

THREE

*How to Avoid Speaking:
Denials*

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I

Even before starting to prepare this lecture, I knew that I wished to speak of the "trace" in its relationship to what one calls, sometimes erroneously, "negative theology." More precisely, I knew that I would have to do this in Jerusalem. But what does such an obligation mean here? When I say that I knew that I would have to do it even before the first word of this lecture, I already name a singular anteriority of the obligation—is an obligation before the first word possible?—which would be difficult to situate and which, perhaps, will be my theme today.

Under the very loose heading of "negative theology," as you know, one often designates a certain form of language, with its *mise en scène*, its rhetorical, grammatical, and logical modes, its demonstrative procedures—in short a textual practice attested or rather situated "in history," although it does sometimes exceed the predicates that constitute this or that concept of history. Is there one negative theology, the negative theology? In any case, the unity of its legacy (*archive*)

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is difficult to delimit. One might try to organize it around certain attempts that are considered exemplary or explicit, such as the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius). But as we shall see, for essential reasons one is never certain of being able to attribute to anyone a project of negative theology as such.¹ Before Dionysius, one may search within a certain Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition; after him up to modernity in Wittgenstein and many others. In a less rigorous or less informed manner, then, "negative theology" has come to designate a certain typical attitude toward language, and within it, in the act of definition or attribution, an attitude toward semantic or conceptual determination. Suppose, by a provisional hypothesis, that negative theology consists of considering that every predicative language is inadequate to the essence, in truth to the hyperessentiality (the being beyond Being) of God; consequently, only a negative ("apophatic") attribution can claim to approach God, and to prepare us for a silent intuition of God. By a more or less tenable analogy, one would thus recognize some traits, the family resemblance of negative theology, in every discourse that seems to return in a regular and insistent manner to this rhetoric of negative determination, endlessly multiplying the defenses and the apophatic warnings: this, which is called X (for example, text, writing, the trace, difference, the hyphen, the supplement, the pharmakon, the parergon, etc.) "is" neither this nor that, neither sensible nor intelligible, neither positive nor negative, neither inside nor outside, neither superior nor inferior, neither active nor passive, neither present nor absent, not even neutral, not even subject to a dialectic with a third moment, without any possible sublation ("Aufhebung"). Despite appearances, then, this X is neither a concept nor even a name; it does *lend itself* to a series of names, but calls for another syntax, and exceeds even the order and the structure of predicative discourse. It "is" not and does not say what "is." It is written completely otherwise.

I have deliberately chosen examples that are close and, one might think, familiar to me. For two reasons. On the one hand, very early I was accused of—rather than congratulated for—resisting the procedures of negative theology in a scenario that one thinks one knows well. One would like to consider these procedures a simple rhetoric, even a rhetoric

of failure—or worse, a rhetoric that renounces knowledge, conceptual determination, and analysis: for those who have nothing to say or don't want to know anything, it is always easy to mimic the technique of negative theology. Indeed, this necessarily does include an apparatus of methodological rules. In a moment I will try to show how negative theology at least claims not to be assimilable to a technique that is subject to simulation or parody, to mechanical repetition. It would escape from this by means of the *prayer* that precedes apophatic utterances, and by the address to the other, to you, in a moment that is not only the preamble or the methodological threshold of the experience. Naturally, the prayer, invocation, and apostrophe can also be mimicked, and even give way, as if despite themselves, to repetitive technique. In conclusion, I will come back to this risk which, fortunately and unfortunately, is also a piece of luck. But if the risk is inevitable, the accusation it incurs need not be limited to the apophatic moment of negative theology. It may be extended to all language, and even to all manifestation in general. This risk is inscribed in the structure of the mark.

There is also an automatic, ritualistic, and "doxic" exercise of the suspicion brought against everything that resembles negative theology. It has interested me for a long time. Its matrix includes at least three types of objections:

a) You prefer to negate; you affirm nothing; you are fundamentally a nihilist, or even an obscurantist; neither knowledge nor even theology will progress in this way. Not to mention atheism, of which one has been able to say in an equally trivial fashion that it is the truth of negative theology.

b) You abuse a simple technique; it suffices to repeat: "X is no more this, than that," "X seems to exceed all discourse or predication," and so on. This comes back to speaking for nothing. You speak only for the sake of speaking, in order to experience speech. Or, more seriously, you speak thus with an eye to writing, since what you write then does not even merit being said. This second critique already appears more interesting and more lucid than the first: to speak for the sake of speaking, to experience what happens to speech through speech *itself*, in the trace of a sort of quasi-tautology, is not entirely to speak in vain and to say nothing. It is perhaps to experience a possibility of speech which the ob-

jector himself must presuppose at the moment when he addresses his criticism. To speak for *nothing* is not: not to speak. Above all, it is not to speak to no one.

c) This criticism does not, then, threaten the essential possibility of the address or the apostrophe. It encompasses still a third possibility, less evident but no doubt more interesting. Here the suspicion takes a form that can reverse the process of the accusation: once the apophatic discourse is analyzed in its logical-grammatical form, if it is not merely sterile, repetitive, obscurantist, mechanical, it perhaps leads us to consider the becoming-theological of all discourse. From the moment a proposition takes a negative form, the negativity that manifests itself need only be pushed to the limit, and it at least resembles an apophatic theology. Every time I say: X is neither this nor that, neither the contrary of this nor of that, neither the simple neutralization of this nor of that with which it *has nothing in common*, being absolutely heterogeneous to or incommensurable with them, I would start to speak of God, under this name or another. God's name would then be the hyperbolic effect of that negativity or all negativity that is consistent in its discourse. God's name would suit everything that may not be broached, approached, or designated, except in an indirect and negative manner. Every negative sentence would already be haunted by God or by the name of God, the distinction between God and God's name opening up the very space of this enigma. If there is a work of negativity in discourse and predication, it will produce divinity. It would then suffice to change a sign (or rather to show, something easy and classical enough, that this inversion has *always already* taken place, that it is the essential movement of thought) in order to say that divinity is not produced but productive. Infinitely productive, Hegel would say, for example. God would be not merely the end, but the origin of this work of the negative. Not only would atheism not be the truth of negative theology; rather, God would be the truth of all negativity. One would thus arrive at a kind of proof of God—not a proof of the *existence* of God, but a proof of God *by His effects*, or more precisely a proof of what one calls God, or of the name of God, by effects without cause, by the *without cause*. The import of this word *without (sans)* will concern us in a moment. In the absolutely singular logic of this proof, "God" would name *that without which* one would

not know how to account for any negativity: grammatical or logical negation, illness, evil, and finally neurosis which, far from permitting psychoanalysis to reduce religion to a symptom, would obligate it to recognize in the symptom the negative manifestation to God. Without saying that there must be at least as much "reality" in the cause as in the effect, and that the "existence" of God has no need of any proof other than the religious symptoms, one would see on the contrary—in the negation or suspension of the predicate, even of the thesis of "existence"—the first mark of respect for a divine cause which does not even need to "be." And those who would like to consider "deconstruction" a symptom of modern or postmodern nihilism could indeed, if they wished, recognize in it the last testimony—not to say the martyrdom—of faith in the present *fin de siècle*. This reading will always be possible. Who could prohibit it? In the name of what? But what has happened, so that what is thus permitted is never necessary as such? In order that it be thus, what must the writing of this deconstruction be, writing according to this deconstruction?

That is a first reason. But I chose examples that are close to me for a second reason. I also wanted to say a few words about a quite long-standing wish: to broach—directly and in itself—the web of questions that one formulates prematurely under the heading of "negative theology." Until now, confronted by the question or by the objection, my response has always been brief, elliptical, and dilatory.² Yet it seems to me already articulated in two stages.

1. No, what I write is not "negative theology." First of all, in the *measure* to which this belongs to the predicative or judicative space of discourse, to its strictly propositional form, and privileges not only the indestructible unity of the word but also the authority of the name—such axioms as a "deconstruction" must start by reconsidering (which I have tried to do since the first part of *Of Grammatology*). Next, in the measure to which "negative theology" seems to reserve, beyond all positive predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being. This is the word that Dionysius so often uses in the *Divine Names*: *hyperousios*, -*ôs*, *hyperousiotes*. God as being beyond Being or also God as *without Being*.³ This seems to exceed the alternative of a theism or an atheism which would only

set itself against what one calls, sometimes ingenuously, the existence of God. Without being able to return to the syntax and semantics of the word *without* (*sans*) which I have tried to analyze elsewhere, I limit myself here to the first stage of this response. No, I would hesitate to inscribe what I put forward under the familiar heading of negative theology, precisely because of that ontological wager of hyperessentiality that one finds at work both in Dionysius and in Meister Eckhart, for example, when he writes:

Each thing works in its being [Ein ieglich dinc wücket in wesene]; nothing can work above its being [über sin wesen]. Fire can only work in wood. God works above Being [Got wücket über wesene], in space, in which He can move. He works in non-being [er wücket in unwesene]. Before there was Being, God worked [é denne wesen wære, dô worhte got]; and He brought about being when there was no Being. Unrefined masters say that God is a pure Being [ein lüter wesen]; He is as high above Being as the highest angel is above a fly. I would be speaking as wrongly in calling God a being as I would in calling the sun pale or black. God is neither this nor that [Got enist weder diz noch daz]. A master says: if anyone thinks that he has known God, even if he did know something, he did not know God. But when I said that God is not being and that He is above Being [über wesen], I have not denied Him being [ich im niht wesen abegesprochen] but, rather, I have exalted Being in Him [ich hân ez in im gehoehet].⁴

In the movement of the same paragraph, a quotation from St. Augustine recalls the simultaneously negative and hyperaffirmative meaning of *without* (*sans*): "St. Augustine says: God is wise without wisdom [wise âne wisheit], good without goodness [guot âne gûete], powerful without power [gewaltic âne gewalt]." *Without* does not merely dissociate the singular attribution from the essential generality: wisdom as *being-wise* in general, goodness as *being-good* in general, power as *being-powerful* in general. It does not only avoid the abstraction tied to every common noun and to the being implied in every essential generality. In the same word and in

the same syntax it transmutes into affirmation its purely phenomenal negativity, which ordinary language, riveted to finitude, gives us to understand in a word such as *without*, or in other analogous words. It deconstructs grammatical anthropomorphism.

To dwell a bit longer on the first stage of my response, I thought I had to forbid myself to write in the register of "negative theology," because I was aware of this movement toward hyperessentiality, beyond Being. What *différance*, the *trace*, and so on "mean"—which hence does not mean *anything*—is "before" the concept, the name, the word, "something" that would be nothing, that no longer arises from Being, from presence or from the presence of the present, nor even from absence, and even less from some hyperessentiality. Yet the onto-theological reappropriation always remains possible—and doubtless *inevitable* insofar as one speaks, precisely, in the element of logic and of onto-theological grammar. One can always say: hyperessentiality is precisely that, a supreme Being who remains incommensurate to the being of all that is, which is nothing, neither present nor absent, and so on. If the movement of this reappropriation appears in fact irrepressible, its ultimate failure is no less necessary. But I concede that this question remains at the heart of a thinking of *différance* or of the writing of writing. It remains a question, and this is why I return to it again. Following the same "logic," and I continue with the first stage of this response, my uneasiness was nevertheless also directed toward the promise of that presence given to intuition or vision. The promise of such a presence often accompanies the apophatic voyage. It is doubtless the vision of a dark light, no doubt an intuition of "more than luminous [hyperphoton] darkness,"⁵ but still it is the immediacy of a presence. Leading to union with God. After the indispensable moment of prayer (of which I will speak again later), Dionysius thus exhorts Timothy to *mystika thearatai*:

This is my prayer. And you, dear Timothy, exercise yourself earnestly in mystical contemplations, abandon all sensation and all intellectual activities, all that is sensed and intelligible, all non-being and all being [panta ouk onta kai ontal]; thus you will un-

knowingly [agnōstos] be elevated, as far as possible, to the unity of that beyond Being and knowledge [tou hyper pasan ousian kai gnōsin]. By the irrepressible and absolving ecstasis [extasei] of yourself and of all, absolved from all, and going away from all, you will be purely raised up to the rays of the divine darkness beyond Being [pros ten hyperousion tou theioul]. (MT, ch. 1:998b-1000a)

This mystic union, this act of *unknowing*, is also "a genuine vision and a genuine knowledge [to ontōs idein kai gnōsai]" (MT, ch. 2:1025b). It knows unknowing itself in its truth, a truth that is not an adequation but an unveiling. Celebrating "what is beyond Being in a hyperessential mode [ton hyperousion hyperousiōs hymnesai]," this union aims to "know unveiled [aperikaluptōs; in an open, unhidden manner] this unknowing [agnōsian] which conceals in every being the knowledge which one can have of this Being" (MT, ch. 2:1025bc). The revelation is invoked by an elevation: toward that contact or vision, that pure intuition of the ineffable, that silent union with that which remains inaccessible to speech. This ascent corresponds to a rarefaction of signs, figures, symbols—and also of fictions, as well as of myths or poetry. Dionysius treats this *economy* of signs as such. The *Symbolic Theology* is more voluble and more voluminous than the *Mystical Theology*. For it treats "metonymies of the sensible which stand for the divine [ai apo tōn aisthetōn epi ta theia metonomiai]" (MT, ch. 3:1033a); it describes the signification of forms (*morphai*) and figures (*skhemata*) in God; it measures its discourse against "symbols" which "demand more words than the rest, so that the *Symbolic Theology* was necessarily much more voluminous than the *Theological Sketches* and than the *Divine Names*." With the elevation beyond the sensible, one gains in "conciseness," "because what is *intelligible* presents itself in a more and more synoptic manner" (MT, ch. 3:1033b). But there is also something beyond this economical conciseness. By the passage beyond the intelligible itself, the *apophatikai theologai* aim toward absolute rarefaction, toward silent union with the ineffable:

Now, however, that we are to enter the darkness beyond intellect, you will not find a brief [brakthylogian] discourse but a complete absence of discourse [alogian]

and intelligibility [anoesian]. In affirmative theology the *logos* descends from what is above down to the last, and increases according to the measure of the descent toward an analogical multitude. But here, as we ascend from the highest to what lies beyond, the *logos* is drawn inward according to the measure of the ascent. After all ascent it will be wholly without sound and wholly united to the unspeakable [aphthegktō]. (MT, ch. 3:1033bc)

This economy is paradoxical. In principle, the apophatic movement of discourse would have to negatively retrace all the stages of symbolic theology and positive predication. It would thus be coextensive with it, confined to the same quantity of discourse. In itself interminable, the apophatic movement cannot contain within itself the principle of its interruption. It can only indefinitely defer the encounter with its own limit.

Alien, heterogeneous, in any case irreducible to the intuitive *telos*—to the experience of the ineffable and of the mute vision which seems to orient all of this apophatics, including the prayer and the encomium which prepare its way—the thinking of difference would thus have little affinity, for an analogous reason, with the current interpretation of certain well-known statements of the early Wittgenstein. I recall these words often quoted from the *Tractatus*, for example, "6.522—The inexpressible, indeed, exists [Es gibt allerdinge Unausprechliches]. It shows itself; it is the mystical." And "7.—Concerning that about which one cannot speak, one must remain silent."

The nature of this "one must" ("il faut") is significant here: it inscribes the injunction to silence into the order or the promise of a "one must speak," "one must—not avoid speaking"; or rather, "it is necessary (il faut) that there be a trace." No, "it is necessary that there have been a trace," a sentence that one must simultaneously turn toward a past and toward a future that are as yet unrepresentable. It is (now) necessary that there have been a trace (in an unremembered past; because of this amnesia, the "necessity" of the trace is necessary). But also, it is necessary (from now on, it will be necessary; the "it is necessary" always also points toward the future) that in the future there will have been a trace.

But we should not be too hasty. In a moment it will be necessary to differentiate between these modalities of the "it is necessary."

2. Turning to what was often the second stage of my improvised responses: the general name of "negative theology" may conceal the confusions it causes and sometimes gives rise to simplistic interpretations. Perhaps there is within it, hidden, restless, diverse, and itself heterogeneous, a voluminous and nebulous multiplicity of potentials to which the single expression "negative theology" yet remains inadequate. In order to engage oneself seriously in this debate, I have often responded, it would be necessary to clarify this designation by considering quite dissimilar corpuses, scenes, proceedings, and languages. As I have always been fascinated by the supposed movements of negative theology (which, no doubt, are themselves never foreign to the experience of fascination in general), I objected in vain to the assimilation of the thinking of the trace or of différance to some negative theology, and my response amounted to a promise: one day I would have to stop deferring, one day I would have to try to explain myself directly on this subject, and at last speak of "negative theology" itself, assuming that some such thing exists.

Has the day come?

In other words, how is it possible to avoid speaking about negative theology? How can one resolve this question, and decide between its two meanings? 1. How is it possible to avoid speaking of it henceforth? This appears impossible. How could I remain silent on this subject? 2. How, if one speaks of it, to avoid speaking of it? How not to speak of it? How is it necessary not to speak of it? How to avoid speaking of it without rhyme or reason? What precautions must be taken to avoid errors, that is, inadequate, insufficient, simplistic assertions?

I return to my opening words. I knew, then, what I would have to do. I had implicitly promised that I would, one day, speak directly of negative theology. Even before speaking, I knew that I was committed to doing it. Such a situation leaves room for at least two possible interpretations. 1. Even before speech, in any case before a discursive event as such, there is necessarily a commitment or a promise. This event presupposes the open space of the promise. 2. This commitment, this word that has been given, already belongs to the

time of the *parole* by which I "keep my word," or "*tiens parole*," as one says in French. In fact, at the moment of promising to speak one day of negative theology, I already started to do it. But this is only an as yet confused hint of the structure that I would like to analyze later.

Having already promised, *as if in spite of myself*, I did not know *how* I would keep this promise. How to speak suitably of negative theology? Is there a negative theology? A single one? A regulative model for the others? Can one adapt a discourse to it? Is there some discourse that measures up to it? Is one not compelled to speak of negative theology according to the modes of negative theology, in a way that is at once impotent, exhausting, and inexhaustible? Is there ever anything other than a "negative theology" of "negative theology"?

Above all, I did not know when and where I would do it. Next year in Jerusalem! I told myself, in order to defer, perhaps indefinitely, the fulfillment of this promise. But also to let myself know—and I did indeed receive this message—that on the day when I would in fact go to Jerusalem it would no longer be possible to delay. It would be necessary to do it.

Will I do it? Am I in Jerusalem? This is a question to which one will never respond in the present tense, only in the future or in the past.⁶

Why insist on this postponement? Because it appears to me neither avoidable nor insignificant. One can never decide whether deferring, as such, brings about precisely that which it defers and alters (*diffère*). It is not certain that I am keeping my promise today; nor is it certain that in further delaying I have not, nevertheless, already kept it.

In other words, am I in Jerusalem or elsewhere, very far from the Holy City? Under what conditions does one find oneself in Jerusalem? Is it enough to be there physically, as one says, and to live in places that carry this name, as I am now doing? What is it to live in Jerusalem? This is not easy to decide. Allow me to cite Meister Eckhart again. Like that of Dionysius, his work sometimes resembles an endless meditation on the sense and symbolism of the Holy City: a logic, a rhetoric, a topology, and a tropology of Jerusalem. Here is an example among many others:

Yesterday I sat in a place where I said something [da sprach ich ein wort] that sounds incredible—I said

that Jerusalem is as near to my soul as the place where I am now [müner sele als nähe als diu stat, dâ ich nû stân]. In truth, that which is a thousand miles beyond Jerusalem is as near to my soul as my own body; I am as sure of this as of being a man.⁷

I will speak of a promise, then, but also within the promise. The experience of negative theology perhaps holds to a promise, that of the other, which I must keep because it commits me to speak where negativity ought to absolutely rarely discourse. Indeed, why should I speak with an eye to explaining, teaching, leading—on the paths of a psychology or of a pedagogy—toward silence, toward union with the ineffable, mute vision? Why can't I avoid speaking, unless it is because a promise has committed me even before I begin the briefest speech? If I therefore speak of the promise, I will not be able to keep any metalinguistic distance in regard to it. Discourse on the promise is already a promise: in the promise. I will thus not speak of this or that promise, but of that which, as necessary as it is impossible, inscribes us by its trace in language—before language. From the moment I open my mouth, I have already promised; or rather, and sooner, the promise has seized the *I* which promises to speak to the other, to say something, at the extreme limit to affirm or to confirm by speech at least this: that it is necessary to be silent; and to be silent concerning that about which one cannot speak. One could have known as much beforehand. This promise is older than I am. Here is something that appears impossible, the theoreticians of speech acts would say: like every genuine performative, a promise must be made in the present, in the first person (in the singular or in the plural). It must be made by one who is capable of saying *I* or *we*, here and now, for example in Jerusalem, "the place where I am now" and where I can therefore be held responsible for this speech act.

The promise of which I shall speak will have always escaped this demand of presence. It is older than I am or than we are. In fact, it renders possible every present discourse on presence. Even if I decide to be silent, even if I decide to promise nothing, not to commit myself to saying something that would confirm once again the destination of speech, and the destination toward speech, this silence yet remains a

modality of speech: a memory of promise and a promise of memory.

I knew, then, that I could not avoid speaking of negative theology. But how and under what heading would I do it? One day, at Yale, I received a telephone message:⁸ it was necessary for me to give a title on the spot. In a few minutes I had to improvise, which I first did in my language: "Comment ne pas dire . . . ?" The use of the French word *dire* permits a certain suspension. "Comment ne pas dire?" can mean, in a manner that is both transitive and intransitive, how to be silent, how not to speak in general, how to avoid speaking? But it can also mean: how, in speaking, not to say this or that, in this or that manner? In other words: how, in saying and speaking, to avoid this or that discursive, logical, rhetorical mode? How to avoid an inexact, erroneous, aberrant, improper form? How to avoid such a predicate, and even predication itself? For example: how to avoid a negative form, or how not to be negative? Finally, how to say something? Which comes back to the apparently inverse question: How to say, how to speak? Between the two interpretations of "Comment ne pas dire . . . ?" the meaning of the uneasiness thus seems to turn again: from the "how to be silent?" (how to avoid speaking at all?) one passes—in a completely necessary and as if intrinsic fashion—to the question, which can always become the heading for an injunction: how not to speak, and which speech to avoid, in order to speak well? "How to avoid speaking" thus means, at once or successively: How must one not speak? How is it necessary to speak? (This is) how it is necessary not to speak. And so on. The "how" always conceals a "why," and the "it is necessary" ("il faut") bears the multiple meanings of "should," "ought," and "must."

I thus improvised this title on the telephone. Letting it be dictated to me by I do not know what unconscious order—in a situation of absolute urgency—I thus also translated my desire to defer still further. This "flight or flight" reaction reproduces itself on the occasion of every lecture: how to avoid speaking, and yet from the outset to commit oneself by giving a title even before writing one's text? But also, in the economy of the same gesture: how to speak, how to do this as is necessary, *comme il faut*, assuming the responsibility for a promise? Not only for the arch-originary promise which

establishes us *a priori* as people who are responsible for speech, but for this promise: to give a lecture on "absence and negation," on the *not* ("how not to," "ought not," "should not," "must not," etc.), on the "how" and the "why" (of the *not*, the negation and the denial, and so on, and thus to commit oneself to giving a title *in advance*. Every title has the import of a promise; a title given in advance is the promise of a promise.

It was thus necessary for me to respond, but I assumed responsibility only while deferring it. Before or rather within a double bind: "how to avoid speaking" since I have already started to speak and have always already started to promise to speak? That I have already started to speak, or rather that at least the trace of a speech will have preceded this very speech, one cannot deny. Translate: *one can only deny it*. There can only be denial of this which is undeniable. What, then, do we make of negations and of denials? What do we make of them before God, that is the question, if there is one. Because the posing of every question is perhaps secondary; it perhaps follows as a first, reactive response, the undeniable *provocation*, the unavoidable denial of the undeniable provocation.

To avoid speaking, to delay the moment when one will have to say something and perhaps acknowledge, surrender, impart a secret, one amplifies the digressions. I will here attempt a brief digression on the secret itself. Under this title, "how to avoid speaking," it is necessary to speak of the secret. In certain situations, one asks oneself "how to avoid speaking," either because one has promised not to speak and to keep a secret, or because one has an interest, sometimes vital, in keeping silent even if put to the rack. This situation again presupposes the possibility of speaking. Some would say, perhaps imprudently, that only man is capable of speaking, because only he can *not* show what he could show. Of course, an animal may inhibit a movement, can abstain from an incautious gesture, for example in a defensive or offensive predatory strategy, such as in the delimitation of sexual territory or in a mating ritual. One might say, then, that animals can *not* respond to the inquisition or requisition of a stimulus or of a complex of stimuli. According to this somewhat naive philosophy of the animal world, one may nevertheless observe that animals are incapable of keeping

or even having a secret, because they cannot represent as such, as an *object* before consciousness, something that they would then forbid themselves from showing. One would thus link the secret to the objective representation (*Vorstellung*) that is placed before consciousness and that is expressible in the form of words. The essence of such a secret would remain rigorously alien to every other nonmanifestation; and, notably, unlike that of which the animal is capable. The manifestation or nonmanifestation of *this* secret, in short its possibility, would never be on the order of the symptom. An animal can neither choose to keep silent, nor keep a secret.

I will not take up this immense problem here. To deal with it, it would be necessary to account for numerous mediations, and then to question in particular the possibility of a preverbal or simply nonverbal secret—linked, for example, to gestures or to mimicry, and even to other codes and more generally to the unconscious. It would be necessary to study the structures of denial before and outside of the possibility of judgment and of predicative language. Above all, it would be necessary to relaborate a problematic of consciousness, that thing that, more and more, one avoids discussing as if one knew what it is and as if its riddle were solved. But is any problem more novel today than that of consciousness? Here one would be tempted to designate, if not to define, consciousness as that place in which is retained the singular power not to say what one knows, to keep a secret in the form of representation. A conscious being is a being capable of lying, of not presenting in speech that of which it yet has an articulated representation: a being that can avoid speaking. But in order to be able to lie, a second and already mediated possibility, it is first and more essentially necessary to be able to keep for (and say to) oneself what one already knows. To keep something to oneself is the most incredible and thought-provoking power. But this keeping-for-onself—this dissimulation for which it is already necessary to be multiple and to differ from oneself—also presupposes the space of a promised speech, that is to say, a trace to which the affirmation is not symmetrical. How to ascertain absolute dissimulation? Does one ever have at one's disposal either sufficient criteria or an apodictic certainty that allows one to say: the secret has been kept, the dissimulation has taken place, one has avoided speaking? Not to mention the

secret that is wrested by physical or mental torture, uncontrolled manifestations that are direct or symbolic, somatic or figurative, may leave in reserve a possible betrayal or avowal. Not because everything manifests itself. Simply, the nonmanifestation is never assured. According to this hypothesis, it would be necessary to reconsider all the boundaries between consciousness and the unconscious, as between man and animal and an enormous system of oppositions.

But I will avoid speaking of the secret as such. These brief allusions to the negativity of the secret and to the secret of denegation seemed necessary to me in order to situate another problem. I will only touch upon it. "Negative theologues" and everything that resembles a form of esoteric sociality have always been infortuitously associated with phenomena of secret society, as if access to the most rigorous apophatic discourse demanded the sharing of a "secret"—that is, of an ability to keep silent that would always be something more than a simple logical or rhetorical technique that is easily imitated and has a withheld content—and of a place or of a wealth that it would be necessary to conceal from the many. It is as if divulgence imperiled a revelation promised to apophysis, to this deciphering which, to make the thing appear uncovered (*aperikalyptós*), must first find it hidden. A recurrence and a rule-governed analogy: today, for example, those who still denounce "deconstruction"—with its thinking of difference or the writing of writing—as a bastardized resurgence of negative theology are also those who readily suspect those they call the "deconstructionists" of forming a sect, a brotherhood, an esoteric corporation, or more vulgarly, a clique, a gang, or (I quote) a "mafia." Since a law of recurrence operates here, up to a certain point the logic of suspicion may be formalized. Those who lead the instruction or the trial say or tell themselves, successively or alternatively:

1. Those people, adepts of negative theology or of deconstruction (the difference matters little to the accusers), must indeed have a secret. They hide something since they say nothing, speak in a negative manner, respond "no, it's not that, it's not so simple" to all questions, and say that what they are speaking about is neither this, nor that, nor a third term, nei-

ther a concept nor a name, in short is not, and thus is nothing.

2. But since this secret obviously cannot be determined and is nothing, as these people themselves recognize, they have no secret. They pretend to have one in order to organize themselves around a social power founded on the magic of a speech that is suited to speaking in order to say nothing. These obscurantists are terrorists who remind one of the Sophists. A Plato would be of use in combating them. They possess a real power, which may be situated inside or outside the Academy: they contrive to blur even this boundary. Their alleged secret belongs to sham, mystification, or at best to a politics of grammar. Because for them there is only writing and language, nothing beyond, even if they claim to "deconstruct logocentrism" and even start there.

3. If you know how to question them, they will finish by admitting: "The secret is that there is no secret, but there are at least two ways of thinking or proving this proposition," and so on. Experts in the art of evasion, they know better how to negate or deny than how to say anything. They always agree to avoid speaking while speaking a lot and "splitting hairs." Some of them appear "Greek," others "Christian"; they have recourse to many languages at once, and one knows some who resemble Talmudists. They are perverse enough to make their esotericism popular and "fashionable." Thus ends a familiar indictment.

One finds hints of this esotericism in the Platonism, and Neoplatonism, which themselves remain so present at the heart of Dionysius' negative theology. But in the works of Dionysius himself, and in another way in those of Meister Eckhart, one may say that no mystery is made of the necessity of the secret—to be kept, preserved, shared. It is necessary to stand or step aside, to find the *place* proper to the experience of the secret. This detour through the secret will lead, in a moment, to the question of the *place* that will henceforth orient my talk. Following the prayer that opens his *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius frequently names the secret

of the divinity beyond Being, the "secrets" (*cryptio-mystiques*) of the "more than luminous darkness of silence." The "secret" of this revelation gives access to the unknowing beyond knowledge. Dionysius exhorts Timothy to divulge the secret neither to those who know, think they know, or think they can know by the path of knowledge, nor *a fortiori* to the ignorant and profane. Avoid speaking, he advises him in short. It is thus necessary to separate oneself twice: from those who know—one could say here, from the philosophers or the experts in ontology—and from the profane, who employ predicative language as naive idolaters. One is not far from the innuendo that ontology itself is a subtle or perverse idolatry, which one will understand, in an analogous and different way, through the voice of Levinas or of Jean-Luc Marion.

The paragraph I will read has a surfeit of interest in defining a beyond that exceeds the opposition between affirmation and negation. In truth, as Dionysius expressly says, it exceeds *position (thesis)* itself, and not merely curtailment, subtraction (*aphairesis*). At the same time, it exceeds privation. The *without* of which I spoke a moment ago marks neither a privation, a lack, nor an absence. As for the *beyond (hyper)* of that which is beyond Being (*hyperousios*), it has the double and ambiguous meaning or what is above in a hierarchy, thus both beyond and more. God (is) beyond Being but as such is more (being) than Being: *no more being and being more than Being*; being more. The French expression *plus d'être* (more being, no more being) formulates this equivocation in a fairly economical manner. Here is the call to an initiatory secret, and the warning:

Disclose this not to the *uninitiated* [tôn amuētôn]: not to those, I say, who are entangled in beings [tois ousin], imagine nothing to be hyperessentially [hyperousiôs] beyond beings, and claim to know by the knowledge in them "Him who has made the dark his hiding place" [Ps. 18:12]. If the divine mystical initiations are beyond these, what about those yet more profane, who characterize the cause which lies beyond all [hyperkeimenen aitian] by the last among beings, and deny it to be preeminent to their ungodly phantasies and diverse formations [polyeidôn

morphomaton] of it? For while to it, as cause of all one must posit and affirm all the positions of beings, as beyond being, beyond all, one must more properly deny all of these. Think not that affirmations and denials are opposed but rather that, long before, the cause transcends all privation [tas stereseis], since it *situates* itself beyond all affirmative and negative position [hyper pasan kai apharesin kai thesin]. (MT, ch. 1:1000ab; my italics)

It *situates* itself, then. It situates itself *beyond* all position. What is thus this place? Between the place and the place of the secret, between the secret place and the topology of the social link which must protect the nondivulgence, there must be a certain homology. This must govern some (secret) relation between the topology of what stands beyond Being, without being—without Being, and the topology, the initiatory polittology which at once organizes the mystical community and makes possible the address to the other, this quasi-pedagogical and mystagogical speech, which Dionysius singularly directs to Timothy (*pros Timotheon*: the dedication of the *Mystical Theology*).

In this hierarchy,⁹ where does the speaker stand, and where the one who listens and receives? Where does the one stand who speaks while *receiving* from the Cause which is also the Cause of this community? Where do Dionysius and Timothy stand, both they and all those who potentially read the text addressed by one of them to the other? Where do they stand in relationship to God, the Cause? God resides in a place, Dionysius says, but He is not this place. To gain access to this place is not yet to contemplate God. Even Moses must retreat. He receives this order from a place that is not a place, even if one of the names of God can sometimes designate place itself. Like all the initiated, he must purify himself, step aside from the impure, separate himself from the many, join "the elite of the priests." But access to this divine place does not yet deliver him to passage toward the mystical Darkness where profane vision ceases and where it is necessary to be silent. It is finally *permitted* and *prescribed* to be silent while closing one's eyes:

It [the good and universal Cause] lies hyperessentially beyond all, it is truly and undisguisably manifested

only to those who step beyond all that is pure and impure, seal every ascent of the holy summits, relinquish every divine light, celestial sounds and *logoi*, and enter into the divine darkness. . . . It is not to be taken lightly that the divine Moses was ordered first to purify himself, and again to be separated from those who were not pure; after every purification he hears the many sounded trumpets, he sees the many pure lights which flash forth and the greatly flowing rays. Then he is separated from the many and, with those who are sacred and select [tôn ekkritôn tereôn], he overtakes the summits of the divine ascents. Yet with these he does not come to be with God Himself; he does not see God—for God is unseen [atheatos gar]—but the place [topon] where God is. This signifies to me that the most divine and highest of what is seen and intelligible are hypothetical *logoi* of what is subordinate to that beyond-having all. Through these is shown forth the presence [parousia] of that which walks upon the intelligible summits of His most holy places [tôn agiôtatôn autou topôn].

And then Moses abandons those who see and what is seen and enters into the really mystical darkness of unknowing [tes agnôias]; in this he shuts out every knowing apprehension and comes to be in the wholly imperceptible and invisible, being entirely of that beyond all—of nothing, neither himself nor another, united most excellently by the completely unknowing inactivity of every knowledge, and knowing beyond intellect by knowing nothing. (MT, ch. 1:1000cd; my italics)

I will take up three motifs from this passage.

1. To separate oneself, to step aside, to withdraw with an elite, from the start this topolology of the secret obeys an order. Moses "was ordered first to purify himself, and again to be separated from those who were not pure." This order cannot be distinguished from a promise. It is the promise itself. The knowledge of the High Priest—who intercedes, so to speak, between God and the holy institution—is the knowledge of the promise. Dionysius makes this more precise, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, on the subject of the prayer for

the dead. *Epaggelia* signifies both the commandment and the promise: "Knowing that the divine promises will infallibly realize themselves [tas apseudeis epaggelias], he teaches all the assistant priests that the gifts for which he supplicates by virtue of a holy institution [Kata thesmon ieron] will be abundantly granted to those who lead a perfect life in God."¹⁰ Earlier, it was said that "the grand priest knows well the promises contained in the infallible Scriptures" (*ibid.*, p. 561d).

2. In this topolology of the secret, the figures or places of rhetoric are also political stratagems. The "sacred symbols," the compositions (*synthemata*), the signs and figures of the sacred discourse, the "enigmas," and the "typical symbols" are invented as "shields" against the many. All of the anthropomorphic emotions which one attributes to God, the sorrows, the angers, the repentances, the curses, all negative moments—and even the "sophistries" (*sophismata*) which He uses in the Scripture "to evade His promises"—are nothing but "sacred allegories [iera synthemata] which one has had the audacity to use to represent God, projecting outward and multiplying the visible appearances of the mystery, dividing the unique and indivisible, figuring in multiple forms what has neither form nor figure [kai typôtika, kai polymorpha tôn amorphôtôn kai atypôtôn], so that one who could see the beauty hidden in the interior [of these allegories] would find them entirely mystical, consistent with God and full of a great theological light" (Letter 9:1105b et seq.). Without the divine promise which is also an injunction, the power of these *synthemata* would be merely conventional rhetoric, poetry, fine arts, perhaps literature. It would suffice to doubt this promise or transgress this injunction in order to see an opening—and also a closing upon itself—of the field of rhetoric or even of literariness, the lawless law of fiction.

Since the promise is also an order, the allegorical veil becomes a political shield, the solid barrier of a social division; or, if you prefer, a *shibboleth*. One invents it to protect against access to a knowledge which remains in itself inaccessible, untransmissible, unteachable. We will see that what is unteachable is nevertheless taught in another mode. This nonmatheme can and must become a matheme. Here I have recourse to the use Lacan makes of this word in a domain that is doubtless not without relationship to the present context. One must not think, Dionysius specifies, that the

rhetorical compositions are fully sufficient unto themselves in their simple phenomenality. They are instruments, technical mediations, weapons, at least defensive weapons, "shields [probablesthai] which secure this inaccessible [intransmissible, ms.] science, which the many must not contemplate, so that the most sacred mysteries should not readily offer themselves to the profane, and so that they should not unveil themselves except to the true friends of sanctity, because only they know how to disentangle sacred symbols from all puerile imagination" (Letter 9:1105c).

There is another political and pedagogical consequence, another institutional trait: the theologian must practice not a double language, but the double inscription of his knowledge. Here Dionysius evokes a double tradition, a double mode of transmission (*ditten paradosis*); on the one hand unspeakable, secret, prohibited, reserved, inaccessible (*aporreton*) or mystical (*mystiken*), "symbolic and initiatory"; on the other hand, philosophic, demonstrative (*apodeiktiken*), capable of being shown. The critical question evidently becomes: How do these two modes relate to each other? What is the law of their reciprocal translation or of their hierarchy? What would be its institutional or political figure? Dionysius recognizes that these two modes "intersect." The "inexpressible" (*arretori*) is woven together or intersects (*symplektaū*) "the expressible" (*tō retō*).

To what mode does this discourse belong, then, both that of Dionysius and that which I hold about him? Must it not necessarily keep to the place, which cannot be an indivisible point, where the two modes cross—such that, properly speaking, the crossing itself, or the *symploke*, belongs to neither of the two modes and doubtless even precedes their distribution? At the intersection of the secret and of the nonsecret, what is the secret?

At the crossing point of these two languages, each of which bears the silence of the other, a secret must and must not allow itself to be divulged. It can and it cannot do this. One must not divulge, but it is also necessary to make known or rather allow to be known this "it is necessary," "one must not," or "it is necessary not to."

How not to divulge a secret? How to avoid saying or speaking? Contradictory and unstable meanings give such a question its endless oscillation: what to do in order that the

secret remain secret? How to make it known, in order that the secret of the secret—as such—not remain secret? How to avoid this divulgence itself? These light disturbances underline the same sentence. At one and the same time stable and unstable, this sentence allows itself to be carried by the movements which here I call *denial* (*dénégation*), a word that I would like to understand prior even to its elaboration in the Freudian context. (This is perhaps not easy and assumes at least two preconditions: that the chosen examples extend beyond both the predicative structure and the onto-theological or metaphysical presuppositions which sustain the psychoanalytic theorems.)

There is a secret of denial and a denial of the secret. The secret as such, as secret, separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself. This denegation does not happen to it by accident; it is essential and originary. And in the *as such* of the secret that denies itself because it appears to itself in order to be what it is, this de-negation gives no chance to dialectic. The enigma of which I am speaking here—in a manner that is too elliptical, too "concise," Dionysius would say, and also too verbose—is the *sharing of the secret*. Not only the sharing of the secret with the other, my partner in a sect or in a secret society, my accomplice, my witness, my ally. I refer first of all to the secret shared *within itself*, its partition "proper," which divides the essence of a secret that cannot even appear to one alone except in starting to be lost, to divulge itself, hence to dissimulate itself, as secret, in showing itself: dissimulating its dissimulation. There is no secret *as such*; I deny it. And this is what I confide in secret to whomever allies himself to me. This is the secret of the alliance. If the theo-logical necessarily insinuates itself there, this does not mean that the secret itself is theo-logical. But does something like the secret itself, properly speaking, ever exist? The name of God (I do not say God, but how to avoid saying God here, from the moment when I say the name of God?) can only be *said* in the modality of this secret denial: above all I do not want to say that.

3. My third remark also concerns the place. The *Mystical Theology* thus distinguishes between access to the contemplation of God and access to the place where God resides. Contrary to what certain acts of designation may allow one

to think, God is not simply His place; He is not even in His most holy places. He is not and He does not take place ("il n'est pas et il n'a pas lieu"), or rather He is and takes place, but without Being and without place, without being His place. What is the place, what takes place or gives place to thought, henceforth, in this word? We will have to follow this thread in order to ask ourselves what an event can be—*ce qui a lieu* or that which takes place—in this atopics of God. I say *atopics*, hardly even playing: *atopos* is the senseless, the absurd, the extravagant, the mad. Dionysius often speaks of God's madness. When he cites Scripture ("God's madness is wiser than human wisdom"), he evokes "the theologians' practice of turning back and denying all positive terms in order to apply them to God under their negative aspect" (DN, ch. 7:865b). For the moment a single clarification: if God's place, which is not God, does not communicate with the divine hyperessence, this is not only because it remains either perceptible or visible. This is also the case inasmuch as it is an intelligible place. Whatever may be the ambiguity of the passage and the difficulty of knowing whether "the place where God resides"—and which is not God—does or does not belong to the order of the sensible, the conclusion seems unambiguous: "The presence" (*parousia*) of God situates itself "upon the intelligible summits of His most holy places [tais noetai akrotēs tōn agiōtatōn autou topōn]" (MT, ch. 1:1000d).

II

We are still on the threshold.

How to avoid speaking? ("Comment ne pas parler?") Why direct this question now toward the question of the place? Wasn't it already there? And isn't to lead always to give oneself over from one place to another? A question about the place does not stand outside place; it properly concerns the place.

In the *three stages* that now await us, I have thought it necessary to privilege the experience of the place. But already the word *experience* appears risky. The relation to the place about which I shall speak will perhaps no longer have the form of experience—if this still assumes the encounter with or crossing over a presence.

Why this privilege of the place? Its justifications will ap-

pear along the way. I hope. Nevertheless, here are some preliminary and schematic hints.

Since such is the *topos* of our colloquium in Jerusalem, poetry, literature, literary criticism, poetics, hermeneutics, and rhetoric will be at stake: everything that can articulate speech or writing, in the current sense, together with what I call here a trace. Each time, problems are inevitable: on the one hand, the immense problem of figurative spatialization (both in speech or writing in the current sense and in the space between the current sense and the other, of which the current sense is only a figure); and, on the other hand, that of meaning and reference, and finally, that of the event insofar as it takes place.

As we have already glimpsed, figuration and the so-called places (*topoi*) of rhetoric constitute the very concern of apophatic procedures. As for meaning and reference, here is another reminder—in truth, the recall of the other, the call of the other as recall. At the moment when the question "how to avoid speaking?" is raised and articulates itself in all its modalities—whether in rhetorical or logical forms of saying, or in the simple fact of speaking—it is already, so to speak, too late. There is no longer any question of not speaking. Even if one speaks and says nothing, even if an apophatic discourse deprives itself of meaning or of an object, it takes place. That which committed or rendered it possible has taken place. The possible absence of a referent still beckons, if not toward the thing of which one speaks (such is God, who is nothing because He takes place, *without place, beyond Being*), at least toward the other (other than Being) who calls or to whom this speech is addressed—even if it speaks only in order to speak, or to say nothing. This call of the other, having always already preceded the speech to which it has never been present a first time, announces itself in advance as a recall. Such a reference to the other will always have taken place. Prior to every proposition and even before all discourse in general—whether a promise, prayer, praise, celebration. The most negative discourse, even beyond all nihilisms and negative dialectics, preserves a trace of the other. A trace of an event older than it or of a "taking-place" to come, both of them: here there is neither an alternative nor a contradiction.

Translated into the Christian apophatics of Dionysius (although other translations of the same necessity are pos-

sible), this signifies that the power of speaking and of speaking well of God already proceeds from God. This is the case even if to do this it is necessary to avoid speaking in one manner or another, or even if, in order to speak *rightly* or *truly*, it is necessary to avoid speaking entirely. This power is a gift and an effect of God. The Cause is a kind of absolute reference for it, but from the outset both an order and a promise. The Cause, the gift of the gift, the order and the promise are the same, that same to which or rather to Whom the responsibility for who speaks and "speaks well" responds. At the end of the *Divine Names*, the very possibility of speaking of the divine names and of speaking of them in a correct manner returns to God, "to That One who is the Cause of all good, to Him who has first given us the gift to speak and, then, to speak well [kai to legein kai to eu legein]" (DN, ch. 13:981c). Following the implicit rule from this utterance, one may say that it is always possible to call on God, to call this assumed origin of all speech by the name of God, its required cause. The exigence of its Cause, the responsibility before what is responsible for it, demands what is demanded. It is for speech, or for the best silence, a request, a demand, or a desire, if you wish, for what one equally well calls meaning, the referent, truth. This is what God's name always names, before or beyond other names: the trace of the singular event that will have rendered speech possible even before it turns itself back toward—in order to respond to—this first or last reference. This is why apophatic discourse must also open with a prayer that recognizes, assigns, or ensures its destination: the Other as Referent of a *legein* which is none other than its Cause.

This always presupposed event, this singular having-taken-place, is also for every reading, every interpretation, every poetics, every literary criticism, what one currently calls the *œuvre*: at least the "already-there" (*déjà-là*) of a phrase, the trace of a phrase of which the singularity would have to remain irreducible and its reference indispensable in a given idiom. A trace has taken place. Even if the idiomatic quality must necessarily lose itself or allow itself to be contaminated by the repetition which confers on it a code and an intelligibility, even if it occurs *only to efface itself*, if it arises only in effacing itself, the effacement will have taken place, even if its place is only in the ashes. *Il y a là cendre*.

What I have just alluded to seems to concern only the finite experience of finite works. But since the structure of the trace is *in general* the very possibility of an experience of finitude, I dare to say that the distinction between a finite and an infinite cause of the trace appears secondary here. It is itself an effect of trace or difference, which does not mean that the trace or difference (of which I have tried to show elsewhere that it is finite, insofar as it is infinite)¹¹ have a cause or an origin.

Thus, at the moment when the question "How to avoid speaking?" arises, it is already too late. There was no longer any question of not speaking. Language has started without us, in us and before us. This is what theology calls God, and it is necessary, it will have been necessary, to speak. This "it is necessary" (*il faut*) is *both* the trace of undeniable necessity—which is another way of saying that one cannot avoid denying it, one can only deny it—and of a past injunction. Always already past, hence without a past present. Indeed, it must have been possible to speak in order to allow the question "How to avoid speaking?" to arise. Having come from the past, language before language, a past that was never present and yet remains unforgettable—this "it is necessary" thus seems to beckon toward the event of an order or of a promise that does not belong to what one currently calls history, the discourse of history or the history of discourse. Order or promise, this injunction commits (me), in a rigorously asymmetrical manner, even before I have been able to say I, to sign such a *provocation* in order to reappropriate it for myself and restore the symmetry. That in no way mitigates my responsibility; on the contrary. There would be no responsibility without this *prior coming* (*prévenance*) of the trace, or if autonomy were first or absolute. Autonomy itself would not be possible, nor would respect for the law (sole "cause" of this respect) in the strictly Kantian meaning of these words. In order to elude this responsibility, to deny it and try to efface it through an absolute regression, it is still or already necessary for me to endorse or countersign it. When Jeremiah curses the day he was born,¹² he must yet—or already—*affirm*. Or rather, he must confirm, in a movement that is no more positive than negative, according to the words of Dionysius, because it does not belong to position (*thesis*) or to deposition (privation, subtraction, negation).

Why these steps? Why should I now proceed in three stages? I am certainly not bent on acquitting myself of some dialectical obligation. Despite appearances, here we are involved in a thinking that is essentially alien to dialectic, even if Christian negative theologies owe much to Platonic or Neoplatonic dialectic; and even if it is difficult to read Hegel without taking account of an apophatic tradition that was not foreign to him (at least by the mediation of Bruno, hence of Nicholas of Cusa and of Meister Eckhart, etc.).

The three "stages" or the three "signs" that I will now link together, as in a fable, do not form the moments or signs of a history. They will not disclose the order of a teleology. They rather concern deconstructive questions on the subject of such a teleology.

Three stages or three places in any case to avoid speaking of a question that I will be unable to treat; to deny it in some way, or to speak of it without speaking of it, in a negative mode; what do I understand by negative theology and its phantoms in a tradition of thought that is neither Greek nor Christian? In other words, what of Jewish and Islamic thought in this regard?¹³ By example, and in everything that I will say, a certain void, the place of an internal desert, will perhaps allow this question to resonate. The three paradigms that I will too quickly have to situate (for a paradigm is often an architectural model) will surround a resonant space of which nothing, almost nothing, will ever be said.

A

The first paradigm will be Greek.

I quickly mention its names, whether proper or not: Plato and the Neoplatonisms, the *epekeina tes ousias* of the *Republic*, and the *khora* of the *Timaeus*. In the *Republic*, the movement that leads *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond Being (or beyond beingness—a serious question of translation on which I cannot dwell here), no doubt inaugurates an immense tradition. One may follow its pathways, detours, and overdeterminations until arriving at what in a moment will be the second paradigm, the Christian apophases, and those of Dionysius in particular. Much has been written about this

affiliation and its limits; this will not concern me here. In the short time that I have at my disposal, since there can be no question of allowing myself a minute study, or even of summarizing what I am attempting elsewhere—now, in seminars or texts in preparation—I will content myself with a few schematic traits. I choose them from our present standpoint, that of the question "How to avoid speaking?" such as I have started to define it: a question of the place as place of writing, of inscription, of the trace. For lack of time, I will have to lighten my talk, employing neither long quotations nor "secondary" literature. But this will not, we shall see, render the hypothesis of a "naked" text any less problematic.

In the Platonic text and in the tradition it marks, it seems to me that one must distinguish between two movements or two tropics of negativity. These two structures are radically heterogeneous.

1. One of them finds both its principle and its exemplification in the *Republic* (509b et seq.). The idea of the Good (*idea tou agathou*) has its place beyond Being or essence. Thus the Good is not, nor is its place. But this not-being is not a non-being; one may say that it transcends presence or essence, *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the beingness of Being. From what is beyond the presence of all that is, the Good gives birth to Being or to the essence of what is, to *einai* and *ousian*, but without itself being. Whence comes the homology between the Good and the sun, between the intelligible sun and the sensible sun. The former gives to beings their visibility, their genesis (growth and nutrition). But it is not in becoming; it is not visible and it does not belong to the order of what proceeds from it, either in regard to knowledge or in regard to Being.

Unable to get involved in the readings that this immense text demands and has already provoked, I will observe two points that concern me in this context.

On the one hand, whatever may be the discontinuity marked by this beyond (*epekeina*) in relation to Being, in relation to the Being of beings or beingness (nevertheless, three distinct hypotheses), this singular limit does not give place to simply neutral or negative determinations, but to a *hyperbolism* of that, beyond which the Good gives rise to thinking, to knowing, and to Being. Negativity serves the *hyper* movement that produces, attracts, or guides it. The

Good is not, of course, in the sense that it is not Being or beings, and on this subject every ontological grammar must take on a negative form. But this negative form is not neutral. It does not oscillate between the *ni ceci—ni cela* (the neither/nor). It first of all obeys a logic of the *sur*, of the *hyper*, over and beyond, which heralds all the hyper-essentialisms of Christian apophyses and all the debates that develop around them (for example, the criticism of Dionysius by Saint Thomas, who reproaches him for having placed *Bonum* before or above *Ens* or *Esse* in the hierarchy of divine names). This maintains a sufficiently homogeneous, homologous, or analogous relationship between Being and (what is) beyond Being, in order that what exceeds the border may be compared to Being; albeit through the figure of hyperbole; but most of all, in order that what is or is known may owe its being and its being-known to this Good. This analogical continuity allows for the translation, and for the comparison of the Good to the intelligible sun, and of the latter to the perceptible sun. The excess of this Good which (is) *hyperektion*, its transcendence, situates it at the origin of Being and of knowledge. It permits one to take account, to speak both of what is and of what the Good is. Knowable things draw from the Good not only the property of being known, but also Being (*einai*) and existence or essence (*ousia*), even if the Good does not belong to essence ("ouk ousias ontos tou agathou") but to something that by far surpasses (*hyperektiontos*) Being in dignity, antiquity (*presbeia*), and power ("all'eti epekeina tes ousias presbeia kai dynamei hyperekhontos"; *Republic*, 509b). The excellence is not so alien to Being or to light that the excess itself cannot be described in the terms of what it exceeds. A bit earlier, an allusion to a third species (*triton genos*) seems to disorient the discourse, because this is neither the visible nor sight or vision; it is precisely light (507e), itself produced by the sun, and son of the Good ("ton tou agathou ekgonon") which the Good has engendered in its own likeness ("on tagathon agennesen analogon"). This analogy between the perceptible and intelligible sun will yet permit one to have confidence in the resemblance between the Good (*epekeina tes ousias*) and that to which it gives birth, Being and knowledge. Negative discourse on that which stands beyond Being, and apparently no longer tolerates ontological predicates, does not interrupt this analogical continuity. In truth, it assumes it: it

even allows itself to be guided by it. Ontology remains possible and necessary. One might discern the effects of this analogical continuity in the rhetoric, grammar, and logic of all the discourses on the Good and on what is beyond Being.

On the other hand, soon after the passage on what (is) *epekeina tes ousias* and *hyperektion*, Glaucon addresses himself or pretends to address himself to God, to the god of the sun, Apollo: "Oh Apollo, what divine hyperbole [daimonias hyperboles: what daemonic or supernatural excess!]" We should not assign too much weight to this invocation or address to God at the moment when one speaks of that which exceeds Being. It seems to be made lightly, in a somewhat humorous manner (*geiōiōs*), as if to punctuate the scene with a breathing. I emphasize it for reasons that will become clear in a moment, when the necessity for every discourse on apophatic theology to begin with an address to God will become something completely other than a theatrical rhetoric: it will have the seriousness of a prayer.

Why have I just pointed out the allusion to the "third species" destined to play a role of analogical mediation, that of light between vision and the visible? Because in the *Sophist* (243b), this schema of the third also concerns Being. Of all the paired oppositions, one may say that each term is. The being (*einai*) of this *is* figures as a third that is beyond the two others ("triton para ta duo ekeina"). It is indispensable to the interweaving (*symploke*) or to the dialectical inter-section of the forms or of the ideas in a *logos* capable of receiving the other. After having raised the question of non-being, which is in itself unthinkable (*adianoeton*), ineffable (*arreton*), unpronounceable (*aphiegkton*), foreign to discourse and to reason (*alogon*; 238c), one arrives at the presentation of dialectic itself. Passing through the parricide and the murder of Parmenides, this dialectic receives the thinking of nonbeing as other and not as absolute nothingness or simple opposite of Being (256b, 259c). This confirms that there cannot be an absolutely negative discourse: a *logos* necessarily speaks about something; it cannot avoid speaking of something; it is impossible for it to refer to nothing ("logon anagkalon, otanper ē, tinos einai logon, mē dē tinos adunaton"; 262e).

2. I will distinguish the tropics of negativity, which I have just outlined in such a schematic manner, from another tropics in Plato's works; it is another manner of treating

what is beyond (*epekeina*) the border, the third species, and the place. This place is here called *khora*; I am, of course, alluding to the *Timaeus*. When I say that this is found "in Plato's works," I leave aside, for lack of time, the question of whether or not it has its place at the interior of the Platonic text, and what "at the interior of" means here. These are questions that I will treat at length elsewhere in a future publication. From this work in progress,¹⁴ I will permit myself to set off a few elements that are indispensable to the formulation of a hypothesis that relates to the present context. *Khora* also constitutes a third species (*triton genos*; *Timaeus* 48e, 49a, 52a). This place is not the intelligible paradigm with which the demiurge inspires itself. Nor does it belong to the order of copies or sensible mimemes that it impresses in the *khora*. It is difficult to speak of this absolutely necessary place, this place "in which" the mimemes of the eternal beings originate by impressing themselves (*typhotenta*) there, and it is difficult to speak of the impression (*ekmageion*) for all the types and all the schemas. It is difficult to adjust to it a true or firm *logos*. One glimpses it only in an "oneiric" manner and one can only describe it by a "bastard reasoning" (*logismó tiri nothó*). This spatial interval neither dies nor is born (52b). Nevertheless, its "eternity" is not that of the intelligible paradigms. At the moment, so to speak, when the demiurge organizes the cosmos by cutting, introducing, and impressing the images of the paradigms "into" the *khora*, the latter must already have been there, as the "there" itself, beyond time or in any case beyond becoming, in a beyond time without common measure with the eternity of the ideas and the becoming of sensible things. How does Plato deal with this disproportion and heterogeneity? There are, it seems to me, two concurrent languages in these pages of the *Timaeus*.

To be sure, one of these languages multiplies the negations, the warnings, the evasions, the detours, the tropes, but with a view to reappropriating the thinking of the *khora* for ontology and for Platonic dialectic in its most dominant schemas. If the *khora*—place, spacing, receptacle (*hypodokhē*)—is neither sensible nor intelligible, it seems to participate in the intelligible in an enigmatic way (51a). Since it "receives all," it makes possible the formation of the cosmos. As it is neither this nor that (neither intelligible nor sensible),

one may speak as if it were a joint participant in both. Neither/nor easily becomes both... and, both this and that. Whence the rhetoric of the passage, the multiplication of figures which one traditionally interprets as metaphors: gold, mother, nurse, sieve, receptacle, impression, and so on. Aristotle provided the matrix for many of the readings of the *Timaeus* and, since his *Physics* (bk. 4), one has always interpreted this passage on the *khora* as being at the interior of philosophy, in a consistently anachronistic way, as if it prefigured, on the one hand, the philosophies of space as *extensio* (Descartes) or as pure sensible form (Kant); or on the other hand, the materialist philosophies of the substratum or of substance which stands, like the *hypodokhē*, beneath the qualities or the phenomena. These readings, the wealth and complexity of which I can only touch upon here, are still possible, and up to a certain point justifiable. As for their anachronistic character, it seems to me not only evident but structurally inevitable. The *khora* is the atemporality (*l'anachronie*) itself of the spacing; it (a)temporalizes (*anachronise*), it calls forth atemporality, provokes it immutably from the pretemporal already that gives place to every inscription. But this is another story with which we cannot get involved here.

The other language and the other interpretive decision interest me more, without ceasing to be atemporal or anachronistic in their way. The synchronicity of a reading has no chance here and no doubt would lack exactly that to which it claimed to adjust itself. This other gesture would inscribe an irreducible spacing interior to (but hence also exterior to, once the interior is placed outside) Platonism, that is, interior to ontology, to dialectic, and perhaps to philosophy in general. Under the name of *khora*, the place belongs neither to the sensible nor to the intelligible, neither to becoming, nor to non-being (the *khora* is never described as a void), nor to Being: according to Plato, the quantity or the quality of Being are measured against its intelligibility. All the aporias, which Plato makes no effort to hide, would signify that there is something that is neither a being nor a nothingness; something that no dialectic, participatory schema, or analogy would allow one to rearticulate together with any philosopheme whatsoever, neither "in" Plato's works nor in the history that Platonism inaugurates and dominates. The neither/nor may

no longer be reconverted into both... and. Hence the so-called "metaphors" are not only inadequate, in that they borrow figures from the sensible forms inscribed in the *khora*, without pertinence for designating the *khora* itself. They are no longer metaphors. Like all rhetoric which makes of it a systematic web, the concept of metaphor issues from this Platonic metaphysics, from the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, and from the dialectic and analogicism that one inherits with it. When the interpreters of Plato discuss these metaphors, whatever may be the complexity of their debates and analyses, we never see them suspicious of the concept of metaphor itself.¹⁵

But to say that Plato does not use metaphor or sensible figures to designate the place does not imply that he speaks appropriately of the proper and properly intelligible meaning of *khora*. The import of receptivity or of receptacle which, one may say, forms the elementary nonvariable of this word's determination, seems to me to transcend the opposition between figurative and proper meaning. The spacing of *khora* introduces a dissociation or a difference in the proper meaning that it renders possible, thereby compelling tropic detours which are no longer rhetorical figures. The typography and the tropics to which the *khora* gives place, *without giving anything*, are explicitly marked in the *Timaeus* (50bc). Hence Plato says this in his way: it is necessary to avoid speaking of *khora* as of "something" that is or is not, that could be present or absent, intelligible, sensible, or both at once, active or passive, the Good (*epekaina tes ousias*) or the Evil, God or man, the living or the nonliving. Every theomorphic or anthropomorphic schema would thus also have to be avoided. If the *khora* receives everything, it does not do this in the manner of a medium or of a container, not even in that of a receptacle, because the receptacle is yet a figure inscribed in it. This is neither an intelligible extension, in the Cartesian sense, a receptive subject, in the Kantian sense of *intuitus derivativus*, nor a pure sensible space, as a form of receptivity. Radically nonhuman and atheological, one cannot even say that it gives place or that *there is the khora*. The *es gibt*, thus translated, too vividly announces or recalls the dispensation of God, of man, or even that of the Being of which certain texts by Heidegger speak (*es gibt Sein*). *Khora* is not even *that* (*ça*), the *es* or *id* of giving, before all subjec-

tivity. It does not give place as one would give something, whatever it may be; it neither creates nor produces anything, not even an event insofar as it takes place. It gives no order and makes no promise. It is radically ahistorical, because nothing happens through it and nothing happens to it. Plato insists on its necessary indifference; to receive all and allow itself to be marked or affected by what is inscribed in it, the *khora* must remain without form and without proper determination. But if it is amorphous (*amorphon*; *Timaeus*, 50d), this signifies neither lack nor privation. *Khora* is nothing positive or negative. It is impassive, but it is neither passive nor active.

How to speak of it? How to avoid speaking of it? In this context, the singularity that interests me is that the impossibility of speaking of it and of giving it a proper name, far from reducing it to silence, yet dictates an obligation, by its very impossibility: *it is necessary to speak of it and there is a rule for that. Which?* If one wishes to respect the absolute singularity of the *khora* (there is only one *khora*, even if it can be pure multiplicity of places), *it is necessary always to refer to it in the same manner*. Not to give it the same name, as one French translation suggests, but to call it, address oneself to it in the same manner ("tauton auten aei proseiton": 49b). This is not a question of proper name, but rather of appellation, a manner of addressing oneself. *Proserô*: I address myself to, I address speech to someone, and sometimes: I adore—divinity; *proserma* is speech addressed to someone; *proresis* is the salutation that calls. One respects the absolute uniqueness of the *khora* by always calling it in the same way—and this is not limited to the name; a phrase is necessary. To obey this injunction with neither order nor promise, an injunction that has always already taken place, one must think of that which—beyond all given philosophemes—has nevertheless left a trace in language; for example, the word *khora* already existed in the Greek language, as it is caught up in the web of its usual meanings. Plato did not have another. Together with the word, there are also grammatical, rhetorical, logical, and hence also philosophical possibilities. However insufficient they may be, they are given, already marked by that unheard trace, promised to the trace that has promised nothing. This trace and this promise always inscribe themselves in the body of a lan-

guage, in its vocabulary and syntax, but one must be able to rediscover the trace, still unique, in other languages, bodies, and negativities.

B

The question now becomes the following: what happens between, on the one hand, an "experience" such as this—the experience of the *khora* which is above all not an experience, if one understands by this word a certain relation to presence, whether it is sensible or intelligible or even a relation to the presence of the present in general—and, on the other hand, what one calls the *via negativa* in its Christian stage?

The passage through the negativity of discourse on the subject of the *khora* is neither the last word nor a mediation in service of a dialectic, an elevation toward a positive or proper meaning, a Good or a God. This has nothing to do with negative theology; there is reference neither to an event nor to a giving, neither to an order nor to a promise, even if, as I have just underscored, the absence of promise or of order—the barren, radically nonhuman, and atheological character of this "place"—obliges us to speak and to refer to it in a certain and unique manner, as to the wholly-other who is neither transcendent, absolutely distanced, nor immanent and close. Not that we are obliged to speak of it; but if, stirred by an obligation that does not come from it, we think and speak of it, then it is necessary to respect the singularity of this reference. Although it is nothing, this referent appears irreducible and irreducibly other: one cannot invent it. But since it remains alien to the order of presence and absence, it seems that one could only invent it in its very otherness, at the moment of the address.

But this unique address is not a prayer, a celebration, or an encomium. It does not speak to You.

Above all, this "third species" that the *khora* also is does not belong to a *group of three*. "Third species" is here only a philosophical way of naming an X that is not included in a group, a family, a triad or a trinity. Even when Plato seems to compare it to a "mother" or to a "nurse," this always virginal *khora* in truth does not couple with the "father" to whom Plato "compares" the paradigms; the *khora* does not

engender the sensible forms that are inscribed in it and that Plato "compares" to a child (*Timaeus*, 50d).

To ask what happens between this type of experience (or the experience of the *typos*) and the Christian apophyses is neither necessarily nor exclusively to think of history, of events, of influences. Indeed, the question that arises here concerns the historicity or eventuality (*évenementialité*), that is, of significations foreign to the *khora*. Even if one wishes to describe "what happens" in terms of structures and relations, it is no doubt necessary to recognize that what happens between them is, perhaps, precisely the event of the event, the story, the thinking of an essential "having-taken-place," of a revelation, of an order and of a promise, of an anthropo-theologicalization which—despite the extreme rigor of the negative hyperbole—seems to dominate anew, even closer to the *agathon* than to the *khora*. And in Dionysius' works, for example, the trinitarian schema appears absolutely indispensable to ensure the passage through or crossing between discourses on the divine names, between the symbolic and mystical theology. The affirmative theologemes celebrate God as the Good, the intelligible Light, even the Good "beyond all light" (it is a "principle of all light and hence it is too little to call it light"; *DN*, ch. 4:701ab). Even if this Good is called formless (like the *khora*), this time it itself gives form: "But if the Good transcends all being, as is in effect the case, then it is necessary to say that it is the formless that gives form, and that the One who remains in Himself without the essence is the height of the essence, and the reality without supreme life" (*DN*, ch. 4:697a). This Good inspires an entire erotics, but Dionysius warns us: it is necessary to avoid using the word *erôs* without first clarifying the meaning, the intention. It is always necessary to start from the intentional meaning and not from the mere words (*DN*, ch. 4:708bc): "one should not imagine that we oppose Scripture in venerating this word of amorous desire [*erôs*]. . . . It even seemed to some of our sacred authors that 'amorous love' [*erôs*] is a term more worthy of God than 'charitable love' [*agapê*]. For the divine Ignatius wrote: 'It is the object of my amorous love that they crucified'" (*DN*, ch. 4:708c-709b). The holy theologians attribute the same import, the same power of unification and gathering to *erôs* and to *agapê*, which the many poorly understand, which assigns

desire to the body, to the division, to the carving up (*ibid.*). In God, desire is at once ecstatic, jealous, and condescending (*DN*, ch. 4:712a et seq.). This erotics leads forward and hence leads back to the Good, circularly, that is, toward what "is situated far beyond both being considered in itself and non-being" (*DN*, ch. 4:716d). As for Evil, "it belongs neither to Being nor to non-Being. Rather, it is more absent and estranged from the Good than non-Being; it is more greatly without being than non-Being" (*ibid.*). What is the more of this less in regard to what is already without essence? Evil is even more without essence than the Good. If possible, one should draw the full consequences of this singular axiomatics. For the moment, this is not my concern.

Between the theological movement that speaks and is inspired by the Good beyond Being or by light and the apophatic path that exceeds the Good, there is necessarily a passage, a transfer, a translation. An experience must yet guide the apophasis toward excellence, not allow it to say just anything, and prevent it from manipulating its negations like empty and purely mechanical phrases. This experience is that of prayer. Here prayer is not a preamble, an accessory mode of access. It constitutes an essential moment, it adjusts discursive asceticism, the passage through the desert of discourse, the apparent referential vacuity which will only avoid empty deliria and prattling, by addressing itself from the start to the other, to you. But to you as "hyperessential and more than divine Trinity."

I will distinguish at least two traits in the experiences and in the so manifold determinations of what one calls prayer. I isolate them here even if at the neglect of everything else, in order to clarify my talk. 1. In every prayer there must be an address to the other as other; for example—I will say, at the risk of shocking—God. The act of addressing oneself to the other as other must, of course, mean praying, that is, asking, supplicating, searching out. No matter what, for the pure prayer demands only that the other hear it, receive it, be present to it, be the other as such, a gift, call, and even cause of prayer. This first trait thus characterizes a discourse (an act of language even if prayer is silent) which, as such, is not predicative, theoretical (*theological*), or constative. 2. But I will differentiate it from another trait with which it is most often associated, notably by Dionysius and his inter-

preters, namely, the encomium or the celebration (*hymnein*). That the association of these two traits is essential for Dionysius does not signify that one trait is identical with the other, nor even in general inseparable from the other. Neither the prayer nor the encomium is, of course, an act of constative predication. Both have a performative dimension, the analysis of which would merit long and difficult expositions, notably as to the origin and validation of these performatives. I will hold to one distinction: prayer in itself, one may say, implies nothing other than the supplicating address to the other, perhaps beyond all supplication and giving, to give the promise of His presence as other, and finally the transcendence of His otherness itself, even without any other determination; the encomium, although it is not a simple attributive speech, nevertheless preserves an irreducible relationship to the attribution. No doubt, as Urs von Balthasar rightly says, "Where God and the divine are concerned, the word *ὑμνεῖν* almost replaces the word 'to say.'"¹⁶ Almost, in fact, but not entirely; and how can one deny that the encomium qualifies God and *determines* prayer, *determines* the other, Him to whom it addresses itself, refers, invoking Him even as the source of prayer? How can one deny that, in this movement of determination (which is no longer the pure address of the prayer to the other), the appointment of the *trinitary* and hyperessential God distinguishes Dionysius' *Christian* prayer from all other prayer? To reject this doubtless subtle distinction, inadmissible for Dionysius and perhaps for a Christian in general, is to deny the essential quality of prayer to every invocation that is not Christian. As Jean-Luc Marion correctly remarks, the encomium is "neither true nor false, not even contradictory,"¹⁷ although it says something about the thearchy, about the Good and the analogy; and if its attributions or namings do not belong to the ordinary signification of truth, but rather to a hypertruth that is ruled by a hyperessentiality, in this it does not merge with the movement of prayer itself, which does not speak *of*, but *to*. Even if this address is immediately determined by the discourse of the encomium and if the prayer addresses itself to God by speaking (to Him) of Him, the apostrophe of prayer and the determination of the encomium form a pair, two different structures: "hyperessential and more than divine Trinity. You who preside over the divine wisdom. . . ." In a moment I will quote

more extensively from this prayer which opens the *Mystical Theology* and prepares the definition of apophatic theologemes. For "it is necessary to start with prayers" (*εὐχῆς ἀποκησθηταὶ κτρεῶν*; DN, ch. 3:680d), Dionysius says. Why? No doubt, to attain union with God; but to speak of this union, it is still necessary to speak of *places*, of height, of distance and of proximity. Dionysius proposes to his immediate addressee—or to the one to whom he dedicates his work, Timothy—to examine the name of Good, which expresses divinity, *after* having invoked the Trinity, that principle of Good which transcends all goods. It is necessary to pray in order to *approach* it, "most intimately"—that is, to raise oneself toward it—and receive from it the initiation of its gifts:

It is necessary that we first be lifted up toward it, the source of good, by our prayers, and then, by drawing near to it, that we be initiated into the all-good gifts of what is founded around it. For while it is present to all, not all are present to it. Then, when we invoke it by our most holy prayers with an unpolluted intellect which is suited for the divine union, we shall be present to it. For it is not in a place, so that it would be absent from some beings or have to go from one being to another. Moreover, even the statement that it is "in" all beings falls far too short of its infinity, which is beyond all and encompasses all. (DN, ch. 3:680b)

By a series of analogies, Dionysius then explains that, in approaching and elevating ourselves thus, we do not traverse the distance that separates us from a place (since the residence of the Trinity is not localized: it is "everywhere and nowhere"). On the other hand, the Trinity draws us toward it, while it remains immobile, like the height of the sky or the depth of marine bedrock from which we will pull on a rope in order to come to it, and not to draw it toward us:

before everything and especially before a discourse about God, it is necessary to begin with a prayer—not so that the power present both everywhere and nowhere shall come to us but so that by our divine remembrance and invocations we ourselves shall be guided to it and be united with it. (*ibid.*)

The principle of the Good is beyond Being, but it also transcends the Good (DN, ch. 3:680b). God is the Good that transcends the Good and the Being that transcends Being. This "logic" is also that of the "without" which I evoked a moment ago in the quotations from Meister Eckhart, citing Saint Augustine ("God is wise *without* wisdom, good *without* goodness, powerful *without* power") or Saint Bernard ("To love God is a mode *without* a mode"). We could recognize in the negativity without negativity of these utterances—concerning a transcendence which is nothing other (and wholly other) than what it transcends—a principle of multiplication of voices and discourses, of disappropriation and reapropriation of utterances, with the most distant appearing the closest, and vice versa. A predicate can always conceal another predicate, or rather the nakedness of an absence of predicate—as the (sometimes indispensable) veil of a garment can at once dissimulate and reveal the very fact that it dissimulates and renders attractive at the same time. Hence the voice of an utterance can conceal another, which it then appears to quote without quoting it, presenting itself as another form, namely as a quotation of the other. Whence the subtlety, but also the conflicts, the relations of power, even the aporias of a politics of doctrine; I want to say: a politics of initiation or of teaching in general, and of an institutional politics of interpretation. Meister Eckhart, for example (but what an example!) knew something about this. Not to mention the arguments he had to deploy against his inquisitorial judges ("They tax with error everything they don't understand. . . ."), the strategy of his sermons put to work a multiplicity of voices and of veils, which he superimposed or removed like skins or garments, thematizing and himself exploring a pseudo-metaphor until reaching that extreme flaying of which one is never sure that it allows one to see the nakedness of God or to hear the voice of Meister Eckhart himself. *Quasi stella matutina*, which furnishes so many pretexts to the Cologne judges, stages the drama of twenty-four masters (*Liber 24 philosophorum* of pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus) who are reunited to speak of God. Eckhart chooses one of their assertions: "God is necessarily above Being [got etwaz ist, daz von nôt über wesene sin muoz]."¹⁸ Speaking thus of what one of his masters says, he comments in a voice that no longer permits one to decide that it is not

his own. And in the same movement, he cites other masters, Christians or pagans, great or subordinate masters (*kleine Meister*). One of them seems to say, "God is neither being nor goodness [Got exist niht wesen noch güete]. Goodness clings to being and is not more comprehensive [breiter] than being; for if there were no being, there would be no goodness, and being is purer than goodness. God is not good, nor better, nor best. Whoever were to say that God is good, would do Him as great an injustice as if he called the sun black" (*ibid.*, 1:148). (The Bull of condemnation mentions this passage only in an appendix, without concluding that Eckhart truly taught it.) The theory of archetypes that forms the context of this argument attenuates its provocative character: God does not share any of the modes of Being with other beings (divided into ten categories by these masters), but "He is not thereby deprived of any of them [er entbirt ir ouch keiner]."

But here is what "a pagan master" says: the soul that loves God "takes Him under the garment of goodness [nimet in under dem velle der güete]," but reason or rationality (*vernunfticheit*) raises this garment and grasps God in His nakedness (*in blöz*). Then He is derobed (*entkleidet*), shorn "of goodness, of Being, and of all names" (*ibid.*, 1:152). Eckhart does not contradict the pagan master; nor does he agree with him. He remarks that, unlike the "holy masters," the pagan speaks in accordance with "natural light." Next, in a voice that appears to be his own, he differentiates—I do not dare say that he makes dialectical—the preceding proposition. In the lines that I am preparing to quote, a certain signification of unveiling, of laying bare, of truth as what is beyond the covering garment—appears to orient the entire axiomatics of this apophysis, at the end of ends and after all. Doubtless, here one cannot speak in full rigor of signification and axiomatics, since what orders and rules the apophatic course precisely exceeds the Good or goodness. But there is indeed a rule or a law: it is necessary to go beyond the veil or the garment. Is it arbitrary to still call truth or hyper-truth this unveiling which is perhaps no longer an unveiling of Being? A light, therefore, that is no longer elucidated by Being? I do not believe so. Consider:

I once said in the school that intellect [vernunfticheit] is nobler than will, and yet both belong to this light.

Then a master in another school said that will is nobler than intellect, for will takes things as they are in themselves, while the intellect takes things as they are in it. That is true. An eye is nobler in itself than an eye painted on the wall. But I say that intellect is nobler than will. The will apprehends God under the garment [under dem kleide] of goodness. The intellect apprehends God naked, as He is divested of goodness and being [Vernunfticheit nimet got blöz, als er entkleidet ist von güete und von wesen]. Goodness is a garment [kleit] under which God is hidden, and will apprehends God under the garment of goodness. If there were no goodness in God, my will would not want Him. (*ibid.*, 1:152-53)

Light and truth, these are Meister Eckhart's words. *Quasi stella matutina*, that is what it is, and it is also a topology (height and proximity) of our relation to God. Like the adverb *quasi*, we are beside the verb that is the truth:

"As [als] a morning star in the midst of the mist." I refer to the little word "quasi," which means "as" [als]; in school the children call it an adverb [ein biwort]. This is what I refer to in all my sermons. The most appropriate [eigenlichest] things that one can say of God are word and truth [wort und wärheit]. God called Himself a word [ein wort]. St. John said: "In the beginning was the Word," and means that beside the word [wort], man is an adverb [biwort]. In the same way, the free star [der vrië sterne] Venus, after which Friday [vritac] is named, has many names. . . . Of all the stars, it is always equally near to the sun; it never moves farther from or nearer to it [niemer verrier noch næher], and symbolizes [meinet] a man who wants to be near God always, and present [gegenwertic] to Him, so that nothing can remove him from God, neither happiness, unhappiness, nor any creature. . . . The more the soul is raised [erhaben] above earthly things, the stronger [krefziger] it is. Even a person who knows nothing but the creatures would never need to think of any sermons, for every creature is full of God and is a book [buoch]. (*ibid.*, 1:154-56)

In its pedagogical necessity and initiatory virtue, the sermon supplements—not so much the Word (*Verbe*), which has no need of it, but—the incapacity of reading in the authentic “book” that we are, as creatures, and the adverbial quality that we must hence be. This supplement of adverbial quality, the sermon, must be accomplished and oriented (as one orients oneself by the morning star) by the prayer or invocation of the trinitary God. This is at once the end and the orientation point of the sermon: “The soul is thus like an ‘adverb,’ working together with God and finding its beautification in the same self-knowledge that exalts him. That for all time, may the Father, the Verbum, and the Holy Spirit help us to remain adverbs of this Verbum. Amen” (*ibid.*, 1:158).

This is the end of the Sermon; the prayer does not directly address itself, in the form of apostrophe, to God Himself. In contrast, at the opening and from the first words of the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius addresses himself directly to You, to God, from now on determined as “hyperessential Trinity” in the prayer that prepares the theologemes of the *via negativa*:

O Trinity beyond being [Trias hyperousiè], beyond divinity [hyperthèe], beyond goodness [hyperagathè], and guide of Christians in divine wisdom [theosophias], direct us to the mystical summits more than unknown and beyond light. There the simple, absolved, and unchanged mysteries of theology lie hidden in the darkness beyond light of the hidden mystical silence, there, in the greatest darkness, that beyond all that is most evident exceedingly illuminates the sightless intellects. There, in the wholly imperceptible and invisible, that beyond all that is most evident fills to overflowing, with the glories beyond all beauty the intellects who know how to close their eyes [tous anommatous noas]. This is my prayer [Enmoi men oon tauta eutkhô]. And you, dear Timothy, be earnest in the exercise of mystical contemplation. (ch. 1:998a)

What happens here?

After having prayed (he writes, we read), he presents his prayer. He quotes it and I have just quoted his quotation. He quotes it in what is properly an *apostrophe* to its addressee,

Timothy. The *Mystical Theology* is dedicated to him; in order to initiate him, it must lead him on the paths toward which Dionysius himself has prayed to God to lead him, or more literally to direct him in a straight (*ithunon*) line. A pedagogy which is also a mystagogy and a *psyche* of the other passes through apostrophe. The one who asks to be led by God turns for an instant toward another addressee, in order to lead him in turn. He does not simply turn himself away from his first addressee who is in truth the first Cause of his prayer and already guides it. It is exactly because he does not turn away from God that he can turn toward Timothy and pass from one address to the other without changing direction.

The writing of Dionysius—which we presently believe we are reading or read in view of believing—stands in the space of that *apostrophe* which turns aside the discourse in the same direction, between the prayer itself, the quotation of the prayer, and the address to the disciple. In other words, it is addressed to the best reader, to the reader who ought to allow himself to be led to become better, to us who presently believe we are reading this text. Not to us as we are, at present, but as we would have to be, in our souls, if we read this text as it ought to be read, aright, in the proper direction, correctly: according to its prayer and its promise. He also prays—that we read correctly, in accordance with his prayer. None of this would be possible without the possibility of quotations (more generally, of repetition), and of an apostrophe that allows one to speak to several people at once. To more than one other. The prayer, the quotation of the prayer, and the apostrophe, from one you to the other, thus weave the same text, however heterogeneous they appear. There is a text because of this repetition.¹⁹ Where, then, does this text have its place? Does it have a place, at present? And why can't one separate the prayer, the quotation of prayer, and the address to the reader?

The identity of this place, and hence of this text, and of its reader, comes from the future of what is promised by the promise. The advent of this future has a provenance, the event of the promise. Contrary to what seemed to happen in the “experience” of the place called *khora*, the apophysis is brought into motion—it is initiated, in the sense of initiative

and initiation—by the event of a revelation which is also a promise. This apophysis belongs to a history; or rather, it opens up a history and an anthropo-theological dimension. The *typhen* ("trait d'union") unites the "new, adjunct writing with that which God himself dictated" (DN, ch. 3:681b); it marks the very place of this adjunction. This place itself is assigned by the event of the promise and the revelation of Scripture. It is the place only after what will have taken place—according to the time and history of this future perfect. The place is an event. Under what conditions is one situated in Jerusalem, we asked a moment ago, and where is the place thus named situated? How can one measure the distance that separates us from or draws us closer to it? Here is the answer of Dionysius, who cites Scripture in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: "Do not distance yourself from Jerusalem, but await the promise of the Father which you have heard from my mouth, and according to which you will be baptised by the Holy Spirit" (512c). The situation of this speech situates a place: he who transmitted the promise (Jesus, "divine founder of our own hierarchy") speaks of Jerusalem as the place that takes place since the event of the promise. But the place that is thus revealed remains the place of waiting, awaiting the realization of the promise. Then it will take place fully. It will be fully a place.

Hence an event prescribes to us the good and accurate apophysis: how to avoid speaking. This prescription is at once a revelation and a teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the architect before all supplementary "adjunction":

with regard to the secret Deity beyond Being, it is necessary to avoid all speech, that is, every incautious thought [ou tolmeteon eipein, ouite men ennoesail, beyond what the Holy Scriptures divinely reveal to us [para ta theoeidōs emin ek tōn ierōn logiōn ekphasmenal. For in these sacred texts, the Deity itself manifested that which suited its Goodness. (DN, ch. 1:588c; my italics)²⁰

This hyperessential goodness is not entirely incommunicable; it can manifest itself, but it remains separated by its hyperessentiality. As for those theologians who have "praised" its inaccessibility and penetrated its "secret infinity," they have left no "trace" (*ikhrōnos*; *ibid.*; my italics).

A secret manifestation, then, if some such thing is possible. Even before commanding the extreme negativity of the apophysis, this manifestation is transmitted to us as a "secret gift" by our inspired masters. We thus learn to decipher symbols, we understand how "the love of God for man envelops the intelligible in the sensible, what is beyond Being in being, gives form and fashion to the unformable and the unfashionable, and through a variety of partial symbols, multiplies and figures the unfigurable and marvelous Simplicity" (DN, ch. 1:592b). In brief, we learn to read, to decipher the rhetoric without rhetoric of God—and finally to be silent.

Among all these figures for the unfigurable, there stands the figure of the seal. This is not one figure among others; it figures the figuration of the unfigurable itself; and this discourse on the imprint appears to displace the Platonic typography of the *khōra*. The latter gave rise to the inscriptions, to *typoi*, for the copies of the paradigms. Here the figure of the seal, which also seals a promise, is valid for the entire text of the creation. It carries over a Platonic argument, one of the two schemas that I have just tried to distinguish, into another order. God at once permits and does not permit participation in Him. The text of creation exists as the typographic inscription of the nonparticipation in participation:

as the central point of a circle is shared by all the radii, which constitute the circle, and as the multiple imprints [ektypomata] of a single seal [sphragidos] share the original which is entirely immanent and identical in each of the imprints, not fragmenting itself in any manner. But the nonparticipation [amethexia] of the Deity, the universal cause, yet transcends all these figures [paradeigmata]. (DN, ch. 2:644ab)

For unlike what happens with the seal, here there is neither contact, community, or synthesis. The subsequent discussion recalls again, while displacing, the necessity for the *khōra* to be without form and virginal. Otherwise, it could not suitably lend itself to the writing of the impressions in it:

One might object that the seal is not complete and identical in all its imprints [en olois tois ekmageiois]. I respond that this is not the fault of the seal which

3:441-42), it is necessary to avoid speaking. Eckhart allows St. Augustine to speak: "what man can say that is most beautiful in respect to God is that he knows how to be silent [swigen] on account of the wisdom of the internal [divine] wealth." Eckhart adds: "Because of this, be silent" (*ibid.*, 3:442). Without that you lie and you commit sin. This duty is a duty of love; the apostrophe orders love, but it speaks out of love and implores the aid of God in a prayer: "You must love Him inasmuch as he is a Non-God, a Non-Intellect, a Non-Person, a Non-Image. More than this, inasmuch as He is a pure, clear, limpid One, separated from all duality. And we must eternally sink ourselves in this One, from the Something to the Nothing. May God help us. Amen" (*ibid.*, 3:448).

This is to speak in order to command not to speak, to say what God is not, that he is a non-God. How may one hear the copula of being that articulates this singular speech and this order to be silent? Where does it have its place? Where does it take place? It is the place, the place of this writing, this trace (left in Being) of what is not, and the writing of this place. The place is only a place of passage, and more precisely, a threshold. But a threshold, this time, to give access to what is no longer a place. A subordination, a relativization of the place, and an extraordinary consequence; the place is Being. What finds itself reduced to the condition of a threshold is Being itself, Being as a place. Solely a threshold, but a sacred place, the outer sanctuary (*parvis*) of the temple:

When we apprehend God in Being, we apprehend Him in his *parvis* [vorbürge], for Being is the *parvis* in which He resides [wonet]. Where is He then in His temple, in which he shines in His sanctity [hellig]? Intellect [vernünftichheit: rationality] is the Temple of God.²²

The soul, which exercises its power in the eye, allows one to see what is not, what is not present; it "works in non-being and follows God who works in non-being." Guided by this *psyche*, the eye thus passes the threshold of Being toward non-being in order to see what does not present itself. Eckhart compares the eye to a sieve. Things must be "passed through the sieve [geblutelt]." This sieve is not one figure among others; it tells the difference between Being and non-being. It discerns this difference, it allows one to see it, but

transmits itself to each one completely and identically; rather, the otherness of the participants differentiates between the reproductions of the unique, total and identical model [arkhetypias]. (*DN*, ch. 2:644b)

Thus everything will depend on the material or wax (*keros*) which receives the imprints. It must be receptive, soft, flexible, smooth, and virginal, in order that the imprint remain pure, clear, and lasting (*DN*, ch. 2:644b).

If one recalls that the *khora* was also described as a receptacle (*dekhomenon*), one may follow another displacement of this figure, the figure of figures, the place of the other figures. Henceforth the "receptacle" is at once *physical* and *created*. It was neither in Plato's works. Later, Saint Augustine once again assures the mediation, and Meister Eckhart cites him in his sermon *Renouamini spiritu*: "Augustine says that in the superior part of the soul, which is called *mens* or *gemüte*, God created, together with the soul's being, a potential [craft] which the masters call a receptacle [sloz] or screen [schrin] of spiritual forms, or of formal images."²¹ The creation of the place, which is also a potential, is the basis for the resemblance of the soul with the Father. But beyond the Trinity, one may say, beyond the multiplicity of images and beyond the created place, the *unmovability without form*—which the *Timæus* attributed, one may say, to the *khora*—is here found to suit God alone: "when all the images of the soul are pushed aside and it contemplates only the unique One [das einig ein], the naked being of the soul encounters the naked being without form [das bloße formlose wesen] of the divine unity, which is the hyperessential Being resting unmoved in itself [ein überwesende wesen, lidende ligende in ime selben]" (*ibid.*, 3:437-438). This unmovability of the formless is the unique and wondrous source of our movability, of our emotions, of our noblest suffering. Thus we can suffer only God, and nothing other than Him: "Oh! wonder of wonders [wunder über wunder], what noble suffering lies therein, that the being of the soul can suffer nothing else than the solitary and pure unity of God!" (*ibid.*, 3:438).

Thus named, "God is without name [namloz]," and "no one can either speak of Him or understand Him." Of this "superminent Being [über swebende wesen]" which is also a "hyperessential nothingness [ein über wesende nitheit]" (*ibid.*,

as the eye itself. There is no text, above all no sermon, no possible predication, without the invention of such a filter.

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I thus decided not to speak of negativity or of apophatic movements in, for example, the Jewish or Islamic traditions. To leave this immense place empty, and above all that which can connect such a name of God with the name of the Place, to remain thus on the threshold—was this not the most consistent possible apophasis? Concerning that about which one cannot speak, isn't it best to remain silent? I let you answer this question. It is always entrusted to the other.

My first paradigm was Greek and the second Christian, without yet ceasing to be Greek. The last will be neither Greek nor Christian. If I were not afraid of trying your patience I would recall that which, in Heidegger's thinking, could resemble the most questioning legacy, both the most audacious and most liberated repetition of the traditions I have just evoked. Here I will have to limit myself to a few landmarks.

One could read *What Is Metaphysics?* as a treatise on negativity. It establishes the basis for negative discourse and negation in the experience of the Nothing which itself "nothing" ("das Nichts selbst nichtet"). The experience of anguish puts us in relation to a negating (*Nichtung*) which is neither annihilation (*Vernichtung*), nor a negation or a denial (*Vernichtung*). It reveals to us the strangeness (*Befremdlichkeit*) of what is (being, *das Seiende*) as the wholly other (*das schlechthin Andere*). It thus opens up the possibility of the question of Being for *Dasein*, the structure of which is characterized precisely by what Heidegger calls transcendence. This transcendence, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* will say, is "properly expressed" (*eigens ausgesprochen*) by the Platonic expression *epekeina tes ousias*. Unable to involve myself, here, in the interpretation of the *agathon* subsequently proposed by Heidegger, I merely wished to mark this passage beyond Being, or rather beyond beingness, and the reinterpretation of negativity that accompanies it. Heidegger specifies immediately that Plato could not elaborate "the original content of

the *epekeina tes ousias* as transcendence of *Dasein* [der ursprüngliche Gehalt des *epekeina als Transzendenz des Daseins*]. He makes an analogous gesture with regard to the *khora*: in the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, a brief parenthesis suggests that Plato fell short of thinking of the place (*Ort*) which, however, signaled to him. In truth, he only prepared (*vorbereitet*) the Cartesian interpretation of place or space as *extensio* (*Ausdehnung*).²³ Elsewhere I try to show what is problematic and reductive about this perspective. Some seven-teen years later, the last page of *Was heisst Denken?* mentions *khora* and *chorismos* anew, without any explicit reference to the *Timaeus*. Plato, who is supposed to have given the most determinative *Deutung* for Western thought, situates the *chorismos*—the interval or the separation, the spacing—between beings (*Setendes*) and Being (*Sein*). But "e khora heisst der Ort," "the khora means the place." For Plato, beings and Being are thus "placed differently [verschieden geortet]." "If Plato takes the *chorismos* into consideration, the difference of place [die verschiedene Ortung] between Being and beings, he thus poses the question of the wholly other place [nach dem ganz anderen Ort] of Being, by comparison with that of beings." That Plato is afterward suspected of having fallen short of this wholly other place, and that one must lead the diversity (*Verschiedenheit*) of places back to the difference (*Unterschied*) and the fold of a duplicity (*Zweifalt*) which must be given in advance, without one ever being able to give it "proper attention"—I can follow this process neither at the end of *Was heisst Denken?* nor elsewhere. I merely underscore this movement toward a wholly other place, as place of Being or place of the wholly other: in and beyond a Platonic or Neoplatonic tradition. But also in and beyond a Christian tradition of which Heidegger—while submerged in it, as in the Greek tradition—never ceased claiming, whether by denial or not, that it could in no case entertain a philosophy. "A Christian philosophy," he often says, "is a squared circle and a misconception [Missverständnis]."²⁴ It is necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, onto-theology or theiology, and, on the other hand, theology.²⁵ The former concerns the supreme being, the being *par excellence*, ultimate foundation or *causa sui* in its divinity. The latter is a science of faith or of divine speech, such as it manifests itself in revelation (*Offenbarung*). Heidegger

again seems to distinguish between manifestation, the possibility of Being to reveal itself (*Offenbarkeit*), and, on the other hand, the revelation (*Offenbarung*) of the God of theology.²⁶

Immense problems are screened behind these distinctions. One may follow, through Heidegger's works, the threads that we have already recognized: revelation, the promise, or the gift (*das Geben*, *die Gabe*, and the *es gibt*, which progressively and profoundly displace the question of Being and its transcendental horizon, time, in *Sein und Zeit*),²⁷ or yet the *Ereignis* which one sometimes translates, in such a problematic manner, by "event." I will limit myself to the question that my title commands: *How to avoid speaking?* More precisely: How to avoid speaking of *Being*? A question in which I will underscore equally the importance of avoiding and that of Being, as if to grant them equal dignity, a sort of common essentiality, which will not go without consequences. These are the consequences that interest me.

What does the avoidance signify here? In regard to Being or the word "Being," does it always have the mode that we have recognized for it in apophatic theologies? For Heidegger, would these be examples of aberration or of the "squared circle"—namely Christian philosophies or unacknowledged onto-theologies? Does the avoidance belong to the category or to the diagnostic of denial (*Verneinung*), in a sense determined this time by a Freudian problematic ("least of all do I say that")? Or again: with regard to the traditions and texts that I have just evoked, and in particular those of Dionysius and Meister Eckhart,²⁸ does Heidegger stand in a relationship of avoidance? What abyss would this simple word, *avoidance*, then designate?

(To say *nothing*, once again, of the mysticisms or theologues in the Jewish, Islamic, or other traditions.)

Twice, in two apparently different contexts and senses, Heidegger explicitly proposed to avoid (is there denial, in this case?) the word *being*. More exactly, not to *avoid* speaking of Being but to avoid using the word *being*. Even more exactly, not to avoid mentioning it—as certain speech-act theorists, who distinguish between mention and use, would say—but to avoid using it. Thus he explicitly proposes, not to avoid speaking of Being, nor in some way to avoid mentioning the word *being*, but to refrain from using it normally, one may say, without placing it in quotation marks or under erasure.

And in both cases, we may suspect, the stakes are serious—even if they seem to hold to the subtle fragility of a terminological, typographical, or more broadly, "pragmatic" artifice. But in both cases, the *place* is at issue, and this is why I privilege them.

1. First, in *Zur Seinsfrage* (1952), precisely in regard to thinking the essence of modern nihilism, Heidegger reminds Ernst Jünger of the necessity for a topology of Being and of the Nothing. He distinguishes this topology from a simple topography, and he has just proposed a reinterpretation of the seal, of the *typos*, of the Platonic and of the modern typography. It is then that Heidegger proposes to write *Being*, the word *being*, under erasure, an erasure in the form of a crossing out (*kreuzweise Durchstreichung*). The word *being* is not avoided; it remains readable. But this readability announces that the word may solely be read, deciphered; it cannot or must not be pronounced, used normally, one might say, as a speech-act of ordinary language. It is necessary to decipher it under a spatialized typography, spaced or spacing, printing over. Even if this does not avoid the strange word *being*, it should at least prevent and warn against, deviate from, while designating, the normal recourse (if such exists) to it. But Heidegger also warns us against the simply negative use of this *Durchstreichung*. This erasure does not, then, have *avoidance* as its essential function. No doubt, Being is not a being, and it reduces to its turns, turnings, historical tropes (*Zuwendungen*); one must therefore avoid representing it (*vorzustellen*) as something, an object that stands *opposite* (*gegenüber*) man and then comes toward him. To avoid this objectifying representation (*Vorstellung*), one will thus write the word *being* under erasure. It is henceforth not heard, but is read in a certain manner. In what manner? If this *Durchstreichung* is neither a sign nor merely a negative sign ("kein bloss negatives Zeichen"), this is because it does not efface "Being" beneath conventional and abstract marks. Heidegger understands it as showing (*zeigen*) the four regions (*Gegenden*) of what he here and elsewhere calls the fourfold (*Geviert*): earth and heavens, mortals and the divine. Why does this written cross, according to Heidegger, have nothing of a negative signification? 1. In withdrawing Being from the subject/object relation, it allows Being to be read, both the word and the meaning of Being. 2. Next it "shows" the four-

fold (*Geviert*).²⁹ But above all it *gathers*. This gathering takes place and has its *place* (*Ort*) in the crossing point of the *Durchkreuzung*.²⁹ The gathering of the *Geviert*, in a place of crossing ("Versammlung im Ort der Durchkreuzung"), lends itself to writing and reading in an indivisible *topos*, in the simplicity (*die Einfachheit*) of the point, of this *Ort* whose name appears so difficult to translate. Heidegger tells us elsewhere that this name "originally signifies" "the point of the sword."³⁰ that toward which all converges and assembles. This indivisible point always assures the possibility of the *Versammlung*. It gives place to it; it is always the gathering, *das Versammelnde*. "The place gathers toward itself at the greatest height and extremity [Der Ort versammelt zu sich ins Höchste und Äusserste]."

Nevertheless, in order to think the negative appearance of this erasure, to gain access to the origin of negativity, of negation, of nihilism, and perhaps also of avoidance, it would thus be necessary to think the place of the Nothing. "What is the place of the Nothing [der Ort des Nichts]?" Heidegger has just asked. Now he specifies: the Nothing should also be *written*, that is to say *thought*. Like Being, it should also be written and read under erasure: "Wie das ~~Sich~~, so müsste auch das Nichts geschrieben und d.h. gedacht werden."

2. Elsewhere, in an apparently different context, Heidegger explains the sense in which he would *avoid* speaking of Being, this time without placing it under erasure. More precisely, the sense in which he would avoid *writing* the word *being*. More precisely still (while remaining in the conditional mode, and this counts for much here), the sense in which "the word 'being' [das Wort 'Sein']" should not take place, occur, happen (*vorkommen*) in his text. It is not a matter of "remaining silent," as one would prefer to do, he says elsewhere,³¹ when the "thinking of God" (on the subject of God) is in question. No; the point is, rather, not to allow the word *being* to occur, on the subject of God.

The text is presented as a *transcription*. Responding to students at the University of Zürich in 1951, Heidegger recalls that Being and God are not identical, and that he would always avoid thinking God's essence by means of Being. He makes this more precise in a sentence in which I underscore the words *were*, *ought*, and *write*: "If I were yet to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word 'being'

ought not to appear there [take place there, occur, figure, or happen there] [Wenn ich noch eine Theologie schreiben würde, wozu es mich manchmal reizt, dann dürfte in ihr das Worth 'Sein' nicht vorkommen]."³²

How may one analyze the folds of denial in this conditional of writing, in the course of an oral improvisation? Can one recognize the modalities in it without first departing from the foundation and from the thing itself—here, that is, from Being and God? Heidegger speaks in order to say what *would happen if he were to write* one day. But he knows that what he says is already being written. If he were to write a theology, the word *being* would not be under erasure; it wouldn't even appear there. For the moment, speaking and writing on the subject of what he *ought* to or *could* write regarding theology, Heidegger allows the word *being* to appear; he does not use it, but mentions it without erasure when he is indeed speaking of theology, of that which he would be tempted to write. Where does this, then, take place? Does it have place? What would take place?

Heidegger continues, "Faith has no need for the thinking of Being." As he often recalls, Christians ought to allow themselves to be inspired by Luther's lucidity on this subject. Indeed, even if Being is "neither the foundation nor the essence of God [Grund und Wesen von Gott]," the experience of revelation—"occurs in the dimension of Being [in der Dimension des Seins sich ereignet]." This revelation is not that (*Offenbarung*) of which the religions speak, but the possibility of this revelation, the opening for this manifestation, this *Offenbarkeit* of which I spoke earlier and in which an *Offenbarung* can take place and man can encounter God. Although God is not and need not be thought from Being as His essence or foundation, the *dimension of Being* opens up access to the advent, the experience, the encounter with this God who nevertheless is not. The word *dimension*—which is also difference—here gives a measure while giving place. One could sketch a singular chiasmus. The anguished experience of the Nothing discloses Being. Here, the dimension of Being discloses the experience of God, who is not or whose Being is either the essence nor the foundation.

How not to think of this? This dimension of disclosure, this place that gives place without being either essence or

foundation—would not this step or passage, this threshold that gives access to God, yet be the “parvis” (*vorbürge*) of which Meister Eckhart spoke? “When we apprehend God in Being, we apprehend Him in His outer sanctuary [parvis], for Being is the *parvis* in which He resides.” Is this a theological, an onto-theological, tradition? A theological tradition? Would Heidegger adopt it? Would he disown it? Would he deny it?

I do not intend to respond to these questions, nor even to conclude with them. More modestly, in a more hasty but also more programmatic manner, I return to the enigma of avoidance, of negation, or of denial in a scene of writing. Heidegger says (then allows to be written in his name) that if he were to write a theology, he would avoid the word *being*; he would avoid writing it and this word would not figure in his text; or rather should not be present in it. What does he mean? That the word would figure in it yet under erasure, appearing there without appearing, quoted but not used? No; it should not figure in it at all. Heidegger well knows that this is not possible, and perhaps it is for this profound reason that he did not write this theology. But didn't he write it? And in it did he avoid writing the word *being*? In fact, since Being is not (a being) and in truth is nothing (that is), what difference is there between writing *Being*, this Being which is not, and writing *God*, this God of whom Heidegger also says that He is not? Indeed, Heidegger does not merely say that God is not a being; he specifies that He “has nothing to do here with Being [Mit dem Sein, ist hier nichts anzuschichten].” But since he recognizes that God announces Himself to experience in the “dimension of Being,” what difference is there between writing a theology and writing on Being, of Being, as Heidegger never ceases doing? Most of all, when he writes the word *being* under and in the place (*Ort*) of the cancellation in the form of a cross? Hasn't Heidegger written what he says he would have liked to write, a theology *without* the word *being*? But didn't he also write what he says should not be written, what he should not have written, namely a theology that is opened, dominated, and invaded by the word *being*?

With and without the word *being*, he wrote a theology with and without God. He did what he said it would be necessary to avoid doing. He said, wrote, and allowed to be written exactly what he said he wanted to avoid. He was not there without leaving a trace of all these folds. He was not

there without allowing a trace to appear, a trace that is, perhaps, no longer his own, but that remains as if (*quasiment*) his own. Not, *without*, *quasi* are three adverbs. *Quasiment*. Fable or fiction, everything happens as if I had wanted to ask, on the threshold of this lecture, what these three adverbs mean and whence they come.

P.S. One more word to conclude, and I ask your pardon for it. I am not certain that only rhetoric is at stake. But this also concerns the strange discursive modality, or rather the *step of* (not) *writing* (*pas d'écriture*), Heidegger's *passé*, *im-passe*, or *dodge*. What does he do? He says to some students, in short: if I had to write a theology (I have always dreamed of this, but I didn't do it and know that I will never do it), I would not let the word *being* occur (*workommen*). It would not have a place. It would not have the right to a place in such a text. I mention this word here but I have never let it occur. It could not figure in all my work, except in *not doing it*—since I always said that Being is *not* (a being, that is) and that it *would have always had* to be written *under erasure*, a rule that I did not in fact always observe, but which I should have respected in principle, starting from the first word, *dès le premier verbe*. Understand me: this is an erasure that would above all have nothing negative about it! And even less of denegation! Etc.

What is thus the discursive modality of this *step of* (not) *writing* and of this abyss of denial? Is it first of all a modality, a simple modality among other possible ones, or rather a quasi-transcendental recourse of writing? We should not forget that we are dealing with an oral declaration, later recorded from memory by Beda Allemann. Heidegger indeed approved this protocol, but while remarking that it did not render present the atmosphere of the discussion, nor would a “complete shorthand report” have done this: no writing could have rendered what had been said *there*.

What was said *there* was addressed to colleagues and students, to disciples, in the very broad sense of this word. Like the address of Dionysius, in his apostrophe to Timothy, this text has a pedagogical or psychological virtue. It remains a text (written or oral; no matter) only in this measure: as repetition or repeatability on an *agogic* path.

But there is never a prayer, not even an apostrophe, in Heidegger's rhetoric. Unlike Dionysius, he never says “you”:

neither to God nor to a disciple or reader. There is no place, or in any case there is no regularly assigned place, for these "neither true nor false" utterances that prayers are, according to Aristotle. This may be interpreted in at least two ways, which appear contradictory.

1. This absence signifies in effect that theology (in the sense in which Heidegger links it to faith and distinguishes it from theology and from metaphysical onto-theology) is rigorously excluded from his texts. It is well defined there but excluded, at least in what ought to *direct* it, namely the movement of faith. And in fact, while thinking that solely the truth of Being can open onto the essence of the divinity and to what the word *god* means (one is familiar with the famous passage in the "Letter on Humanism"), Heidegger says no less: "At the interior of thought, nothing could be accomplished that would prepare for or contribute to determining what happens in faith and in grace. If faith summoned me in this manner, I would close down shop. —Of course, interior to the dimension of faith, one yet continues to think; but thinking as such no longer has a task."³³ In short, neither faith nor science, as such, thinks or has thinking as its task.

This absence of prayer, or of apostrophe in general, also confirms the predominance of the theoretical, "constative," even propositional form (in the third-person, indicative present: S is P) in the rhetoric, at least, of a text which yet forcefully questions the determination of truth linked to this theoreticism and to this judicative form.

2. But at the same time, on the contrary, one can read here a sign of respect for prayer. For the formidable questions evoked by the essence of prayer: can or must a prayer allow itself to be mentioned, quoted, inscribed in a compelling, *agógic* proof? Perhaps it need not be. Perhaps it must not do this. Perhaps, on the contrary, it must do this. Are there criteria external to the event itself to decide whether Dionysius, for example, distorted or rather accomplished the essence of prayer by quoting it, and first of all by writing it for Timothy? Does one have the right to think that, as a pure address, on the edge of silence, alien to every code and to every rite, hence to every repetition, prayer should never be turned away from its part by a notation or by the movement of an apostrophe, by a multiplication of addresses? That each time it takes place only once and should never be re-

corded? But perhaps the contrary is the case. Perhaps there would be no prayer, no pure possibility of prayer, without what we glimpse as a menace or as a contamination: writing, the code, repetition, analogy or the—at least apparent—multiplicity of addresses, initiation. If there were a purely pure experience of prayer, would one need religion and affirmative or negative theologies? Would one need a supplement of prayer? But if there were no supplement, if quotation did not bend prayer, if prayer did not bend, if it did not submit to writing, would a theology be possible? Would a theology be possible?

Notes

Translator's note: I shall avoid the customary apologies and excuses, denials and disclaimers, instead merely acknowledging the assistance of Barbara Caulk and Ora Wiskind in revisions of this translation.

1. Who has ever assumed the project of the negative theology as such, reclaiming it in the singular under this name, without subordinating and subordinating it, without at least pluralizing it? On the subject of this title, the negative theology, can one do anything but deny it? Jean-Luc Marion contests the legitimacy of this title, not only for the ensemble of Dionysius' oeuvre—which goes without saying—but even for the places where there is a question of "negative theologies" in the plural ("times of *kataphatikal* theological, times at *apophatikal*") in chapter 3 of the *Mystical Theology*. Concerning "what it is suitable to call 'negative theology,'" Jean-Luc Marion notes: "To our knowledge, Dionysius employs nothing which may be translated by 'negative theology.' If he speaks of 'negative theologies' in the plural, he does not separate them from the 'affirmative theologies' with which they maintain the relationship which one describes here." (See the *Mystical Theology*, 1032 et seq.) Marion, *L'idole et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), pp. 189 and 244.

2. This occurred in diverse passages and contexts. I will cite only one in order to clarify a point and, perhaps, to respond to an objection which has the merit of not being stereotypical. In "Différance" (1968), contained in my *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 6, I wrote: "So much so that the detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of

negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology. Already we have had to delineate that *différance* is not, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything that it is not, that is, everything; and consequently that it has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent. And yet those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which as one knows are always concerned with disengaging a hyperessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge His superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being" (translation modified slightly [KF]). After having quoted this last sentence, in *L'idole et la distance*, p. 318, Jean-Luc Marion objects: "What does 'one knows' mean here? We have seen, precisely, that the so-called negative theology, in its depths [my italics], does not aim to reestablish a 'hyperessentiality,' since it aims at neither predication nor at Being; how, a *fortiori*, could there be a question of existence and essence in Dionysius, who speaks a sufficiently ordinary Greek to see it in neither the idea nor the usage?" Here, too briefly, are some elements of a response. 1. In speaking of presence or absence, of existence or essence, I sought merely to specify, in a cursory manner, the different categories or modalities of presence in general, without precise historical reference to Dionysius. 2. Whatever may be the complex and quite enigmatic historicity of the distinction between essence and existence, I am not sure that it is simply ignored by Dionysius; how can one be certain of the absence of such a distinction at any stage of the Greek language? What does "a sufficiently ordinary Greek" mean? 3. What does "in its depths" mean here? What does it mean that "negative theology," in its depths, does not aim to reestablish a "hyperessentiality"? First of all, as Marion knows better than anyone else, it is difficult to consider accidental the reference to this hyperessentiality which plays a major, insistent, and literal role in so many texts by Dionysius—and by others, who I will cite later. Next—beyond this obvious case, the only one to which I had to refer in a lecture that was not devoted to negative theology and did not even name Dionysius—it is necessary to elaborate an interpretive discourse as interesting and original as that of Marion, at the crossing, in the wake, sometimes beyond thoughts like those of Heidegger, Urs von Balthasar, Levinas, and some others, to distinguish the "depths" (the thinking of the gift, of paternity, of distance, of celebration, etc.) from what in the so-called "negative theology" still seems to be very concerned with hyperessentiality. But without

being able to develop this third point here, I will return to it below, at least in principle and in an oblique fashion.

3. Concerning a paradoxical writing of the word *without* (*sans*), notably in the work of Blanchot, I allow myself to refer to the essay "pas" in *Gramma* (1976), nos. 3–4, reprinted in my *Parages* (Paris: Gallée, 1986). *Dieu sans l'être* is the magnificent title of a book by Jean-Luc Marion (Paris: Fayard, 1982), to which I cannot do justice in the space of a note or the time of a lecture. This title remains difficult to translate. Its very suspension depends on the grammatical vacillation that only French syntax can tolerate—precisely in the structure of a title—that is, of a nominal or incomplete phrase. *L'* may be the definite article of the noun *être* (*God without Being*), but it can also be a personal pronoun—object of the verb to be—referring to God, from God to God Himself who would not be what He is or who would be what He is *without being* (*tf*) (*God without being God, God without being*): God with and without being. On the subject of a title's syntax, Levinas preferred to say—also in a most singular syntax, no doubt in order to avoid this ultimate precedence of Being or of the predicative sentence that would insinuate itself here—rather than "Being without Being," "God with or beyond Being," extra-essence, or hyperessence; *otherwise than Being*. Let us not forget these fairly recent, thought-provoking titles—*Dieu sans l'être* and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974–78)—which seek, in two very different ways, to avoid what Levinas calls the contamination by Being, in order to "hear God not contaminated by Being" for example. Grammar does not suffice, but it never reduces to an accessory instrumentality; by the word *grammar* one designates a discipline and its history, or more radically the modalities of writing—how one writes of God. The two cited titles lead the way to two major responses to the question I would like to raise: how not to say or speak? Otherwise, and implicitly: how not to speak Being (how to avoid speaking—of Being)? How to speak Being otherwise? How to speak otherwise (*than*) being? And so on.

4. Meister Eckhart, *Quasi stella matutina*. All translations of Meister Eckhart's sermons are based on *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936), vols. 1–3. The present passage appears in 1:145–46.

5. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, in *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1980), ch. 1:998a et seq. References to these two works, cited in the text as *MT* and *DN*, are modified slightly from this translation [KF]. For obvious reasons, I will sometimes quote several words of the original text [JD].

6. Here the author alludes to the grammar of biblical Hebrew, which does not employ a present-tense form of the verb *to be*; the previous paragraph refers to a messianic motif in the Passover Haggadah [KF].

7. *Adolescens, tibi dico: surge*, in *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, 2:305.

8. Provenance of the call: Jerusalem. Sanford Budick had just called. He had to record a title, however provisory, on the program of the colloquium. I must associate the memory of this telephone call with that of a telegram. It also came from Jerusalem and was signed by Sanford Budick, who was then preparing the volume, which has since appeared, *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986). Having learned that in Seattle, during a colloquium devoted to Paul Celan, I had given what he called a "lecture on circumcision," he asked me: "could we have a portion of that lecture or some other piece you would be willing to give us however short stop midrash volume soon going to press."

9. Here it is not possible to become directly involved with this difficult problem of Hierarchy, in particular concerning relations of translation or analogy—or regarding the rupture and heterogeneity between hierarchy as such, namely "the sacred ordinance," the principle or origin of sanctity, and, on the other hand, the sociopolitical order. One may follow Jean-Luc Marion as far as possible when he dissociates the "hierarchy, understood from the Theandric mystery of which the Church offers us the unique place" and the "vulgar concept" or the "common concept" of hierarchy (*L'Idole et la distance*, p. 209). One might even agree with certain of his more provocative formulations ("the political model of hierarchy has nothing to do with the mystery of the hierarchy which opens onto the communion of saints. The deliberate or naive equivocation betrays the perversion of the look, and does not even merit refutation. At issue is only seeing, or not seeing"; p. 217). No doubt, but what it is also necessary to see is the historic, essential, undeniable, and irreducible possibility of the aforementioned perversity which is perhaps only considerable by first having been observable, as one says, "in fact." How is the "vulgar concept" constituted? This is what it is also necessary to see or not to see. How is it possible that "distance"—in the sense Marion gives to this word and which also makes up the distance between the two hierarchies—can have let itself be overstepped or "traversed" and give place to the analogical translation of one hierarchy into another? Can one proscribe here an "analogy" which appears nevertheless to support all of this construction? And if the translation is bad, erroneous, "vulgar," what would be the good political translation of the hierarchy as a "sacred

ordinance"? This is only a question, but it is not impossible that its matrix holds others of the same kind in reserve, on the subject of the trinitarian Thearchy of which the hierarchy would be "the icon, at once resembling and dissembling" (p. 224; and the entire exposition on pp. 207ff starting from the term "hierarchy" which "Dionysius mobilizes" and which "our modernity prohibits us from the outset from understanding correctly"); and thus on the subject of the trinitarian or patristic scheme sustaining a thinking of the gift that does not necessarily require it or that perhaps finds in it a strange and unfathomable economy, in other words a fascinating limit. Here I must interrupt this lengthy note on a noneconomy or an anarchy of the gift, which nevertheless has concerned me for a long time. In this regard I feel that Marion's thought is both very close and extremely distant; others might say opposed.

10. *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, p. 564a. Quotations from this work are translated from the French version cited by Derrida, as are a few short passages from the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*.

11. "The infinite *différance* is finite." See Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays*, trans. David Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 102.

12. This allusion referred to a seminar on Jeremiah which had just taken place in Jerusalem (at the Institute for Advanced Studies), shortly before this colloquium, and to a large extent with the same participants. Concerning that which a question (be it the "piety of thought") must already contain in itself and which no longer belongs to the questioning, see my *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Gallée, 1987), pp. 147ff.

13. Despite this silence, or in fact because of it, one will perhaps permit me to interpret this lecture as the most "autobiographical" speech I have ever risked. One will attach to this word as many quotation marks as possible. It is necessary to surround with precautions the hypothesis of a self-presentation passing through a speech on the negative theology of others. But if one day I had to tell my story, nothing in this narrative would start to speak of the thing itself if I did not come up against this fact; for lack of capacity, competence, or self-authorization, I have never yet been able to speak of what my birth, as one says, should have made closest to me: the Jew, the Arab.

This small piece of autobiography confirms it obliquely. It is performed in all of my foreign languages: French, English, German, Greek, Latin, the philosophic, metaphilosophic, Christian, etc.

In brief, how not to speak of oneself? But also: how to do it

without allowing oneself to be invented by the other? or without inventing the other?

14. A long introduction to this work in progress has appeared under the title *Chora*, in a volume in honor of Jean-Pierre Vernant.

15. See my essay "Le retrait de la métaphore." In *Psyché*, pp. 63-93.

16. Quoted by Jean-Luc Marion in *L'idole et la distance*, p. 249. Here I refer to this work, and in particular to the chapter "The Distance of the *Requisit* and the Discourse of Encomium: Dionysius." I must admit that I had not read this book at the time of writing this lecture. This book was in fact published in 1977, and its author had amicably sent it to me. Discouraged or irritated by the signs of reductive misunderstanding or injustice concerning me, which I thought I had immediately discerned, I made the mistake of not continuing my reading, thus allowing myself to be diverted by quite a secondary aspect (namely, his relationship to my work); today, after rereading Dionysius and preparing the present lecture, I better perceive the force and the necessity of this work—which does not always signify, on my part, an agreement without reservations. Since the limitations of this publication do not permit me to explain myself, I defer the matter until later. Nevertheless, the few lines in which I distinguish between prayer and encomium, like the references to *Dieu sans l'être*, were subsequently added to the exposition that I had devoted to prayer in the lecture read in Jerusalem. I did this in response and in homage to Jean-Luc Marion, who seems to me to give the impression all too quickly that the passage to the encomium is the passage to prayer itself, or that between these two the passage is immediate, necessary, and in some way analytic. Notably, when he writes: "Dionysius tends to substitute another verb for the speaking of predicative language, ἠμμενόν, to praise. What does this substitution signify? It no doubt indicates the passage of the discourse to prayer, because 'prayer is a λόγος, but neither true nor false' (Aristotle) (p. 232). What Aristotle says, as a matter of fact, in the *Pert Hermeneias* (17a), is that if all *logos* is significant (*semanitikes*), only one in which one can distinguish the true and false is *apophantic*, and constitutes an affirmative proposition. And he adds: this does not appertain to all *logos*; "thus prayer [*leukhè*] is a discourse [*logos*], but neither true nor false [all'outè alethès oute pseudes]." But would Aristotle have said that the encomium (*hymnein*) is not apophantic? That it is neither true nor false? That it has no relationship to the distinction between the true and the false? One may doubt this. One may even doubt it in the case of Dionysius. For if the encomium or the celebration of

God indeed does not have the same rule of predication as every other proposition, even if the "truth" to which it lays claim is the higher truth of a hyperessentiality, it celebrates and names what "is" such as it "is," beyond Being. Even if it is not a predicative affirmation of the current type, the encomium preserves the style and the structure of a predicative affirmation. It says something about someone. This is not the case of the prayer that apostrophizes, addresses itself to the other and remains, in this pure movement, absolutely pre-predicative. Here it does not suffice to underscore the performative character of utterances of prayer and encomium. The performance itself does not always exclude predication. All the passages from the *Divine Names* or the *Mystical Theology*, to which Marion refers in a note (n. 65, p. 249) as "confirmation," involve an encomium or, as M. de Gandillac sometimes translates, a celebration that is not a prayer and that entails a predicative aim, however foreign it may be to "normal" ontological predication. One may even risk the following paradox: sometimes the celebration can go further than the prayer, at least in supplementing it where it cannot "accomplish" itself, namely, as Dionysius says, in the "union" (*DN*, ch. 2:680bcd). Even if the encomium cannot merely bring to light (*ekphainetn*) or say, it says and determines—as that which it is — the very fact that it cannot show and know, and to which it cannot unite itself even by prayer. If prayer, at least according to Dionysius, tends toward union with God, the encomium is not prayer; it is at most its supplement. It is what is added to it, when union remains inaccessible or fails to occur, playing the role of substitute, but also determining the referent itself, which is also the cause (the *Réquisit*, Marion would say) of the prayer. It can incite to prayer, it can also follow it, but it is not identical with it. From many other possible examples, here I recall only the one Marion rightly quotes, underscoring a few words: "We must merely recall that this discourse does not aim to bring to light (*εκφαινει*) the hyperessential essence insofar as it is hyperessential (because it remains unspeakable, unknowable, and thus entirely impossible to bring to light, *eluding all union*), but much rather to praise the procession which makes the essences and which comes before all the beings of the [trinitary] thearchy, a principle of essence" (*DN*, ch. 5:816c; cited by Marion on pp. 249-50). This passage may be found on p. 128 of the (often different) translation by Maurice de Gandillac in the (*Œuvres Complètes* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1943). Not to bring to light, not to reveal (*εκφαινει*), not to make access to it by a revelation reaching "union": this is not exactly not to speak, not to name, nor even to abstain from attributing (even if this is beyond Being). This is not to avoid speaking. It is even to start to speak in order to

determine the addressee of the prayer, an addressee who is also *aitia*, of course, and cause or *requisit* of the prayer, according to a trinitary beyond of Being, a thearchy as principle of essence.

17. Marlon, *L'idole et la distance*, p. 240.
18. *Quasi stella matutina*, in *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, 1:142.
19. Repetition appears at once proscribed, impossible and necessary, as if it were necessary to avoid the unavoidable. To analyze the law of these paradoxes from the viewpoint of writing (notably in the current sense of the word) or of a pedagogical initiation—which is much more than a “point of view”—it would be necessary to follow very closely such a passage in the *Divine Names*, for example, as that which explains to us why it would be “folly” to “repeat the same truths twice.” For example, those of the *Theological Elements* of “our preceptor Hierotheus.” If Dionysius undertakes to write other treatises, “and particularly that which one reads here [kat ten parousian theologian],” it is only to introduce *supplements* adapted to our forces (expositions, clarifications, distinctions), where Hierotheus had magisterially contented himself with a collective picture of fundamental definitions. Because these supplements do not fill a lack, they repeat without repeating what is already said, virtually. They follow the order given and obey a given order. They transgress no law; on the contrary, “everything happened as if he [Hierotheus] had proscribed that we, and all other preceptors of still inexperienced souls, introduce expositions and distinctions by a reasoning which was adapted to our forces.” But the order, the prayer, or the request also come from the reader, from the immediate addressee, Timothy, as if he reflected Hierotheus’ prescription (“everything happened as if he had proscribed that we . . .”); “And to this task you yourself have often committed us, and have sent back the book of Hierotheus, judging it to be too difficult.” From the most difficult to the simplest, the *adjunction* of supplements only compensates for our weakness and not for a gap on the side of what there is to read. Even before determining our relationship to the major text of Hierotheus, the first master, this supplementarity will have marked the relationship of Hierotheus’ writing to God’s writing, or rather, to God’s “dictation.” And thus the elite or the hierarchy—and analogy—is constituted: “the instructions of his complete and presbyterial thoughts—which might be viewed as *new adjunct writings* in conformity with the writings of those anointed of God—are for those beyond the many. Thus, we will transmit what is divine according to our logos to those who are our equals . . . The eyewitness vision of the intelligible writings and a comprehensive instruction in these require the power of a presbyter, but the knowl-

edge and thorough learning of the reason which bear one to this are adapted to those dedicated and hallowed persons who are inferiors” (*DN*, ch. 3:681bc); my italics [translation modified slightly—KFF]. Always in view of a greater sanctification, and thus of aging well, the consideration of age only takes on its sense from this analogy and this teleology.

20. This passage is translated directly from the French version cited by Derrida.
21. *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, 3:437.
22. *Ibid.*, 1:150.
23. Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953), pp. 50–51. In English, see *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 66.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 6 in the German original and p. 7 in the English translation.

25. Although this distinction is essential and stable, it does not always receive a terminological equivalent as clear as, for example, in Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 135: “The science Aristotle has described—the science that observes beings as beings—he calls First Philosophy. But first philosophy does not only contemplate beings in their beingness [Seiendheit]; it also contemplates that being which corresponds to beingness in all purity: the supreme being. This being, *to Theion*, the Divine [das Göttliche], is also with a curious ambiguity called ‘Being.’ First philosophy, as ontology, is also the theology of what truly is. It should more accurately be called theology. The science of beings as such is in itself onto-theological.” See also Heidegger’s course on *Scheidung* (1936; Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1971), pp. 61–62. Insofar as it is distinct from the onto-theological theology, theology had been defined in *Sein und Zeit* (p. 10): a “more originary making explicit” of the being of man in his relation to God, starting from the “meaning of faith.” See Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), 2:58–59. In the preceding chapter, “Nihilismus, nihil und Nichts,” Heidegger defines the essence of nihilism (from which Nietzsche will not have escaped); not to take seriously the question of the Nothing, “the essential non-thinking of the essence of the Nothing [das wesenhafte Nichtdenken an das Wesen des Nichts]” (*Ibid.*, pp. 53–54).

26. See, in particular, the resumé of a session of the *Académie évangélique*, early in December 1953, in Hofgeismar, Heidegger et la

question de Dieu, trans. Jean Greisch (Paris: Grasset 1980), p. 335.

27. *Es gibt die Zeit, es gibt das Sein*, says "Zeit und Sein" in 1962. Later printed in Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969), pp. 1-25. There is no question of reversing priority or a logical order and saying that the gift precedes Being. But the thinking of the gift opens up the space in which Being and time give themselves and give themselves to thought. Here I cannot enter into these questions, to which in the 1970s I devoted a seminar at the *École normale supérieure* and at Yale University ("Donner le temps"), which expressly orient all the texts I have published since about 1972.

28. Heidegger sometimes quotes Meister Eckhart, and frequently in regard to the thinking of the thing. "As the old master of reading the living, Meister Eckhart, says, in what is unspeakable of their language [i.e., that of things] is God first God" (Martin Heidegger, *Der Feldweg* [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1953], p. 4; my italics). It is always on the subject of the thing that he associates the name of Dionysius (who, to my knowledge, he cites nowhere else) with that of Eckhart: "Meister Eckhart employs the word *dinc* both for God and for the soul. . . . Thereby this master of thought [my italics] by no means wishes to say that God and the soul are similar to a boulder: a material object; *dinc* is here the cautious and reserved name for something that is in general. Thus Meister Eckhart says, following a passage of Dionysius the Areopagite: *du münne ist der natur, daz si den menschen wardelt in die dinc; die er münnet* [the nature of love is that it transforms man into the things he loves]. . . . Like Meister Eckhart, Kant speaks of things and understands, by this word, something that is. But for Kant, what is becomes an object of representation [Gegenstand des Vorstellens]" ("Das Ding," *Vorträge und Aufsätze* [Pfullingen: Neske, 1954], p. 169). I quote this last phrase because, as we shall see, it is not without relation to the reason for which Heidegger writes the word *being* under erasure. Concerning the concept of *Gemüt* in Heidegger and a tradition that also leads back to Eckhart, among others, see my *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Gallée, 1987), p. 125 and *passim*.

29. By an analogous but no doubt radically different gesture, Jean-Luc Marion inscribes the name of God under a cross in *Dieu sans l'être*, "crossing ~~God~~ with the cross which reveals Him only in the disappearance, His death and resurrection" (pp. 152-153). This is another thinking of the gift and of the trace, a "theology" which would be "rigorously Christian" by sometimes opposing itself to the most kindred thoughts, those of Heidegger in particular: "these questions could join together in a topical, apparently modest ques-

tion: does the name of ~~God~~, who crosses Himself with a cross because He crucifies Himself, arise from Being? We say nothing of 'God' in general, or of thought which takes its starting-point from the divine, hence also from the fourfold; we speak of the ~~God~~ who crosses himself with a cross because He reveals Himself by His being placed on the cross, the ~~God~~ revealed by, in, and as Christ; in other words, the ~~God~~ of rigorously Christian theology" (p. 107). By placing a cross on "God" rather than on "Being," Marion proposes to subtract the thinking of the gift, or rather of the trace of the gift, because there is also and still at issue a thinking of the trace, from the Heideggerian fourfold: "~~God~~ gives. The giving [donation], giving one cause to guess how 'it gives,' a donation, provides the only accessible trace of Him who gives. Being/beings, like everything, if it is taken into view as a giving, can therein allow one to guess the trace of another gift. Here solely the model of the gift which one admits is important—appropriation or distance. In the former case, naturally, the agency of ~~God~~ could not intervene, since the giving [donner] is included in the fourfold. . . . There remains to be glimpsed—if not with Heidegger, at least from his reading and, if necessary, against him—that ~~God~~ does not belong to Being/beings, and even that Being/beings arises from distance" (pp. 153-54). This thinking of the trace is thus also that of a "distance" not reducible to the ontological difference.

30. See, among many other places, the first page of Martin Heidegger, "Die Sprache im Gedicht: Eine Erörterung von Georg Trakls Gedicht," in Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), p. 37. In English, see Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 159.

31. "Metaphysics is onto-theology. Whoever has experienced theology in its own roots—both the theology of the Christian faith and that of philosophy—today prefers, in the realm of thinking, to remain silent [schweigen] about God. For the onto-theological character of metaphysics has become questionable [fragwürdig] for thought, not on the basis of any atheism, but out of the experience of a thinking that has shown, in onto-theology, the as yet unthought unity of the essence of metaphysics." See the bilingual edition of Martin Heidegger's *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 54-55 and 121. I have underscored the words remain silent.

32. This seminar was translated and presented by F. Fédier and D. Saadatian in the review *Po&sie* (1980), vol. 13, and the passage I quote was also translated in the same year by Jean Greisch in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, p. 334. The German text of the

privately circulated edition was quoted, for the passage that interests us, by J.-L. Marion, in *Dieu sans l'être*, p. 93.

33. Report of a session of the Evangelical Academy in Hofgeismar, December 1953, trans. Jean Greisch, in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, p. 335.

FOUR

On Not Solving Riddles Alone

Michel Despland

A strange necessity haunts the history of philosophy. Fresh conflicts periodically arise to remind readers that philosophy is more than the accumulation (or sifting) of true statements that can be found in books. To limit examples to the Platonic corpus, my teacher René Schaefer in 1938 wrote *La Question platonicienne* to "recall" the obvious: Plato wrote dialogues, and any examination of their content should also pay attention to their form. More recently, Jacques Derrida¹ broke with a long line of philosophers who found *Phaedrus* badly organized by examining attentively the way the dialogue was composed; not surprisingly, he was led to subtler thoughts than those commonly discerned by commentators who had concluded that Plato was not in good form when he wrote this piece (on grounds of being either too young or too old). All those who have gone some distance in the understanding of Plato now acknowledge that his philosophical dialogues are also works of art, and that the *logos* in them entertains constant (and varied) relations to *mythos*.² Besides being committed to the quest for knowledge and true opinions, Plato also strove to use language in a manner that makes it a good practice. (He accepts, even welcomes, public accountability