming discusses, such an interest may seem naïve, uncritical or even simply unphilosophical.

¹⁹ Crowe 2008 and McGrath 2006 focus on very different aspects of the lectures from those on which I will focus.

their examination of St Paul, his discussion in the letters to the Thessalonians of the question, ‘When will the *parousia*, the Last Judgment, come?’²⁰

2. A Closer Look: Heidegger on St Paul on the *Parousia*

In his lectures on St Paul, we read

According to Harnack, Greek philosophy first dogmatized the Christian religion. But the actual problem of ‘dogma’ ... lies in primordial Christian religion. (PRL 50)

We find that ‘problem’, Heidegger claims, in St Paul, whom Heidegger sees as struggling with his congregation to get them to see what their real concerns as Christians are, and thereby struggling against what one might call ‘the Theoretical Attitude’:

Paul’s answer to the question of the When of the *parousia* is ... an urging to awaken and to be sober. Here lies a point ... against the incessant brooding of those who dwell upon and speculate about the ‘when’ of the *parousia*. They worry only about the ‘When’, the ‘What’, the objective determination, in which they have no authentic personal interest. (PRL 74)

As Heidegger understands it, St Paul’s concern is to point to a confusion and an irreligiosity in concern with the ‘speculative’ question of when the *parousia* will take place; this ‘objective determination’ is one in which we actually have ‘no authentic

²⁰ Strictly speaking, ‘*Parousia*’ refers to the Second Coming, an event which, in principle, need not be accompanied by a Last Judgment. But I will use the terms interchangeably here for the sake of simplicity; such a use also seems to reflect Heidegger’s concerns in the lectures in question. It should also be noted that I will not consider here how accurate a reading Heidegger provides of St Paul.

personal interest’: it is a ‘false concern’ (PRL 110). This assessment is reflected in the ‘the how of the answer’ that St Paul gives to this question; he ‘maintains a total distance from a cognitive treatment’ and instead ‘enacts [his] answer’ – his distinctive *kind* of answer – ‘in juxtaposing two ways of life’ (PRL 70):

About dates and times, my friends, we need not write to you, for you know perfectly well that the Day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. While they are talking of peace and security, all at once calamity is upon them, sudden as the pangs that come upon a woman with child; and there will no escape. But you, my friends, are not in the dark, that the day should overtake you like a thief. You are all children of light, children of day. We do not belong to night or darkness, and we must not sleep like the rest, but keep awake and sober. (1 Thess. 5.3-7, New English Bible)

In one sense, there is no anticipating such an event because it ‘comes like a thief in the night’. But at the same time, St Paul conspicuously says it is only those who ‘talk of peace and security’ for whom the *parousia* is ‘sudden’, ‘all at once’. Heidegger elaborates: for ‘them’, it is

‘sudden’ and inescapable; *unexpected*, unprepared for; no means for overcoming and taking a stance; they are *handed over* to it. ... They cannot escape; they want to save themselves but can no longer do so. To be *taken absolutely!* They are mired in darkness such that they themselves ... are hidden. They do not ‘look’ *at* it, and run away from themselves. (PRL 107)

I will suggest that this difficult passage asks us to think about what the relevant ‘subject-correlate’ of the Last Judgment is, about what it is to ‘comport oneself towards’ *that particular event*. Specifically, Heidegger asks us to reflect on what it is to ‘be prepared for’ and not to be ‘overtaken by’ this event; and his remarks do indeed suggest, I think, a sense in which the concern of those who ‘talk[] of peace and

security’ - with when the *parousia* is to happen - shows them to be ‘unprepared’ for that event and in a way that the ‘children of light’ aren’t.

Understanding this particular event is understanding that when it takes place does not *matter* in that the form of ‘being prepared’ that characterises those who understand this event is not something for which knowing its date is necessary; the only kind of ‘preparation’ for which knowing a date is necessary is the kind which will not ‘prepare’ one for this *particular* event. To clarify this, let us consider why one would *want* the kind of ‘preparation’ that ‘the speculators and chatterboxes’ (PRL 110) seek. What is one imagining being able to do during whatever period it is in which one knows the Last Judgment will not come? What seems to be sought is a period in which one will not be subject to God’s judgment and knowledge of the date by which one must get one’s house in order. But to ‘prepare’ in this way is to prepare not as one who acknowledges God’s judgment as the truth, as what matters most of all; instead it is to look at that judgment as something to be accommodated, dealt with, even got round: it is to see some other, further end – namely, one’s ‘peace and security’ – which must be protected *in the face of* God’s judgment. Such an individual lacks a ‘fundamental comportment to *God*’ (PRL 110, emphasis in original).

The stance of these individuals differs from that of a third group of ‘believers’ we might introduce, a group we could call ‘pagans’, made up of those who think that an all-powerful and all-knowing being created the universe and will return at some point to bring joy to those who have acted as that being thinks they should have and inflict suffering on those it thinks haven’t. There is nothing irreligious in the pagan’s trying to ‘get round’ such a being’s judgment because their attitude (as described above) to that being is not, in any sense that matters for St Paul, religious in the first place: it is non-religious, one might say. Those who ‘talk[] of peace and security’, however, *think* that they believe in God not as the pagan does: they *think* they *love* God. But the way that they ‘have’ or ‘comport themselves towards’ the *parousia* reveals that their understanding of that event is fundamentally pagan after all. Returning to the passage from PRL 107, ‘they cannot’ - but, nonetheless, want to - ‘escape’; although they have ‘no means’, they, nonetheless, want to ‘overcom[e] and tak[e] a stance’ towards this judgment; God’s judgment of them is an alien imposition,

something to which they are ‘*handed over*’ and from which they ‘want to save themselves’.

Such individuals ‘refuse[] to love the truth’ (2 Thess 2.10-11, translation from PRL 77) and act out of what St Augustine calls ‘*timor servilis*’, ‘servile fear’: they act ‘not ... from love of God, but from fear of punishment’ (quoted in PRL 225). Such fear contrasts with ‘*timor castus*’ - ‘chaste fear’ – which is the fear, as Heidegger puts it, of ‘he who has begun to strive for the good for its own sake’ (PRL 225).²¹

According to 2 Thess. 1:5, which Heidegger cites at PRL 75, God’s ‘judgment’ is ‘righteous’: the New English Bible speaks here of ‘the justice of God’s judgment’. To ‘love the truth’ is to acknowledge this, to see the carrying out of God’s will as the thing that matters most, even if that might result in the loss of one’s ‘peace and security’. It is to desire to live as God demands – not to desire to be living as God demands *when* he comes in judgment, a state of affairs that one might hope to arrange perhaps by divining when the *parousia* will take place, by joining ‘the speculators and chatterboxes’ who pore over calendars, looking for portents.²² To entertain that hope is to put one’s ‘peace and security’ above the carrying out of God’s will, to understand ‘being saved’ not as being righteous in the eyes of God full-stop, but as being righteous *in order that* one’s ‘peace and security’ be saved; the latter understanding betrays a ‘fundamental compoment’ to one’s ‘peace and security’, rather than to God.

To ‘be prepared for’ the *parousia* – as the specific event that it is - is then to live a certain way, rather than to know when it will come. We may say that the Christian looks forward with ‘hope’ but

²¹ *Timor castus* is ‘fear that you lose the good things’, of God’s ‘forsaking you’: ‘This fear does not have the direction of keeping something or someone at bay, but of pulling something or someone toward oneself. *Timor separationem (est) amare veritatem* [Fearing separation (is) loving the truth]’ (PRL 225).

²² Such an arrangement brings to mind, of course, St Augustine’s famous plea to be ‘give[n] chastity and continence, but not yet’ (1961: 169).

‘Having hope’ and mere attitudinal expectation [are] essentially different. To have ‘expectation’ as hope, faithful, loving, serving expectation in sadness and joy. (PRL 107)

In the terms invoked earlier, what Heidegger is drawing our attention to here is the distinctive ‘subject-correlate’ of the *parousia*, the forms of ‘*Verhalten*’ or ‘*Haben*’ in which the *parousia* shows itself as the religious event that it is. This ‘having’ is ‘not some ideational “expectation”, [but] rather ... serving God’ (PRL 79); Heidegger asks of the *parousia*, ‘How is it *there*, which objectivity is involved in its *cognition*?’, and his answer is ‘This itself is a *faith*!!’ (PRL 106)

3. Some Parallels with Wittgenstein

There are obvious echoes of the above discussion with that of authenticity in BT and in particular a clear anticipation of the motif of Being-towards-death.²³ But an exploration of these themes must be left to another occasion.²⁴ Instead I want to present a worry that the above discussion raises. Noting some quite striking parallels between it and a discussion of Wittgenstein’s of the Last Judgment will help us bring this worry out into the open. Although Wittgenstein’s remarks post-date Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein makes some direct comments on some of Heidegger’s other ideas,²⁵

²³ Heidegger characterises those who ‘talk of peace and security’ and their characteristic ‘speculative’ ‘brooding’ as ‘falling’ (PRL 106); the ‘children of light’, on the other hand, manifest ‘resolution [*Entschliessung*]’ (PRL 109). Moreover, they ‘run[] towards *the aim*!’ (PRL 90) and ‘live towards’ the *parousia* (PRL 103).

²⁴ A crucial question that van Buren asks is: how can primal Christian experience become ‘the paradigm of all experience for Heidegger’ (van Buren 1994: 185)? To no more than gesture towards an answer of my own, I suspect that the discussion of hiding from God provides a model of what it is to hide from one’s own best judgment. But, as I say above, elaborating upon that thought must be left to another day.

²⁵ Cf. VC 68 and VW 69-77.

direct influence strikes me as very unlikely.²⁶ A much more promising explanation of the convergence I will describe lies in the ‘anti-theological’ tradition set out above and, in particular, in a shared interest in Kierkegaardian themes.²⁷

Wittgenstein remarks

Suppose one were a believer and said: ‘I believe in a Last Judgment,’ and I said: ‘Well, I’m not so sure. Possibly.’ You would say that there is an enormous gulf between us. If he said ‘There is a German aeroplane overhead,’ and I said ‘Possibly. I’m not so sure,’ you’d say we were fairly near. ...

Suppose, for instance, we knew people who foresaw the future; make forecasts for years and years ahead; and they described some sort of a Judgment Day.

Queerly enough, even if there were such a thing, and even if it were more convincing than I have described, belief in this happening wouldn’t be at all a religious belief. (LC 53, 56)

According to Wittgenstein, we grasp the character of the Last Judgment as the object of a religious belief when we recognize how it is ‘seized on by men believingly (i.e. lovingly)’ (CV 38), its ‘regulating for all in [the believer’s] life’, its being ‘before his mind’ ‘whenever he does anything’ as ‘guidance for this life’ (LC 54, 53):

The believer’s relation to these messages is *neither* a relation to historical truth (probability) *nor yet* that to a doctrine consisting of ‘truths of reason’. There is such a thing. (CV 38)

²⁶ For example, I think it’s possible that Wittgenstein read none of Heidegger’s works. His few comments cited in the previous note are made in conversations with members of the Vienna Circle and show an awareness of notions that are prominent in WM, in particular. One possibility is that Wittgenstein’s knowledge of Heidegger arises merely out of conversations that were going on around the publication of Carnap 1929.

²⁷ On Wittgenstein’s relationship to Kierkegaard, cf., e.g., Schönbaumsfeld 2007.

There is such a relation, says Wittgenstein; there is such a distinctive ‘subject-correlate’, says Heidegger. To invoke a notion to which I will return, ‘reminding’ us that our experience actually comes in these forms is what a certain kind of phenomenological reflection sets out to do. Without a recognition of that diversity, we are liable to make groundless assimilations between different kinds of ‘experience’ and their ‘objects’, which will then make it difficult for us to make sense of the lives that we lead.²⁸

There are other interesting parallels between the reflections on religion of these two thinkers. Both regarded philosophical attempts to prove the existence of God as confused.²⁹ Rather Heidegger held that the ‘awaken[ing of] religious life ... only [occurs] through such life itself’ (PRL 232),³⁰ and Wittgenstein that ‘‘[c]onvincing someone of God’s existence’’ is something you might do by means of a certain upbringing, shaping his life in such & such a way’ (CV 97). Such attitudes have led to long-standing suspicions of fideism: for example, Neilsen claims that Wittgenstein sees religion as an ‘incommensurable domain’ that ‘sets its own criteria of coherence, intelligibility or rationality’ (2005: 128-29, 1967: 193),³¹ and Guignon claims that Heidegger sees the ‘language-game’ of ‘religious inspiration’ as an ‘autonomous region[] of projection’ with its ‘own logic and criteria of legitimacy’ (1983: 168). But I want to focus on a deeper question: deeper than the question of whether one might *defend* religious beliefs is the question of whether such ‘beliefs’ truly are *beliefs* at all.

²⁸ Cf., e.g., PI sec. 24 on the need to ‘keep the multiplicity of language-games in view’.

²⁹ Heidegger saw such efforts as ‘Hellenistic’ and ‘not originally Christian’ (PRL 19) and Wittgenstein held that ‘*believers* who offered such proofs’ ‘themselves would never have arrived at belief by way of such proofs’ (CV 97).

³⁰ Cf. also PRL 235: ‘[A]s a *religious person* I need no trace of the philosophy of religion’.

³¹ Cf. also Malcolm 1963.

4. Suspicions of Non-Cognitivism

In emphasising the difference between our relation to ‘historical truth’ and ‘truths of reason’, and an ‘originary’ religious mode of intentionality, of ‘faithful, loving, serving expectation in sadness and joy’, one runs the risk of breaking off any connection with the very idea of truth, of losing any understanding of this mode of intentionality as, in *some* sense, cognitive. Wittgenstein encourages this thought when he talks of religious belief’ as ‘like a passionate commitment to a system of reference’, as ‘really a way of living, or a way of assessing life’ (CV 73) - to which, as the worrier might put it, actual belief in God might seem irrelevant – or when he offers the following thoughts:

[M]y soul, with its passions, as it were with its flesh & blood, must be redeemed, not my abstract mind [*spekulierender Verstand*]. Perhaps one may say: Only *love* can believe the Resurrection.’ (CV 38-39)

Such remarks have prompted Nielsen to claim that, for Wittgenstein, ‘Christian practice is everything and Christian belief, belief that involves doctrines, is nothing’ (2005: 116), and Hyman to argue that a consequence of Wittgenstein’s view is that ‘a religious belief cannot be *true* or *false*’ (2001: 6).

Similar concerns might well arise when Heidegger juxtaposes, on the one hand, ‘ideational “expectation”’ and, on the other, ‘serving God’ or ‘faithful, loving, serving expectation in sadness and joy’: it is tempting here to think that practice is everything and belief nothing. Indeed Heidegger’s subsequent reflections on belief may seem to confirm this suspicion. In BT, he associates beliefs and assertions with the revelation of the *Vorhanden*, the ‘present-at-hand’ or ‘occurrent’ object: it is ‘the speciality of assertion’ to ‘level’ the modes of engagement through which entities are initially revealed to us – ‘the primordial “as”’ - down to that which reveals the *Vorhanden* (BT 201 (158)).³² Beliefs and assertions about the religious would then seem to necessarily ‘level down’ our understanding of their objects, and to be capable

³² Cf. also, e.g., BT 89 (61-62) and 209 (166).

only of drawing our attention away from those entities that are revealed to us in ‘the primordial “as”’ of ‘serving God’. If so, and if God is not to be understood as ‘present-at-hand’, then the modes of intentionality through which we engage with him must not be belief: religious belief must not be a form of belief after all.

In this way, the claim that beliefs reveal the *Vorhanden* further supports the suspicion of non-cognitivism in Heidegger’s reflections on religion. In recognizing this, we connect those reflections to what is often taken to be one of BT’s central claims. But it also needs to be acknowledged that, on most plausible construals of the *Vorhanden*,³³ the claim that assertions only and specifically reveal the *Vorhanden* is deeply implausible, and among the beneficial consequences of the response to the charge of non-cognitivism that I will also offer is a challenge to any straight-forward ascription of that implausible claim to Heidegger.

5. The ‘Genuine Complicatedness of Belief’ and the ‘Levelling’ ‘Indifference’ of ‘the Assertion’

The analogy with Wittgenstein suggests another way of looking at Heidegger’s later remarks on belief and assertion. Cora Diamond comments on the passage from CV 38-39 quoted above:

³³ McManus forthcoming argues that the discussions of *Vorhandenheit* and of assertion are actually much more complicated than is typically recognized and I only touch on those complexities here. ‘The *Vorhanden*’, for example, are characterised in many different ways: natural phenomena, ‘mere things’, mere ostended *thats*, the ‘isolated’ or ‘de-contextualised’, substances, the objective, ‘the thematic’, the non-ready-to-hand, ‘the unintelligible’, ‘the strange’, and as that which is revealed by assertions, by the Theoretical Attitude, by knowledge, by intuition, by ‘pure beholding’, by ‘fixed staring’, by natural science, by mathematics, by anxiety, by ‘devivification’ and by ‘de-worlding’.

The idea that we are not concerned with the *spekulierende Verstand* does not ... mean that we are not concerned with the *Verstand* at all. Indeed [Wittgenstein's point] is that religious belief complicates the treatment that we as philosophers need to give to belief, which it would not do, were we to exclude the case of religious belief from *Verstand*. (Diamond 2005: 112)

The following exchange with Casimir Lewy suggests that this may indeed be Wittgenstein's point:

Suppose someone, before going to China, when he might never see me again, said to me: 'We might see one another after death' – would I necessarily say that I don't understand him? I might want say [want to say] simply, 'Yes, I *understand* him entirely.'

Lewy: In this case, you might only mean that he expressed a certain attitude.

I would say 'No, it isn't the same as saying "I'm very fond of you"' – and it may not be the same as saying anything else. It says what it says. Why should you be able to substitute anything else? (LC 70-71)

What Wittgenstein here seems to resist is the thought that such beliefs are 'not genuinely *beliefs* at all' but must be 'dissolved into conduct, attitudes and modes of life'; instead he wants to retain the thought that these speakers '*mean what they say*' and, insisting that we recognize *these* beliefs *as* beliefs, press upon us 'the genuine complicatedness of the concept of belief' (Diamond 2005: 131, 112).

I suggest that we see Heidegger's proposals in a similar light. Despite the impression that a superficial reading of his comments on faith as a 'holding-as-true' might give, Heidegger sees his phenomenological reflections as showing that 'truth must undergo a "widening"', and 'so too must Being' (HCT 55). Heidegger's discussion of religious belief contributes to such a 'widening' of what we understand by 'belief' and its 'objects', to an effort – to echo Diamond - to 'complicate[] the treatment that we as philosophers need to give to belief, which it would not do, were

we to exclude the case of religious belief' from belief altogether. The kind of *non-cognitivism* described above would singularly fail to bring about the 'widening' Heidegger seeks, by instead happily handing over all rights to talk of 'truth', 'the objective' and 'the cognitive' to more 'respectable' modes of intentionality and their 'object-correlates'. Heidegger's concern in focusing on the 'entirely originary intentionality' of religious experience, this 'original having', is to widen our conception of such 'object-correlates' and reveal 'an originary objectivity [*Objectität*]' (PRL 252).

Conclusively proving that this indeed is the way to understand Heidegger's proposals here is, I think, impossible for reasons to which I return at the end of this section. But there are several reasons to think it in keeping with the spirit of his early work. First, any flat-footed invocation of the notion of 'non-cognitivism' seems to presuppose a naivety about the 'cognitive' of which we cannot convict Heidegger. Compare his reaction to depictions of the religious as 'the irrational': that concept is a 'counter-projection [*Gegenwurf*]' and 'with these two concepts nothing is said, as long as one does not know the meaning of "rational"', the latter 'find[ing] itself in notorious indetermination' (PRL 251, 54).³⁴ As he memorably puts it in BT:

When irrationalism, as the counterplay [*Gegenspiel*] of rationalism, talks about the things to which rationalism is blind, it does so only with a squint.
(BT 175 (136))

³⁴ Double quotation marks added for clarity. Cf. also PRL 54, 92, 236. Kisiel suggests a similar grievance about Kierkegaard's talk of a 'paradox of faith': such talk remains 'ensnared in the concept of theoretical truth acquired from philosophy' and undermines the 'attempt to give truth a new sense [that] took place in the New Testament and later in Augustine' (1993: 282). It is notable that when Wittgenstein bemoans the fact that 'the word "belief" has caused much mischief in religion' he too includes amongst that 'mischief' '[a]ll these intractable thoughts about "paradox"' (DW 103-4, translated quoted from Schönbaumsfeld 2007: 27).

Indeed Heidegger even goes so far as to insist that when one depicts religious experience as ‘not theoretical’ one only ‘intends what is correct’, because one leaves unasked questions like ‘what does theoretical mean, and what does not theoretical mean?’ (PRL 236).³⁵ If we must ask these questions of ‘the theoretical’, surely we must ask them also of notions like ‘belief’, ‘assertion’ and ‘the cognitive’.

Indeed that would seem to be the real intent behind Heidegger’s reflections on belief and assertion in his ‘mature’ early work, reflections that are more nuanced than is suggested by the ‘headline-grabbing’ – though downright implausible - claim that assertions reveal only the *Vorhanden*. In the 1925-26 *Logik* lectures, he distinguishes ‘various levels between a functional involvement with something, on the one hand, and a pure determining on the other’; and he declares the latter an ‘extreme’ to be distinguished from assertions that are ‘in and for a practical function’ and those which ‘describes one’s specific lived world’ (L 156 n. 131). But BT too warns that its discussion ‘stick[s] to certain limiting cases of assertion’ (BT 200 (157)), which are to be distinguished from ‘the kind of interpretation which is still wholly wrapped up in concerned understanding’; the latter includes ‘assertions about the happenings in the environment, accounts of the ready-to-hand, “reports on the Situation”, the recording and fixing of the “facts of the case”, the description of a state of affairs, the narration of something that has befallen’ (BT 201 (158)). He continues: ‘[w]e cannot trace back these “sentences” to theoretical statements without essentially perverting their meaning’. But that is not to deny them membership of what one might call the ‘cognitive family’ altogether: they remain ‘assertions’, ‘accounts’, ‘reports’, ‘recordings’, ‘descriptions’, and ‘narrations’.

To what vice then does theology succumb in its ‘constant dependency’ on ‘theoretical consciousness’ (PRL 235)? How might that ‘dependency’ ‘pervert the meaning’ of religious belief? In lectures shortly after BT, Heidegger insists that ‘the evenness, the undifferentiatedness of asserting and talking about ...’ obscures the

³⁵ Cf. also BT 409 (358): ‘it is by no means patent where the ontological boundary between “theoretical” and “atheoretical” behaviour runs!’ I return later to the question of how this claim ought to lead us to reassess some of the formulations of Heidegger’s concerns that I have used and quoted earlier in this paper.

variety of forms of Being; '[t]he equal and regular possibility of an assertion about all occurring beings' – about 'stones, trees, dogs, cars, "passers by" (human beings)' may give the impression that the 'manifestness of beings [is] a universally even and regular one' and that 'that all beings which can be spoken about are, as it were, of the same kind' (EP 82-83).³⁶ This offers a distinctive sense of what might be problematic about a 'Theoretical Attitude', a more nuanced one than our earlier discussion may have suggested. From this perspective, the problem lies not, as it were, with assertions or beliefs as such, or indeed the theoretical as such; it lies not, for example, in a supposed impossibility of assertions about anything but the *Vorhanden*, which we have already seen to be an implausible notion. Instead the problem lies in the fact that differences in the modes of Being of the subject-matter of assertions does not 'protrude ... in the linguistic form' (BPP 212): an *uncritical* 'orientation towards the assertion and its indifference, towards its levelled and levelling character' (EP 83), is apt to distract us from the life - the 'totality of involvements' - that make the 'objects' of our assertions what they are, the modes of Being-in-the-world – the diverse 'dealings' and modes of 'being involved with', 'having to do with', 'dwelling with', and 'being at home with' (BPP 208, BT 80 (54), PS 21, 191, 267, 21) - in which our diverse forms of assertion and belief are rooted.³⁷

I suggest that these are sentiments that the Heidegger of PRL might very well share and might do so without thereby committing himself to the notion that religious beliefs or assertions either necessarily conceal their 'objects' or cannot truly be beliefs or assertions after all. The 'constant dependency' of theology on 'theoretical consciousness' threatens to 'pervert the meaning' of religious beliefs, I would suggest, by potentially distracting us from the rootedness of our understanding of the entities which our beliefs intend in a kind of 'concernful understanding': in these cases, in a

³⁶ Cf. also BT 300 (256): 'The kind of truth ... varies with the way entities differ'.

³⁷ McManus forthcoming discusses this alternative view of the 'Theoretical Attitude' at greater length and in the broader context of Heidegger's philosophy.

relationship to God of worship and love.³⁸ Moreover, if we overlook that, we are in danger of thinking of the ‘object’ of those beliefs as ‘simply a special object’, or as we might instead put it, of overlooking its ‘originary objectivity’ – overlooking just how *very* special that ‘object’ is.

This should also make clear why I have avoided here a certain formulation of Heidegger’s concern that might perhaps have appealed in the foregoing discussion. Van Buren has argued that Heidegger’s discussions of St Paul and of related themes in Luther (in particular, his attack on *theologia gloriae*) point us to relations of ours to ‘the nonobjectifiable’ (1994: 151). My reason for avoiding that formulation is essentially the same as that for rejecting ‘non-cognitivism’: to echo the above discussion of ‘the irrational’, the ‘unobjective’ is a ‘counterplay’ – a ‘counter-projection’ - and ‘with these two concepts nothing is said, as long as one does not know the meaning’ of ‘object’. At BT 72 (46), Heidegger remarks on the need to understand the ‘ontological origin’ of ‘Thinghood’ if we are to understand what we mean by calling for an ‘un-reified’ conception of the Subject: if so, if we are not sufficiently clear about what a thing, a *res*, is, then ‘re-ification’ cannot be a substantial and determinate charge and being ‘unobjective’ cannot be a determinate

³⁸ There are similarities between this view and that which has been ascribed to Wittgenstein by Mulhall 2001 and Schönbaumsfeld 2007; and it confirms Crowe’s view that, for Heidegger, ‘religious doctrines and the reflective processes involved in their formation grow out of the articulated understanding of religious meaning that lies at the very ground of religious life’, an ‘understanding [that] is “lived out” in concrete practices such as prayer, communal life, or worship’ (2008: 65, 91). Cf. also PRL 112: ‘the genesis of dogma can only be understood from out of the enactment of Christian life experience’.

characteristic.³⁹ It is precisely this point that Heidegger makes in the Appendix that he later added to his 1927 lecture, ‘Phenomenology and Theology’, that ‘[p]rior to placing in discussion the question of *nonobjectifying* thinking and speaking in theology, it is necessary to reflect on what one understands by an *objectifying* thinking and speaking’ (PT 55).⁴⁰ If that too ‘finds itself in notorious indetermination’, then when we invoke the ‘unobjective’ in talking here of the things to which a certain kind of philosophical *Seinsvergessenheit* is blind, we ‘do so only with a squint’.⁴¹

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that although the reading sketched here opens up a space within which a concrete view of the character of religious belief might be constructed, it does not provide such a view itself. A defence of sorts is provided by the fact that Heidegger didn’t provide one either; and there remains a

³⁹ A parallel caution is needed with a formulation of Mulhall’s, according to which one of the causes of the seeming incoherence of ‘God-talk’ is our having an ‘impoverished conception of the kinds of non-factual or non-descriptive uses of language ... there might be’ (2005: 190). We can mean something determinate by the ‘counter-projections’ ‘non-factual’ and ‘non-descriptive’ only if we mean something determinate by ‘factual’ and ‘descriptive’.

⁴⁰ In that later (1964) piece, Heidegger identifies ‘objectifying thought’ with ‘the thinking and speaking of the natural sciences’ (PT 59) specifically to leave room for a recognition of the diversity of forms of ‘non-objectifying thought’. But this identification also serves to leave much room for assertions and beliefs whose ‘objects’ need not then be assimilated to those of ‘the thinking and speaking of the natural sciences’.

⁴¹ Similarly, one might be driven by Pauline or Lutheran reflections to deny we have any ‘mode of access’ to God, a *deus absconditus* (which is another of van Buren’s themes). But one might also declare that it does make sense to say we can ‘access’ God but only as long as we recognize what ‘access’ looks like here: ‘faithful, loving, serving expectation in sadness and joy’.

great deal of room for disagreement about the form that such a view should take.⁴² As I indicated earlier, one finds nothing in Heidegger's work after PRL to compare with its detailed and sustained reflections on religion and even those reflections have, I feel, an unresolved character.⁴³ Heidegger seems to have struggled to pin down just what the 'religious subject-correlate' or '-correlates' are. He looks at a variety of concepts like 'trust' (PRL 245), "revelation", "tradition", "congregation" (PRL 235), 'concentration, meditation, prayer' (PRL 254) and different conceptions of 'faith' (PRL 236):

Constitution of religious objecthood: Is God constituted in prayer? Or is he already somehow religiously pre-given in faith ("love")? And prayer a special comportment toward God? To what extent is there a possible multiplicity of types of constitution? Is there an essential connection between them? (PRL 234)

⁴² For example, unlike the non-cognitivist reading I have opposed, my reading is consistent with the 'semantic realism' that Crowe (2008: 13) ascribes to Heidegger; but can it accommodate the more specific proposal that Crowe offers?

[W]hile no less concretely given, God's objective reality is not like that of the objects of sense perception. Instead God is given as the ultimate *horizon* or *background* of religious life. (Crowe 2008: 59)

Does it make sense to think of such an 'object' as the object of a belief? A simple 'no' is unavailable if we have 'widened' our understanding of 'belief' which in turn makes possible in principle a 'widening' of the domain of 'objects of belief' beyond 'the objects of sense perception' and the like. But can an 'ultimate *horizon* or *background*' become such an 'object of belief'? *Prima facie*, a *reflective* philosophical belief might make it so. (Another path here might be offered by Schönbaumsfeld 2007, who ascribes to Wittgenstein a view not unrelated to Crowe's, while also wishing to preserve the notion of religious belief *as belief*.)

⁴³ Crowe seems to feel the same. Cf. his 2008: 67, 74

There are no indications that Heidegger ever answered these questions, and for reasons that are also less than clear, Heidegger moved on.

6. Conclusion

I have attempted to indicate here that one of Heidegger's first steps as an independent thinker is a bringing to bear of insights of the 'anti-theological' tradition, that St Paul would seem to inaugurate, on the Husserlian understanding of phenomenology. This move gives life to Heidegger's notion of 'the theoretical attitude' and gives sense to his claim that that 'attitude' is problematically partial. As I have shown through a comparison with strikingly similar claims of Wittgenstein's, the move also gives rise to significant worries, but worries the exploration of which sheds interesting light on Heidegger's mature early philosophy, on its understanding of assertions and the precise danger that 'the theoretical attitude' represents.

I believe that the analogy with Wittgenstein can be explored in yet greater depth. In particular, it can shed light on accusations of idealism that face both philosophers and it may have a bearing on important metaphilosophical issues that their work raises. We have explored Heidegger and Wittgenstein's reflections on the character and status of religious beliefs or assertions and, by a number of different routes, this also naturally leads on to the question of the character and status of philosophical beliefs or assertions. A question that a number of commentators have raised is: how can Heidegger's own seemingly theoretical assertions direct themselves towards the diversity of objects that we come to recognize once we recognize the partiality of the 'Theoretical Attitude'?⁴⁴ - not least, one might suggest, the 'objects' of religious belief? The above discussion of the range of phenomena that assertions

⁴⁴ I have in mind Dahlstrom's identification of the 'Paradox of Thematization' (cf. his 1994 and 2001), Crowell's examination of Heidegger's response to Natorp's criticisms of phenomenology (cf. his 2001 chs. 1, 6 and 7) and Blattner's reflections on ontology as 'theoretic-conceptual' (2007: 23).

might reveal and the character of the critical work done by the notion of the ‘Theoretical Attitude’ serves to question whether this is quite the worry that it seems. But the question of just what kind of ‘work’ Heidegger’s philosophical remarks are meant to do remains. Wittgenstein claims to be in the business of ‘reminding’ us of the understanding we already possess (PI sec. 127). Might we see Heidegger’s philosophical remarks as working in a similar way?

I have suggested that in his discussion of religious belief, Heidegger’s concern is not to deny that these are truly beliefs but instead to ask what belief in these particular matters involves – what it takes, one might say, to believe these matters. Following St Paul, Heidegger’s concern is that we not overlook the distinctive characteristics of the *lives* of those who truly believe. To fail to do so is a philosophical confusion, a forgetting of what we all, in a sense, already know about the religious life, and also potentially a spiritual evasion; we hear this concern clearly in Wittgenstein too:

I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the direction of one’s life.) ...
The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you. (CV 61)

The issue here seems to be one of *appropriation*, of recognizing what it is to make a belief like this genuinely *one’s own*, and the philosophical failure is a failure to appropriate – to actually set to work in one’s own reflection – the understanding of religion that one already possesses, to ensure that one’s ‘philosophy of religion refers to religion, ... grows from out of the meaning of religion’ (PRL 19). Conspicuously, Heidegger sees something like the above concern to ‘remind’ - to ‘reappropriate’ - in St Paul too.⁴⁵ ‘[T]he essential teachings of Paul ... are and remain entwined with the *How*, with life; they are not concerned with a specifically theoretical teaching’, with

⁴⁵ Heidegger seems to see Augustine as also performing a proto-phenomenological ‘return to origins’. He sees him as presenting ‘a re-vivification of the old [‘dogmatic system’] on the basis of personal experience and piety’, as ‘rediscover[ing] religiosity in religion’ (PRL 117).

‘theoretical instruction’; instead his letters are a ‘call’, an attempt to provoke his readers into actually appropriating – ‘reminding’ them of? - what they already know, into keeping this ‘unceasingly ... alive in the enactment of life’ (PRL 83, 76, 94). But whether these final analogies can bear development is a matter I must leave for another occasion.^{46 47}

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⁴⁶ For some further discussion, cf. McManus 2008 sec. 4 and forthcoming.

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