

HEIDEGGER'S LAST GOD: WHO NOW CAN STILL SAVE US?

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(HELD IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ORGANISATION, WORK AND TECHNOLOGY)

This initiative brought together scholars from a variety of disciplines as a reading group. The textual basis of these two workshops was the profound (and often mysterious) Section 256, *Der letzte Gott (The Last God)*, of Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (translated as *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning* by Emad and Maly, 1999). Although a relatively short chapter, it delineates a very intense ground of debate. Upon this ground, with the philosopher's help, two sessions of very fertile dialogue and learning developed and a possible domain of investigation was mapped out for a wider interdisciplinary group of philosophers, theologians and religious studies experts, political and social scientists. Because one dimension of this text seemed clear: that Heidegger refers not only to matters theological or philosophical, but to the deep crises of modernity in the widest cultural, political, social, ecological and technological terms.

The group (which met on two separate days, 19 May and 16 June 2008) was formed with the purpose of a genuine scholarly overcoming of disciplinary boundaries with members from within and outside Lancaster: Dr. Laurence Hemming (University of London; author of *Heidegger's Atheism*. Notre Dame University Press, 2002); Dr. Susan Frank Parsons (President of the *Society for the Study of Christian Ethics* and editor of *Studies in Christian Ethics*); Dr. Johan Siebers (senior lecturer in communications theory at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston); Hal Broadbent (PhD student, theology, Heythrop College, University of London); Nir Shaki (PhD student, Birkbeck College, University of London) – as well as a group of Lancaster participants: Professor Michael Dillon, Politics; Professor Lucas Introna, OWT; Dr Paul Fletcher, Religious Studies; Dr Arthur Bradley, English and Creative Writing; Dr. Martin Brigham, OWT; Dr. Bogdan Costea, OWT; Mr Kostas Amiridis, PhD Student, OWT.

During the first workshop, a close reading of Heidegger's text (both in the original and in translation) allowed the emergence of a central point of concern: how does Heidegger's enigmatic question, "Given that as yet we barely grasp 'death' in its utmost, how are we then ever going to be primed for the rare hint of the last god?", speak to us in our current historical situation amidst deepening, near-abyssal anxieties, which have become however increasingly concealed to us (obsessed as we are with our frenetic and endless 'machinations')?

The second workshop became an opportunity to return to, and rediscuss, the text through a series of perspectives related to the participants' own interests: from ethics and politics, to theology and cultural history. The common thread was the attempt to problematise the relationships between Heidegger's text and the nature of the multiple political, cultural,

religious, institutional, and technological crises of modernity in its global dimensions. Interrogating the world through Heidegger's work proved thus to become a very fertile symposium about the nature of the modern *ēthos*.

The outcomes of these two workshops went beyond the initial anticipations. First, the most substantive effects of these events revolved around: the realisation that such deep dialogues can be had (despite the pressures on intellectual overproduction and individualised 'career velocities' – all understandable, of course, but severely debilitating); that disciplinary limitations evaporate rapidly, or metamorphose into actual conceptual resources instead of obstacles; and – finally – that the intellectual energy of such occasions is extremely stimulating and thus more productive than an utilitarian approach would be able to conceive of. Moreover, such events have a significant potential to establish an image of our university as a place for outstanding scholarship and collegial generosity.

In very concrete terms, the energy developed by the group has generated the desire to formulate a structured set of future interactions for the period 2008-2010 at Lancaster University. The fundamental thematic for this project revolves around Heidegger's notion of *machination* and the interpretation of contemporary life in the global dominion of *machinations*. The tentative title for over all scheme is thus *The Machination of Life Itself: Politics, Globalisation, and the Absence of Hints of the Last God*.

The group plans to meet once more before it opens up to a more general constituency in October 2008 for a one-day event (organised around three sessions of 1½ hours) on the theme of *Epochal Nihilism*. The next stage would be a wider one-day workshop in the Easter period of 2009 to explore the relation between politics and the Last God. These two preparatory workshops will lead to the organisation in October 2010 of an international two-day conference (following the very successful *Messianic Now* Conference in 2007) for which the themes (politics, religion, and work in contemporary culture) emerging from Heidegger's text would become the framework.

As an overall conclusion, the two workshops were a novel experience for all participants. The way in which the Lancaster group made possible the hosting of such a generous interaction has been the key reason for the intellectual success of the workshops and for generating a clear desire to continue the work over the next two-three years. The expenditure was of £545.00.

[Report submitted by Bogdan Costea, 2 July 2008]