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Heidegger's Notion of Religion: The limits of being-understanding

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Heidegger's Notion of Religion: the limits of being-understanding

The engagement with Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity[1] is not a new topic of debate and there have been various excellent commentaries on this topic. The aim of this paper will not be to repeat or dispute these previous discussions, but rather, to posit Heidegger's relationship with the question of religion in a new light. The aim of this paper is to disclose how religion is conceived in Heidegger's path of thinking, and further, how the phenomenon of religion poses problems for Heidegger's path of thinking.

In the most general sense, this article will provide three arguments: the first that Heidegger in his early lectures on 'primal Christianity' delimits the notion of religion to an experience of the truth of being. Additionally, I will argue that in providing this interpretation of the notion of religion Heidegger will also find himself inevitably denying any authenticity to traditional religions and accordingly, inevitably looking for an alternative to traditional religion. Finally, I will argue that the phenomenon of religion itself reveals a fundamental distinction between 'being' and the 'ground of being' (or the otherwise than being). This explains the sub-title of the article insofar as I am arguing that a proper phenomenology of religion (in Heidegger's sense of phenomenology; as ontology) discloses a major flaw in Heidegger's prioritisation of *Dasein* as the entity who understands.

In attempting this task, I will provide two interpretations of Heidegger's thinking in relation to religion. The first will be an interpretation of Heidegger's early lectures on religion, published under the title of *The Phenomenology of Religious Life.* This will allow me to ascertain the implications of his interpretation of primal Christianity within the realm of the philosophical problem of grounding and also the preconception of religion founded

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[1] Martin Heidegger himself coins the term 'primal' or 'primordial' Christianity in his 1920-1 lectures entitled 'Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion' in which he states: "*Primordial Christian religiosity is in Primordial Christian life experience and is itself such.*" (Martin Heidegger, 2004, p.55). This phrase is translated by Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren as 'primal Christianity' in *Reading Heidegger From the Start: Essays in his earliest thought* (Kisiel & van Buren, 1994)

therein. I will argue, on this basis, that Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity generates a conception of religion as merely ontical, which then serves as the basis for Heidegger's later relation with religion.

The second interpretation of Heidegger's relation with religion, then, will focus on his later engagement with pre-metaphysical Greek thinking and German poetry. In this part of the paper I will provide a detailed exposition of how Heidegger relates to religious concepts and phenomena in his lectures on Parmenides (Heidegger, 1992), Heraclitus (Heidegger, 1993), and then Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister" (Heidegger, 1996). I will argue on this basis that Heidegger conceives religion in these texts as an intrinsically 'inauthentic' phenomenon for which he will then seek a replacement. The questions this paper will ask of Heidegger's thinking will be: how does religion pose problems for this path of thinking, how does the phenomenon of religion resist Heidegger's interpretation, and thus, is there potential for religion to delimit the validity of the quest for the being of *Dasein*?

§1. Key Concepts:

The arguments that this paper provides operate on the basis of my use of two key concepts: 'religion' and 'authenticity'. The former, I am arguing, poses a problem for Heidegger's path of thinking; the latter, I would claim, is pivotal to Heidegger's conception and then dismissal of any possible genuine place of religion in the being of Dasein.

For the purposes of this paper I am using the term 'religion' to mean "the phenomenon of religion". In other words, I am claiming that religion is a phenomenon in precisely the way that Heidegger defines phenomenon in *Being and Time*: "the showing-itself-in-itself of the being of entities" (Heidegger, 1962, p.60). Any phenomenon, it follows, either *is* the being of the entity or '*belongs-to*' to an entity in its being. On this basis, my use of the concept religion in this paper will signify 'religion' as a phenomenon that belongs-to

and discloses the being of humans. I would argue that insofar as we conceive of religion as a phenomenon the meaning of religion is located in and grounded upon the capacity of humans (in our being) to be directed towards and have a relationship with that through which we uncover meaning and purpose for our living[2]. The question that the phenomenon of religion poses of Heidegger's philosophy is this: If the concept of Dasein cannot adequately serve as the ground for the phenomenon of religion, then can we say that Dasein really (genuinely) signifies the being of humans?

The concept 'authenticity' or '*Eigentlichkeit*' is a somewhat contested term in Heideggerian scholarship. Benjamin Crowe, in his work on *Heidegger's Religious Origins* notes that there are three main interpretative trends in relation to the term: the first which he calls an ontological account, the second he calls the 'narrativist' reading, and the third, which he calls the 'emancipatory' reading (Crowe, 2006, pp164, 167-169). According to Crowe, the first interpretative trend emphasises the ontological character of the term as reflecting and fitting into Heidegger's philosophical project as a whole (Crowe, 2006). The narrative account emphasises the connection between the concept of authenticity and 'how' we live and emphasises how the concept fits into Heidegger's general account of selfhood (Crowe, 2006). The third and final account is one which views Heidegger as anticipating to some extent philosophers such as Derrida and Levinas; therein emphasising the 'personal' character of life (Crowe, 2006).

The approach I will take in this paper is the first; the ontological reading exemplified by those like Thomas Sheehan who constitutes authenticity as intrinsically connected with an encounter with one's own proper or true being: "one recuperates one's essence and thus attains 'authenticity' by becoming one's proper (or 'authentic') self" (Sheehan, 1998). Authenticity, I would argue, is a concept that harks back to and is grounded upon Aristotle's

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[2] This argument was the substance of my PhD thesis, now published as a book (Brook, 2009) and also a number of conference papers

concept of φρονησις in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially as Heidegger interprets it to refer to the being of "something which can also be otherwise" than itself (Heidegger, 1997, pp.34-5). Following this quote, Heidegger goes on to claim that "it is not at all a matter of course that Dasein be disclosed to itself in its proper being" - its true being (Heidegger, 1997). This discussion is crucial to understanding the later development of the concept of authenticity as the encounter of one's own being or the truth of being-human.

§2. Commentaries on Heidegger's Interpretation of Primal Christianity

As mentioned previously, there have been many excellent commentaries of Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity. I will set the context for my interpretation of Heidegger's lectures and writings on religion through a general and brief discussion of some of the pivotal themes in these commentaries. I will broadly touch upon three themes of relevance: *what* Heidegger finds in primal Christianity, how this serves as a ground for phenomenology, and the implications of Heidegger's interpretation for his later engagements with religion or religious themes.

A. The What:

There is a general consensus that Heidegger found (if not sought from the outset) in Primal Christianity the ground for a philosophical notion of 'authenticity' (Capelle, 1997). This notion of authenticity does not refer to the personal; ethical, spiritual or psychological, but rather is called 'factical' – referring to the ontological (Caputo, 1993). Authenticity, as such, refers to some sense of authentic-being; a being-truly, or properly human. In this case, authenticity pertains to an authentic experience of what it is to be human, and further, the ground for a genuine understanding – a philosophy proper Capelle, 1997; van Buren, 1994). The former discloses via primal Christianity the content of an experience of life as authentic

(being) in a certain kind of temporality (van Buren, 1994; Sheehan, 1986) and a certain how of interpreting life in relation to meaning (Sheehan, 1986; Capelle, 2005). The latter discloses the test or framework for an authentic understanding that is also a phenomenology as ontology (Sheehan, 1986; Capelle, 2005). *What* Heidegger finds in Primal Christianity, is a double point of origin for phenomenology: the ontological content of human existence and the ground of a genuine way of living philosophically.

Primal Christian Experience and the Ground of a Genuine Philosophical Life:
The ground of a philosophical life is intrinsically connected to the disclosure in advance of authentic factical experience in a certain way, i.e., the authentic facticity of understanding. Primal Christian experience is the context for this disclosure of an authentic factical understanding and therein allows of the disclosure in advance of a genuine understanding which in turn serves as the ground of a genuine philosophical life (van Buren, 1994).

Insofar as the disclosure of authenticity is equally (in this sense) the disclosure of being, the exposition of authenticity in primal Christianity also grounds phenomenology. The disclosure of an authentic sense of temporality in primal Christianity, then, is the disclosure of the temporality of being-Dasein (Capelle, 2005). Moreover, this disclosure of temporality forms the basis of Dasein's intrinsic quest for being – to understand (van Buren, 1994).

Heidegger's interpretation also served as a 'how' of overcoming metaphysics (as onto-theology); as a ground for a non-metaphysical way of questioning being (Sadler, 1996). In part, this destruction of metaphysics operated as a kind of philosophical theology, a philosophical Lutheran (Protestant) critique of the theological dimension of Aristotle's metaphysics (Sadler, 1996). However, the primary aim was ontological, or an ontological revolution, which also at the same time leads to the discreditation of theology as a philosophical endeavour altogether (van Buren, 1994). The genuine philosophical life, in its

ground disclosed via primal Christianity, forms the horizon for the question of Dasein as the primary question of philosophy – genuine only as ontology.

Implications of the Interpretation of Primal Christianity:

The implications of Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity for his thinking (in relation to theology and religion) are closely tied to the notion of the 'turn' (*Kehre*) (Kovacs, 1990).[3] Insofar as primal Christianity served as a horizon for the question of grounding philosophy there is a great deal of ambiguity as to how this interpretation formed or influenced Heidegger's later thinking about religion. One of the consistent themes herein is the view that in the 'turn' Heidegger moved towards early Greek thinking (via Nietzsche) as a horizon for the proper discussion of religion in a non-metaphysical sense (Caputo, 1993). In this respect, early Greek thinking is viewed as the space in which Heidegger founded a rival (to Christian) sense of the holy (Caputo, 1993). This is paralleled in Heidegger's investigations into Hölderlin, perhaps in the sense of a German history of being in relation to the divine (van Buren, 1994).

There are, then, two general themes in the commentaries pertinent to the implications of primal Christianity for Heidegger's later thinking about religion. The first is that the 'demythologising' or 'ontologising' of primal Christianity leads to a thinking that subsumes the divine under the truth of being (Caputo, 1993). The second theme is that Heidegger's search for ground (in primal Christianity) operates within a prioritisation of the question of being in such a way that ontology becomes a religion of sorts (Kovacs, 1990; Sadler, 1996).

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[3] The notion of the *Kehre* in Heidegger's philosophy is a contested term. However, for the purposes of this paper the notion of *Kehre* is used solely insofar as it helps us place in context the changing relation Heidegger had with religion and religious phenomena.

§3. Heidegger on Primal Christianity

In turning to Heidegger's interpretation of what he calls primal Christianity, through the translations of his lectures on religion, my aim is to draw out the implicit conception of religion that is developed therein. As such, the task is not so much to identify the 'what' or 'how' of Heidegger's approach to primal Christianity, but rather, to disclose the preconception of religion within his path of thinking.

Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion

When Heidegger attempts to address primal Christianity his primary agenda is the disclosure of factical existence in the sense of 'how' humans may experience and understand our own being 'authentically'. In this respect Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity appears to achieve two interrelated endpoints: the positing of a certain religious experience of life as an authentic experience of being-human in the historical and '*Chairological'* temporality, and further, the 'demythologising' of primal Christian experience. This accords with Heidegger's stated task of the explication of concrete religious phenomena and the penetration of the ground (being) of these phenomena (Heidegger, 2004).

However, these results are played out within a second goal of the lectures, namely: the explication of fundamental religious experience and the quest to understand this experience in connection to all religious phenomena (Heidegger, 2004). Heidegger, then, cannot be seen to merely demythologise religious experience, but also, actively seek a sense of the meaning of religion in an ontological sense.[4] The question (of this paper) therefore becomes: how does Heidegger conceive the meaning of religion, and further, what are the essential characteristics given therein?

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[4] Universal: "*all* religious phenomena", Ontological: "*original*" – grounding phenomena.

The conception of religion is initially driven by the matter of Heidegger's thinking in a more general sense, e.g., the horizon of the ontological question of how beings are grasped/presented in their being. As such, the question of religion operates within the context of phenomenology-ontology in such a way that primal Christian experience discloses something about the character of the being of Dasein (the entity who presents) and this in turn discloses something about the essence of the meaning of religion. In the first instance, primal Christian experience discloses the being of Dasein as factical and thus historical (Heidegger, 2004, pp.22, 86-88, 97). Accordingly, the initial turn preconceives religion as a life experience that is factical (grounded in the being of Dasein) and historical (as a way of living temporality) (Heidegger, 2004). Thus, in the first instance, religion is conceived by Heidegger as a kind of authentic factical experience grounded in being Dasein.

The key to Heidegger's interpretation of the meaning of religion lies in the question of 'authenticity', and moreover, the way Heidegger preconceives religious authenticity: the potential authenticity of a human relation with God and an authentic understanding of God.

The potential authenticity of the human relation to God, as Heidegger characterises it, pertains to the potential 'authenticity' of being Dasein. That is, the authenticity of religious phenomena is grounded upon an awareness or experience of what it is to be truly human (as Dasein) (Heidegger, 2004). As such, the first way of characterising the potential authenticity of religion is its meaning as a life that is authentically grounded in the being of Dasein. Of course, primal Christianity merely lives this authenticity and does not necessarily grasp (understand properly) the ground of itself. However, the primary character of the authenticity of religious phenomena is its belonging to the being of Dasein, i.e. the meaning of religious phenomena is its belonging to being Dasein.

As a phenomenon, then, religion is implicitly preconceived as the relation of being Dasein with God that may be characterised as authentic only insofar as it is grounded in what

it is to be truly human. In this respect, the authenticity of primal Christianity is the way in which God is present in factical life as a 'having become' for humans in our being (Heidegger, 2004). Further, this authenticity belongs to the being of Dasein as enactment (a lived temporality) in which the sense of being of God is determined (Heidegger, 2004).

Augustine and Neo-Platonism

The second way Heidegger characterises the authenticity of religion focuses on the phenomenon of understanding God. Herein, Heidegger's lecture on St. Augustine's *Confessions (Book 10)* interprets the text within the context of the combination of theology and philosophy as a factical life (Heidegger, 2004a). The point of origin for this analysis is the distantiation of theology from philosophy (Heidegger, 2004a).[5] Theology, as such, is constituted via a relation of belief; the ontical science of belief as a historical phenomena (Heidegger, 1998). Philosophy, however, is the relation of humans to being-Dasein within the realm of comprehension (understanding).

The philosophical analysis of the meaning of religion centres on the possibility of an authentic human understanding of the 'towards which' of religion. For Heidegger, in the lectures on Augustine, this is God, gods, or the divine. The interpretation of the *Confessions*, insofar as it pertains to the essence of religion, focuses on the proper human understanding of God: what do I love when I love you? (Heidegger, 2004a) Herein, Heidegger interprets Augustine as understanding God as 'the Truth', and thus, the search for God the search for truth (Heidegger, 2004a).[6] Therefore, the meaning of religion is a lived authenticity (grounded in Dasein's being) in the truth; the truth of being human and an authentic relation to the truth as a being (Heidegger, 2004a).

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[5] Heidegger quotes Kierkegaard from *Sickness Unto Death*: "To comprehend is the range of man's relation to the human, but to believe is man's relation to the divine."
[6] Heidegger is defining truth as 'the truth of being'

The notion of religion within Heidegger's interpretation of Primal Christianity:

Within Heidegger's interpretation of primal Christianity the notion of religion is preconceived or presupposed in two primary ways. In the first instance, religion is preconceived as 'religious phenomena'; a factical experience (faith/believing) that is grounded in the being of Dasein. This 'preconceiving' of religion is brought about through the phenomenological method wherein, for Heidegger, all human phenomena will be explicated with regard to the basic characteristics of being-Dasein. The search for philosophical ground, as such, transforms human experiences into indicative phenomena of what it is to be Dasein. The notion of religion, therefore, is 'preconceived' within the context of this transformation as necessarily a phenomena grounded upon being-Dasein. Thus, the preconception of religion is that it signifies a factical experience of what it is to be truly-human, and its authenticity belongs to being-Dasein (Heidegger, 2004a).

Religion is presupposed as 'factical experience' within the context of Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation insofar as it is granted, in some sense, the character 'authenticity'. Herein, the notion of 'authenticity' in Heidegger's thinking implicitly signifies 'truth', 'truth of being', or 'true-being'. As such, primal Christianity is granted the character of 'authenticity' within the context of its factical experience of God as the truth that comes to presence as a being: a 'fore-giving' of truth as a phenomenon (Heidegger, 2004a). Thus, the 'authenticity' of primal Christianity implicitly belongs to the experiencing of truth and the meaning of religion therein presupposed as an 'authentic' factical experience of 'the Truth'.

It can be seen that Heidegger's turn to the essential meaning of religion as these two interrelated 'factical experiences' of truth already encapsulates a 'turn' in Heidegger's later thinking, for a turn to what is traditionally called religion is no more than the path to thinking about 'the truth'. Equally, Heidegger's formulation of the meaning of religion transforms

primal Christianity as a religious life into an example of an authentic existence insofar as the notion 'authenticity' intrinsically belongs with the notion of 'truth' in factical experience.

§4. Heidegger on Early Greek Thinking and German Poetry.

In providing an overview of Heidegger's thinking in relation to what is traditionally called religion, or the realm of religion, my primary aim is to show how Heidegger constitutes religion as the factical experience of the truth of being (or simply the truth). Further, I aim to show that Heidegger sought to overcome religion (in its traditional form) by appropriating its ground and founding, therein, an authentic philosophical-ontological eschatology and an alternative 'truly authentic' factical experience of truth in poetry. Two primary themes will serve as a point of orientation for this overview: a) the meaning of religion is the factical experience of the truth and an encountering of the truth as a being but is not an understanding of the truth, and b) religion is a secondary phenomena to philosophy and the possibility of a genuine philosophical understanding of truth.

Heidegger on Early Greek Thinking:

In Heidegger's *Parmenides* the interpretation of the meaning of religion appears to be a quite straightforward continuation of his characterisation of primal Christianity. A surface read of the text seems to indicate that the meaning of religion is the human encounter with the truth brought to presence as divinities. The text begins with Parmenides encounter with the goddess, Heidegger providing an argument that the goddess is the truth (*Aletheia*) – the truth experienced as a person (Heidegger, 1998a). Towards the end of the text Heidegger returns to the seemingly 'religious', via a discussion of the 'how' of Greek-Dasein's encountering the truth (of the emergence of being) as the divine or daemonic (Heidegger, 1998a). This 'how' is then discussed in relation to the being of Greek-Dasein; that Greek-Dasein presents the

divine in the encounter with the truth as it emerges into presence (Heidegger, 1998a). As such, it appears that Heidegger intrinsically formulates religion to be the human encounter with the truth emerging as a being. However, I would argue that in this text Heidegger seeks the ground of what gets called religion, or religious phenomena, and negates religion in the process.

In interpreting the fragments of Parmenides' proem Heidegger's primary concern is not the human encounter of the truth as an experienced phenomenon, nor as a potentially religious phenomenon. Rather, the question is that of Greek-Dasein's relation with the truth in an ontological sense insofar as it discloses something about the essential character of Dasein as understanding, i.e. how Dasein understands being, and how the truth is essentially an emergence of beings and being for Dasein. Equally, the question is that of Greek-Dasein as a historical phenomenon; a phenomenon within the horizon of a Greek history of Being and the 'authenticity' contained therein that discloses the truth as emergence.

The text of Heidegger's lecture on Parmenides, then, focuses on the disclosure of the horizon of Dasein's being as a relation with being-itself (the truth as emergence) called the 'uncanny' wherein the truth itself emerges into the realm of the ordinary (Heidegger, 1998a). The uncanny signifies 'how' in an ontological sense the truth is possible and therein discloses an 'authentic' encounter with truth. Further, that which is encountered (the truth as emergent as a being for Dasein) is named 'divine' only within the horizon of being for Greek-Dasein and the history of being belonging to Greek-Dasein. As such, the authenticity of the divine for Greek-Dasein is not fundamentally religious (in Heidegger's interpretation), but rather, the naming of the presence of present being: the emergence of being-itself for Greek-Dasein Heidegger, 1998a).

This stance is reiterated in Heidegger's and Fink's lectures on Heraclitus. Again, Heidegger argues that for Greek-Dasein, the gods belong to what is (being), and further, that

the notion *Theos* signifies being-itself (Heidegger & Fink, 1993). As such, humanity is a condition for the existence of the divine insofar as it is Dasein (in our being) that presents the divine in the understanding of being and as the being that understands (Heidegger & Fink, 1993). The divine for Greek-Dasein, Heidegger asserts, is therefore not a religious notion, nor pertinent to religion, but is rather the naming of the presence of the truth of being as it is understood (Heidegger & Fink, 1993). The locus of the Greek sense of the divine within the realm of understanding is thus a purely philosophical notion that is essentially a naming of truth in itself as it emerges into and for Dasein.

The interpretation of early Greek thinking is marked by an appropriation of the ground of the religious by philosophy, and a philosophical overcoming of religious phenomena through the disclosure of what Heidegger believes to be the ontological structures of this ground. Herein, the overcoming is related to both the ground as a history of being (the tradition of theology as grounded in Greek metaphysics) and the ground of religion as an experiencing of truth.

Heidegger's interpretation of early Greek thinking also serves as a third ground, namely: the foundation of an authentic philosophical-ontological eschatology of truth. This is expressed poignantly in the lectures on Parmenides wherein Heidegger attributes 'a-theism' to the absence of the divine which is also the horizon of the modern forgetting/withdrawal of being (Heidegger, 1998a). Philosophy, as a genuine factical life in the modern history of being, then takes up the task of destiny that brings being into presence: thinking that seeks the truth as the essence of emergence and thus brings 'occidental humanity' to the home region of the goddess *aletheia* (Heidegger, 1998a). Philosophy, for Heidegger, thus replaces religion with an ontological eschatology. This is only possible insofar as religion comes to be constituted as a phenomenon of inauthenticity (the fallen-ness of Dasein's being) that serves as the everyday ground of a-theism (the withdrawal of being). Insofar as religion can no

longer be constituted as an authentic encounter with the truth (as being) Heidegger will then seek to find an alternative 'authentic' encounter of the emergence of truth, namely: poetry.

German Poetry (Hölderlin) as the 'authentic' alternative factical life.

For Heidegger, the overcoming of religion is not simply a matter of the substitution of theology by the ontological, but is also the disclosure of an alternative more 'authentic' realm of Dasein's encounter with the emergence of truth in factical experience. Herein, Heidegger supplants the need for religion in a traditional sense while considering the destiny of being for 'German humanity' via Hölderlin's hymn 'The Ister' (Heidegger, 1997). The overcoming of religion produced here is disclosed not only as seeking a more 'authentic' factical experience, but moreover, a necessary denial of any 'authenticity' (primacy) of religious phenomena within Heidegger's path of thinking.

The replacement of religion by poetry outlined in this text takes place implicitly within a reversal or negation of primal Christian experience wherein the Christian notion of sin and salvation are posited as an inauthentic negation (Heidegger, 1997). Accordingly, the primordial Greek and German humanity (in their relation of the foreign) together through their poets are called back to their essence: the homeliness of Dasein by the river – the dwelling and building place to which Dasein authentically (in our being) belongs (Heidegger, 1997). Herein, the proper home of Dasein is with the holy: nature and the divinity presenced within the relation of Dasein and the power of nature (mother *Germania*) (Heidegger, 1997).

Heidegger can be seen to make two essential moves in this lecture on Hölderlin: the first to position the poet (as demigod) that replaces religious revelation, the second to pronounce through Greek and German poetry an eschatology of being as a becoming homely (Heidegger, 1997). This authenticity of the destiny of German Dasein, in becoming homely,

is to become homely as one's-self: to be grounded in Dasein's essence, a being open to being in general as emergence, and thus, *Germania* – mother earth (Heidegger, 1997).

§5. The Three Primary Themes of Heidegger's Relation with Religion:

In summary, there are three themes to be drawn out of Heidegger's relation with religion: a) the phases of the relation, b) the necessity of overcoming religion, and c) the notion of authenticity in Heidegger's thinking.

Phases of Heidegger's relation with religion

In the first phase of Heidegger's relation with religion, with respect to primal Christianity, he determines the essential meaning of religion to be the 'factical' experience of the truth of being in living. Herein, the phenomena of religion indicates a doubled experience of truth: the truth of the being of Dasein experienced in life, and the truth itself emerging (encountered) as a being. Primal Christianity, and thus religion, in this sense is essentially experiential and does not primarily refer to understanding. Rather, the essence of religion is a not-understanding – a faith that is grounded in Dasein's being without any necessary intrinsic connection to truth. Insofar as authenticity is a belonging to the truth of Dasein's being or truth in general the potential authenticity of religious phenomena is historical and ontical, not ontological. Philosophical understanding, however, is essentially this seeking truth with regard to ground – to the emergence of truth - and as such, gains priority over religion by finding the ground of religious phenomena. Moreover, the essence of religion is a contingency: a 'happening' to experience the truth without any true understanding of the essence of truth. This is why Heidegger's relation to religion, in the first instance, leads to an overcoming of traditional religion.

The second phase then follows in Heidegger's interpretations of early Greek thinking wherein he seeks an authentic understanding of, or way of access to, the truth. This authentic philosophical-ontological understanding thus supersedes religion by disclosing the ground of religion (the ground of Dasein's encounter with truth). The 'contingency' of religious phenomena, that may happen upon truth and equally miss the truth, then discloses the essence of religion to be a secondary or derivative phenomenon. Religion, as such, is grounded in Dasein's being that seeks the truth, but is not an intrinsically authentic phenomenon.

The third phase, then, arises in Heidegger's attempt to find an alternative to religion, in poetry, providing an ontological eschatology of the emergence of truth as a poetic experience. Heidegger characterises Christianity, and by implication the phenomenon of religion in general, as an intrinsically inauthentic encounter with the truth. The inauthenticity of religion is disclosed precisely in its lack of intrinsic connection to the truth of Dasein's being and further, truth itself.

The Necessity of Overcoming Religion

To understand the necessity of overcoming religion, in Heidegger's path of thinking, we must first come to terms with two dimensions of Heidegger's preconception of religion: a) religion as theological and b) religion as experiential.

Heidegger's preconception of religion as essentially experiential (ontical) is founded in his relation to theology and his formulation of phenomenology as ontological. Heidegger had two primary understandings of theology: via metaphysics and as an ontical science. Heidegger initially related to Theology in metaphysics as an abstraction of the everyday understanding of being and the inauthentic presupposition of metaphysical thought (Heidegger, 1997). Theology, as such, is intrinsically connected to the inauthenticity of metaphysics in its presupposing an entity as the '*ousiological*' ground of presence. Further,

the proper formulation of theology is therefore non-philosophical; theology is a science of faith as a historical/factical phenomenon (Heidegger, 1997).

In this second relation to theology, then, there are at least two preconceptions about religion. First, that religion is properly addressed by theology (as a science) determines religion as a merely historical phenomenon. Moreover, the essence of religion as a historical phenomenon is 'faith' – a believing (understanding of believing) mode of existing towards a historical revelation (occurrence) (Heidegger, 1997). Faith, then, is not intrinsically 'authentic', nor the 'towards-which' of faith necessarily pertinent to the essential/truth. Thus, a foundation for Heidegger's rejection of religion is his relation with theology, or 'Christianity' as a historical phenomenon.

Heidegger's formulation of phenomenology plays a pivotal role in his preconception of religion as a historical/experiential affair. Here, I would argue, Heidegger's formulation of phenomenology repeats the prejudice contained within the history of philosophy, that the primary sense of being human is understanding. There is no doubt, whatever controversy surrounds the matter of Heidegger's thinking or the meaning of Dasein (as a term), that the prioritisation of Dasein's being in *Being and Time* signifies the prioritisation of being human as understanding (Heidegger, 1962; Heidegger, 1996a).[7] As such, Heidegger's phenomenology does not aim to explicate the being of humans in general (a philosophical anthropology as he calls it), but is rather a fundamental ontology – disclosing the essential ontological structures of Dasein's being (being-understanding) (Heidegger, 1996a). Thus, there is a certain irony in Heidegger's relation to religion insofar as it is grounded in a prioritisation of Dasein's being: leading to a denial of the authenticity of religion as non-essential for Dasein (not within the realm of understanding), but also an understanding of the

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[7] The John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson translation is: "Dasein *is* in such a way as to be something which understands something like Being… temporality as the being of Dasein, which understands being."
Stambaugh's Translation reads: "Da-sein *is* in such a way that, by being, it understands something like being."
The locus of the term '*Dasein*' as such is undoubtedly related to the traditional philosophical preconception of being human as being-rational.

meaning of religion subsumed within Dasein. Religion, then, cannot be authentic because it does not intrinsically pertain to Dasein's being-understanding, and further, loses any ontological significance when it is preconceived as an experience of truth grounded in Dasein's being.

This is precisely, in my view, why Heidegger constitutes religion as a phenomenon of factical experience, for it doesn't belong intrinsically to Dasein's being. Further, the approaches to religion born out of theology all tend to be 'ontical' scientific and historical – providing Heidegger with a convenient point of origin for the consideration of religion subsumed under Dasein's being in an everyday sense. Heidegger's prioritisation of Dasein's being, therefore, explains the necessity of overcoming religion insofar as this prioritisation led to an ignorance/ignoring of any aspect of being human that does not pertain to the region of understanding. The ignored regions, then, are turned into experiences grounded in Dasein's being.

The Notion of Authenticity in Heidegger's path of thinking:

The problem of authenticity also revolves around Heidegger's prioritisation of Dasein, for the notion of authenticity therein can only signify the truth of being; what something really *is* or the truth *itself* (as an identity). In this way, Heidegger's thinking is forced (through the internal logical consistency of his thinking) to seek a replacement for religion not only because religion is preconceived as other to understanding, but also insofar as religious notions of authenticity (especially that of Christianity) tend to be diametrically opposed to Heidegger's notion of authenticity as truly being Dasein. Heidegger's later move to poetry and art, as such, can be seen to operate in this necessity to replace religion with factical experiences more comfortable with the authenticity of Dasein's being-understanding.

However, it is precisely in the opposition to Heidegger's notion of authenticity that religion begins to say something about Heidegger's path of thinking.

5. Concluding Questions:

I would like to conclude with a reflection upon Heidegger's relation to religion in such a way that religion poses some questions for Heidegger's thinking. There are, then, three primary questions I think religion poses to Heidegger's path of thinking, namely: the question of religion as a phenomenon of being-human, the question of authenticity and the question of truth. Operating within all of these questions is the question of the limit of Heidegger's thinking in its fundamental character, namely: the question of the delimitations of the prioritisation of Dasein.

The Question of the meaning of religion?

George Kovacs remarks, in his critical reflection of Heidegger's relation to the question of God, that Heidegger never asked 'how' religion belongs to human existence, nor its meaning as a relation to the 'other' (Kovacs, 1990). I would posit this critical remark in a much stronger sense: that Heidegger's prioritisation of Dasein leads to blindness towards the question of being-human in general that is the ground of religious phenomena. Heidegger assumes, herein, that religion is a phenomenon grounded in Dasein's being and as such, cannot see the question posed by religion as a phenomenon, namely: how are humans in our being able to be religious? Religion, herein, poses an ontological question to which Heidegger's thinking has no point of entry.

The Question of Dasein's Authenticity?

The phenomenon of religion also poses two challenges to Heidegger's notion of authenticity as being-truly-human or being-properly-one's-self. These challenges are posed even within Heidegger's interpretative relation with religion and are marked by strained and forced interpretations of religious thought. An example of the first (religious authenticity) can be found in Heidegger's interpretation of Paul, and the latter (religious/ethical authenticity) in the interpretation of Aristotle.

In relation to Paul's letter to the Romans, we find Heidegger providing an incredibly strained account wherein the authenticity disclosed by Paul is implicitly interpreted to signify 'being-Dasein' (Heidegger, 2004, p.88). This reading goes against both the general gist of the text: that humans tend towards sin (as an ontological argument we could say: the tendency towards sin signifies that being-human is to be-sin-full), and the following argument in this particular text: the ground of this authenticity is not human (not I) but God.[8] In this respect, then, primal Christianity as an expression of the phenomenon of religion resists and opposes Heidegger's notion of authenticity.

Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, serves as the basis for his rejection of the validity of theology as a valid part of philosophy (Heidegger, 1997, §24-25, 32). Juxtaposed to Heidegger's emphasis on the ontological dimensions of Dasein in the ethics is Aristotle's statement: "But such a life (*Sophia*) would be too high for man; for it is not insofar as he is man that he will live so, but insofar as something divine is present in him."(1177^{b}26-27) The authenticity under discussion, here, is only ontological in the sense of *ethos*: of the ground of good and the being of humans in relation to this ground. As such, Aristotle (contra Heidegger) provides an argument which characterises the being of humans as not-being-good *("it is not insofar as he is man")* and the ground of good '*Theos*' *("insofar*

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[8] Romans, 8: Heidegger interprets the first half of this chapter, but avoids the second half which constitutes authenticity as the death of the 'sinful nature' and God living in us.

as something divine is present in him"). Thus, in the second instance, the religious sense of authenticity poses an ontological question that cannot be answered in Heidegger's path of thinking, namely: what is the ground, in an ontological sense, of the question of good, and further, the question of why are we alive?

This then brings us to the fundamental question brought to bear against the path of Heidegger's thinking disclosed via religion in relation to the notion of authenticity, namely: the question of the *arche*. I would argue that the dimension of metaphysics called Theology does not pertain solely, or even primarily, to the notion of highest being or beings as a whole (as Heidegger suggests), but rather refers to the Greek 'religious' question of the *arche* – the original/originary ground. This question can be explicated further via the question of truth.

The Question of Truth.

Heidegger's reading of pre-Socratic thinking serves as the basis of his key expositions on the truth as *aletheia* and *Theos* as the truth of being emerging into presence through *Dasein*. Yet, ironically, from the religious problematic, pre-Socratic thinking may also be read as the denial of the priority of being and the prioritisation of the question of *arche* (originary ground). The fragments of Parmenides proem serve as a point of orientation for this question.[9] Herein, Parmenides' encounter with the goddess 'truth' (and Heidegger's much celebrated goddess '*aletheia*') provides a divine revelation of two paths of truth. The first way of truth is being: "It is, and it is not possible for it not to be" (Fr:2).

The second path of truth is more poignant here: "that it is not, and that it is bound not to be: this I tell *you* (my emphasis) is a path that cannot be explored; for *you* could neither recognise that which is not, nor express it." (Fr:2) Let me just speculate for a moment here: first, that this path is one of truth-full-ness, and moreover, a path denied to *you* the human

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[9] All quoted fragments, referenced as (Fr:) in the body of the text are from: Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Freeman, 1996)

being as understanding being, i.e. is an ontological statement about Dasein. The first, then, indicates that 'that which is not' is truth in some fashion, the second that 'that which is not' is a way of truth beyond (otherwise than) human Dasein (understanding). Is this second path then, the truth of the divine, while the first is the truth of being-Dasein? This speculative question makes sense of a line of fragment 8: "nor shall the force of credibility ever admit that anything should come into being, besides being-itself, out of not-being" (the *arche* of being).

This second path of truth in Parmenides is closely related to the question of *arche* in pre-Socratic thinking (and Greek philosophy in general) as an intrinsically religious and ethical question that is also (I would argue) ontological – that is: the question of originary ground, the ground of being that is not-being. I cannot do justice to this problem here, but it does suggest a major limitation in Heidegger's thinking insofar as the religiosity of the question also clears a space in which the prioritisation of Dasein may also be questioned and disclosed in its limits.

If we acknowledge that the phenomenon of religion belongs-to and expresses the being of humans then it is apparent that the concepts of Dasein and authenticity in Heidegger's philosophy are both problematic. The phenomenon of religion reveals something about being human that exceeds the limits of Dasein, namely: our capacity to be in relation to the truth as otherwise than being via the questions of the possibility of good and meaning\purpose. Thus, the ontological question posed by religion would be: 'who are we in our being, that the otherwise than being is an issue for us?'

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