

Article

Heidegger's Way to "The Last God"

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Abstract: After *Being and Time*, "the last god" is born ex nihilo in *Contributions to Philosophy*. This has aroused extensive interest and discussion in the academic world. This paper focuses on the manifestation of "the last god" in *Contributions to Philosophy*. I will show that *Contributions to Philosophy* conveys Heidegger's "deep experience". This "deep experience" contains several key moments: solitude, stillness, silence and restraint. Solitude is the essential state of philosophers and poets. In solitude, one can enter a still place, which comes from the "stillness of Being". Silence corresponds to this stillness. Silence has an original depth. These experiences finally point to the grounding attunement of "restraint", which contains a relationship with powerful things. "The last god" appears in such deep experience, and its mode of manifestation is called "passing by".

Keywords: the last god; solitude; stillness; silence; restraint

1. Introduction

It is well known that *Contributions to Philosophy* is a very obscure text in Heidegger's whole philosophical writings. Due to the fragmentary characteristics of the text and Heidegger's unique terminology, there are large and small obstacles for understanding of *Contributions to Philosophy*. However, there is a phenomenon worth noting. Since the publication of this text, the academic interest has generally focused on the part of "the last god" (*der letzte Gott*). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says nothing about God, so the emergence of "the last god" is indeed remarkable. But it is still not easy for us to understand "the last god". Heidegger's discussion of "the last god" is short, and his description is hazy, which leaves more space for the possibilities of interpretation. Due to the different starting points, motives and purposes of the interpreters, these interpretations follow different routes. For example, some interpreters point out the connection between "the last god" and Hebrew tradition (Schürmann 1992, p. 317; Polt 2006, p. 210). Some interpreters trace "the last god" back to Schelling's philosophy (Seidel 1999, p. 85ff.). Some interpreters point out the connection between "the last god" and negative theology (Crownfield 2001, p. 219; Law 2000, p. 149).

If we do not stick to a fixed position, these interpretations are all somewhat reasonable, and it is difficult for them to disprove each other categorically. In this situation, compared with what "the last god" is like, this paper focuses on how "the last god" appears in *Contributions to Philosophy*. I will go back to the text and dig out a Heideggerian way to "the last god". I will name this way "deep experience" as a whole. "The last god" appears in such a kind of "deep experience".¹

Peter Trawny uses *adyton*, a Greek image, to describe the special experience conveyed in *Contributions to Philosophy*. *Adyton* is an inner space of the Greek temple, where the oracle is sent. Only priests and gods are allowed to enter it. Mortals can only accept the instructions of the oracle outside. Trawny uses such a metaphor to show the esoteric nature of *Contributions to Philosophy*, so as to distinguish other exoteric statements of Heidegger (Trawny 2010, p. 7). Richard Polt further distinguishes the intrinsic esotericism from the extrinsic esotericism. Extrinsic esotericism selects readers. It will hide the real information from unqualified readers and only open it to qualified one. It is based on a virtue of "prudence", which is either to prevent political and religious persecution, or to distinguish



Citation: Zhang, Zhenhua. 2022. Heidegger's Way to "The Last God". *Religions* 13: 762. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080762>

Academic Editor: Xin Leng

Received: 11 July 2022

Accepted: 18 August 2022

Published: 21 August 2022

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between different types of mankind. The intrinsic esotericism originates from the profound nature of philosophy itself. In this sense, Polt quoted Schelling: “Philosophy is necessarily esoteric, by its very nature. There is no need to try to keep it secret, for, instead, it is essentially mysterious” (Polt 2006, p. 16).

Considering Heidegger’s thought as a whole, *Contributions to Philosophy* is more esoteric in the intrinsic sense. I will try to rephrase this intrinsic esotericism as “deep experience”. I think Heidegger obtains a special kind of “deep experience” in *Contributions to Philosophy*. This is also the source of uniqueness of this text. I will show that in this deep experience, solitude, stillness, silence, restraint and so on belong to the deepest part.

This deep experience has several characteristics. First of all, concerning the characteristics of Heidegger’s text, *Contributions to Philosophy* is distinguished from the lecture courses or public lectures. Its intention is to keep thoughts and words within its own space, rather than spread out into the public field and become gossip. This is an essential structure of inside–outside. The inside part plays a role in its own way, which is not directly displayed, but has a certain relationship with the outside part. Secondly, such a kind of deep experience is different from our daily experience. It goes far beyond the scope of daily consideration, use and calculation. Daily experience is just simple and crude, while deep experience has a higher intensity and is elaborate. In Heidegger’s words, daily experience deals with beings, while deep experience deals with Being. Finally, deep experience belongs to the few and the rare. It is not the affair belonging to the ordinary people. Deep experience discloses the background which the ordinary people live in but not notice. Heidegger’s deep experience comes from an essential philosophical space.

2. Resonant Relationship

How to access this deep experience? I think we need to first pay attention to a core structure in Heidegger’s thought, that is, the resonant relationship between the world and the self. This structure is the essence of Heidegger’s thought. It runs through Heidegger’s philosophy from early period to the late. Here, we start from a text of Heidegger in the early period and extend it through the several different texts in the middle and late periods.

This early text is the lecture course “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview” in the war emergency semester (*Notsemester*) in 1919. This course means the beginning of Heidegger’s thought. In this course, Heidegger describes an experience of a platform. Heidegger says that the platform in our daily experience is not first perceived as a brown, multifaceted thing, then understood as a “box”, then as a “table”, and finally as a “platform”. On the contrary, it is experienced by us at once as a teaching tool in the connection of the environment. In other words, it is a meaningful experience from the beginning. “The meaningful (*das Bedeutsame*) is primary and immediately given to me without any mental detours across thing-oriented apprehension” (Heidegger 1999b, p. 73; translation: Heidegger 2000, p. 61). Heidegger associates this kind of experience with the concept of “world” and points out that all experiences are related to the world (Heidegger 1999b, p. 73).

After discussing the pole of the world, Heidegger turns his attention and asks, in this kind of experience, can we find something about “I”: “In this experiencing, in this living-towards (*Hinleben zu*), there is something of me: my ‘I’ goes out beyond itself and resonates with (*schwingt mit*) this seeing . . . More precisely: only through the resounding together (*Mitanklingen*) of this particular ‘I’ does it experience something environmental, where we can say that ‘it worlds’. Wherever and whenever ‘it worlds’ for me, I am somehow there” (Heidegger 1999b, p. 73; translation: Heidegger 2000, p. 62). “I” is not a being opposite to the world. “I” is devoted to the world and integrated with the world. “I” and the world are in the relationship of “resonates with”, “resounding together”, which indicate the resonant relationship between the “I” and the world.

Heidegger further analyzes that this initial resonant relationship is destroyed in the process of objectification of research activities. In the research attitude, the “I” no longer resonates and resounds. Accordingly, the world no longer worlds. The “I” disappears

and the world gradually becomes an “object”. The world as an object no longer “touches” (*Berührt*) me. Living experience (*Er-leben*) is distant away from life (*Ent-leben*). It fades and becomes pale. The original living thing turns into dead. What is originally an integral whole separates now (Heidegger 1999b, p. 74). This separation is the separation between “subject” and “object”. It is the beginning of theorization, which is actually far away from its original source.

Heidegger mentions the “touch” of objects to me in the analysis of the experience of the platform. This “touch” has always been a key point in the subsequent development of Heidegger’s philosophy. For example, in section 12 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger mentions the construction of “being-in” of *Dasein*, which is defined as “being-in-the-world”. In this regard, “being-in” means to dwell in the world, to be together with the world and to be absorbed in the world. Heidegger points out that only on the premise of being in the world, what exists in the world can touch (*berühren*) something. In this regard, the chair cannot “touch” the wall. Because “a being can only touch an objectively present being within the world if it fundamentally has the kind of being of being-in—only if with its *Da-sein* something like world is already discovered in terms of which beings can reveal themselves through touch and thus, become accessible in their objective presence. Two beings which are objectively present within the world and are, moreover, worldless in themselves, can never ‘touch’ each other, neither can ‘be’ ‘together with’ the other” (Heidegger 1977, p. 74; translation: Heidegger 1996, p. 52). Heidegger points out that touch refers to “encounter” (*begegnen*) (Heidegger 1977, p. 74), that is, I can encounter things and have a relationship with them, and then I can manage them in a variety of ways. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger finally reveals that this “being-in” which means touch and encounter is fundamentally rooted in “care” (*Sorge*) (Heidegger 1977, pp. 77, 174).

In the text of 1919 mentioned above, there is another very interesting place. Heidegger calls this kind of objective thing away from living experience “process” (*Vor-Gang*). This means that it passes in front of me, but it does not touch me. It has nothing to do with my care. It is only passing in front of the subject who implements cognitive behavior (Heidegger 1999b, p. 74). This relationship is the essence of theoretical attitude. On the contrary, in the original experience, “it is not a process but rather an event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) . . . Lived experience does not pass in front of me like a thing, but I appropriate (*er-eigne*) it to myself, and it appropriates itself according to its essence” (Heidegger 1999b, p. 75; translation: Heidegger 2000, p. 63). This is roughly the first time Heidegger uses the word *Ereignis*. In the initial use of this word, Heidegger compares it with *Vorgang* and emphasizes the integrated relationship between *Ereignis* and “I”. Heidegger further explains that this dynamic appropriating does not mean occupying my experience from the outside. Instead, there is no so-called “inside” and “outside”, just as there is no so-called physical and psychological difference (Heidegger 1999b, p. 75). “I” is not inside, nor is the world outside. “I” and the world coexist and are in a resonant relationship.

As we all know, *Ereignis* is the leading word of Heidegger’s later thought. Resonant relationship is just a basic connotation of *Ereignis*. In *The Principle of Identity* (1957), which is a key text to understand *Ereignis*, Heidegger emphasizes such a kind of relationship: “*Er-eignis* is a field that swings in itself. Through this field, human beings and Being reach each other (*erreichen*) in their essence . . . ” (Heidegger 2006, p. 46). From Heidegger’s use of the word “reach each other”, we can see that *Ereignis* contains the interactive relationship between Being and human beings. Peter Trawny calls this relationship as “dialogic structure” (*dialogische Struktur*). In this structure, two elements move toward each other and at the same time move away from each other (*aufeinanderzu- bzw. voneinanderwegbewegen*) (Trawny 2003, p. 99). It means that *Ereignis* builds the foundation for human beings as *Dasein*; In turn, human beings as *Dasein* also build the foundation for *Ereignis* (Heidegger 2003b, p. 261).

Ereignis, as a relationship, is not a being, but an open space, which is the “foundation” for Being and human beings to come from. This “foundation” itself is a place of emptiness. It is like a field of light without any fixed light source, which is purely constitutive. The

foundation is not any one of the two elements, but the intertwined relationship itself between the two elements.

So, we can see that Heidegger's "resonant relationship" means that the state of the self determines the way the world unfolds. At the same time, the unfolding of the world also constantly determines the state of the self. The self and the world present as two poles of mutual determination and circulation.

3. Mood

The most typical foothold of this resonant relationship between the self and the world is "mood" or "attunement" (*Stimmung*).

In Heidegger, mood is not just emotion or feeling. It is not something that people have subjectively. It is not a private, relative, variable thing. What mood needs is not the research of psychology and anthropology. For Heidegger, mood has an ontological status.

In the previous reference to *Being and Time*, we mentioned the structure of "being-in" of *Dasein*. We said that this "being-in" rooted in "care" reveals the resonant relationship between the self and the world. Heidegger just regards mood and understanding as more primitive moments of "being-in" than cognition.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes three determinations on mood: 1. the unfolding of thrownness (*Erschließen der Geworfenheit*) (Heidegger 1977, p. 182); 2. the respective unfolding of the whole "being-in-the-world" (*jeweiligen Erschließen des ganzen In-der-Welt-seins*) (Heidegger 1977, p. 182); 3. a disclosive submission to world (*eine erschließende Angewiesenheit auf Welt*) (Heidegger 1977, p. 183). The first determination points to the dimension of time of the past, which means the passivity of human beings. The second determination points to the dimension of time of the current, which means the revealing power of mood to the current things. The third determination just points to the resonance between the self and the world. Submission to world refers to our daily activities being moved by things (*Betroffenwerden, Betroffenheit*), being touched by things (*angegangen werden, Angänglichkeit*) (Heidegger 1977, p. 183). This is just the resonant relationship.

In the thought of the middle and late period, Heidegger more firmly uses the word *Stimmung* which has already appeared in *Being and Time*: "but first of all, if we are not first grasped (*ergriffen sind*) by the things that concepts want to catch (*begreifen*), then we will never grasp these concepts and their conceptual strictness. This state of graspedness (*Ergriffenheit*), its arousing and rooting function, is the basic thing that philosophical activities are committed to. And all the state of graspedness comes from and remains in *Stimmung*" (Heidegger 2004a, p. 9). Heidegger believes that thought cannot be separated from mood, and an idea must emerge in corresponding mood. It is not that we grasp the concept and then control things, but that we penetrate the concept and are grasped by what the concept points to. This kind of grasping means that philosophical activities are always surrounded by *Stimmung*.

Not only philosophy, but also poetry comes from such a kind of *Stimmung* (Heidegger 1999a, p. 79). In the winter semester of 1934/35, Heidegger makes four determinations on mood which are different from *Being and Time*: 1. transporting out into (*entrückend in*) beings as a whole; 2. transporting into (*einrückend in*) the earth; 3. opening beings; 4. grounding for Being (Heidegger 1999a, p. 181).

The first determination is about the ecstasy of *Dasein*, which goes outward and fundamentally faces beings as a whole. This is also called by Heidegger as "exposing" (*Ausgesetztheit*) into beings as a whole (Heidegger 1999a, p. 141). In this outward exposure, the self is "attuned" (*stimmen*) by beings as a whole. Therefore, in the article "On the Essence of Truth" (1930), Heidegger says: "every behavior of historical human beings, whether it is emphasized or not, whether it is understood or not, is attuned (*gestimmt*), and through this attuning, it is pushed into beings as a whole" (Heidegger 2004b, p. 192). The "openness" of beings attunes human beings.

At the same time, the attunedness of human beings (*Gestimmtheit*) (Heidegger 2004b, p. 192) is rooted in the earth. The earth means concealment and the hidden foundation of

the mood of human being. It is something attunes human beings (*Stimmende*). “The earth is precisely attuning, and when human beings are fundamentally open in front of beings in a grounding attunement, the earth is more directly and continuously attuning” (Heidegger 1999a, p. 88). In this lecture course about Hölderlin, the earth also means rooting in locality and homeland (Heidegger 1999a, p. 140). The homeland is called by Heidegger “power of the earth” (*die Macht der Erde*) (Heidegger 1999a, p. 88), which is the concrete embodiment of the vast bearing capacity and inclusiveness of the earth. “In such a homeland, human beings first experience that they belong to the earth” (Heidegger 1999a, p. 88).

If the first and second determinations indicate the passive characteristics of mood, then the third and fourth determinations indicate the active and creative characteristics of mood.

The third determination concerns specific beings. Mood can open beings and make them accessible to us. The fourth determination concerns Being itself that makes the manifestation of any concrete beings possible. The manifestation of beings fundamentally comes from the opening of Being; and the power that makes Being open finally comes from mood.

The passivity and creativity of mood are combined together to show the resonant relationship between the self and the world. *Stimmung* prescribes thought and opens things at the same time.

4. Solitude

Mood can be a way to enter *Contributions to Philosophy*. Heidegger not only talks about the grounding attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of another beginning of Western thought, but also discusses the “grounding attunement” and the “guiding attunement” (*Leitstimmung*) in various chapters of *Contributions to Philosophy* (Heidegger 2003b, pp. 107, 169, 227, 395f.). The “grounding attunement” seems to be a main line of *Contributions to Philosophy*, which connects and dominates the whole manuscript through a variety of “guiding attunement” as branch lines. (Gander 1994, p. 16).

Here, we try to start with the mood of “solitude”, which is neither grounding attunement nor guiding attunement but very important to understand Heidegger’s thought. Rainer Marten, a student of late Heidegger, once pointed out the significance of solitude for Heidegger: “Heidegger always seeks silence, isolation and solitude again and again, so that he can focus on his work—the ‘study room’ in *Messkirch*, *Zählingen*, *Todtnauberg* and *Beuron*. If he also feels solitary in his work, then this solitude does not mean being alone and self-lost, not the kind of loneliness that ‘modern people’ often call. Solitude is the necessary air he breathes, so that he can concentrate so as to make an insight to have a public impact in a richer way, and can interact with others. It is a kind of solitude in order to be alone and find oneself” (Marten 1991, p. 59).

In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger mentions that “the few” have the supreme courage to face solitude (Heidegger 2003b, p. 11)². The few here refer to “the questioners” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 12). These questioners ask the essence of truth, so as to unfold the truth of Being. We can see that it is the Heideggerian style of determination of the philosopher.

In the interpretation of Plato’s *Republic* in the winter semester of 1931/32, when Heidegger explained the last stage of the cave metaphor in the *Republic*, that is, when the philosopher left the cave and returned to the cave, he described the situation that the philosopher would look ridiculous to the people who were used to the darkness of the cave. He said that philosophers were solitary: “a philosopher must remain solitary because he is solitary by nature. His solitude does not need to be comforted” (Heidegger 1997a, p. 86). In the explanation of the same paragraph during the lecture course in 1933, Heidegger said: “the philosopher is solitary, which belongs to the essence of the philosopher. what matters is to exist in his way, in his world position. He is more and more solitary, because he cannot return to the cave. He speaks out of solitude at the critical moment” (Heidegger 2001, p. 183). Philosophers always remain solitary. Instead of canceling, he strengthens this solitude. His speech comes from solitude. In the crowd, in the cave, the solitude

of philosophers becomes more and more distinct; because solitude is not an accidental situation for philosophers. It is an essential state.

In fact, this solitude does not belong only to philosophers, but also to poets. Heidegger believes that Hölderlin is such a kind of solitude person. It is true that Hölderlin was unknown in his life. He was depressed and frustrated all his life. He lived as a “marginal person”, who was not discovered by the Germans until the beginning of the 20th century. However, this experience is only an accidental phenomenon for Heidegger, and its origin roots in “a necessity on the metaphysical level” (Heidegger 1999a, p. 135). As long as someone is real poet or philosopher, he must be in a kind of solitude, because he is in a unique metaphysical position. We can see that Heidegger has a special preference for “solitary people”. He calls Heraclitus, Nietzsche and Hölderlin such solitary people and believes that in the history of thought they constitute a close sequence. These solitary people face each other in their solitary positions (Heidegger 1999a, p. 269).

The solitude of philosophers and poets is not an occasional feeling, but a state of being. This state of being means complete independence. Complete independence points to a towering position, which surpasses the times and the public. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* in 1935, Heidegger interpreted Sophocles’ *Antigone*. He called poets, philosophers and even politicians “creators” there. These creators stood high above in the city-state (*polis*), but at the same time, they were bound to lose the city-state, that is, law, boundary and order, because as creators, they must first create all these (Heidegger 1983a, p. 162).

As long as the self and the world have a resonant relationship in mood, the solitude of philosophers and poets is not just to return to themselves and find their authentic existence, but to open themselves to the world and reach the highest and deepest part of things. Therefore, the “individuation” in *Being and Time* is further deepened into “solitariness”: “this kind of individuation (*Vereinzelung*) is rather that kind of solitariness (*Vereinsamung*)” (Heidegger 2004a, p. 8). In this solitude, “everyone is close to the essence of all things and the world” (Heidegger 2004a, p. 8).

However, Heidegger believes that current age destroys solitude. Questioning is absent in our age. Everything is familiar, common and knowable. Such an unquestionable age can only be overcome by an “age of simple solitude” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 110).

In the face of this state of age, Heidegger believes that it is necessary to implement a retreat, “retreat from all fields of semblant ‘cultural activity’ and admit that no necessity reigns there any longer” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 114). Cultural production is an illusion in the current age, because they have no roots and do not grow from the origin. We must withdraw from these noisy illusions, so as to at least create the conditions for obtaining the real thing first. It takes courage to break through a stubborn habit, because it leads to the unsafe and unknown. In order to achieve this solitude, Heidegger summons a “courage to retreat” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 114).

We can see that Heidegger himself carries out this retreat in his life. First, he retreats from the public. Secondly, he retreats from the city. Finally, he retreats from universities.

In the sense of multiple retreats, the cabin in *Todtnauberg* is a unique place for Heidegger. In *Todtnauberg*, the distance from public society, urban civilization and universities is opened, and Heidegger returns to himself and the space of thought. The corresponding environment will arouse the corresponding mood. *Todtnauberg* meets the basic conditions for staying solitary: it is halfway up the mountain, far away from the city, the universities and close to nature.

So, Heidegger needs to live and work alone in *Todtnauberg* from time to time. Most of his works and manuscripts are written from the special environment of *Todtnauberg*. On 18 September 1932, Heidegger wrote to Elisabeth Blochmann that he had been in the cabin for four weeks and had been alone since the beginning of the semester. He refused all visitors, and there was no mail on the mountain. No one knew where he was. “As long as I am completely solitary here on the mountain, everything jumps to me; including all kinds of moods, problems and positions during my previous work” (Heidegger and Blochmann 1989, p. 53). In the early 1930s Heidegger wrote the famous essay “Why Do We Stay in

the Provinces?" after rejecting the professorship of the University of Berlin. In this essay, Heidegger talked also about "solitude": "because solitude has the most unique power, it does not isolate us, but puts the whole *Dasein* into a broad and close relationship with the essence of all things" (Heidegger 1983b, p. 11).

5. Stillness and Silence

To remain solitary is not to obtain pure tranquility of soul, but to enter a still space (Heidegger 2003b, p. 47). Retreat and solitude open a still field.

Heidegger says that Being is related to a special kind of stillness. He not only uses the expression of "stillness of Being" (*die Stille des Seyns*) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 95), believing that *Dasein* needs to be restrained in the "stillness of Being" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 96), but also describes: "there is a long period of solitude and stillest rapture (*stillste Entzückungen*) by the fireside of Being . . ." (Heidegger 2003b, p. 177). Moreover, the word "stillness" is still not enough for Heidegger and the expression "the stillest stillness" (*der stillsten Stille*) is also used: "the stillest witnesses to the stillest stillness, in which an imperceptible impact reverses the truth from all the confusion of calculative correctness into its essence: keeping the most concealed concealed, the trembling of the passing by of the decision about the gods, and the essential occurrence of Being" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 395). "The stillest stillness" makes the truth get rid of the rule of calculation, get rid of the simple function of reason, and lets *Dasein* enter into the deep experience.

Heidegger further believes that "this stillness only starts from silence (*Schweigen*)" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 34). The "first thinker" of the future must be able to carry out the simplest saying in the purest reticence (*Verschweigung*) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 72). Great power lies in silence. It is the imperceptible background from which all actions, words and activities come out.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger also discusses silence, but his focus is discourse and speech. "He who never says anything is also unable to keep silent at a given moment. Authentic silence is possible only in genuine discourse" (Heidegger 1977, p. 219; translation: Heidegger 1996, p. 154). In *Contributions to Philosophy*, the original position of silence has been highlighted. We can find a group of words related to silence in *Contributions to Philosophy: Schweigen, Verschweigung, Verschwiegenheit, Verweigerung, Erschweigung*. Heidegger points out that saying comes from the "truth of Being" and obeys the "power of Being" (*Macht des Seyns*) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 79). Therefore, to get into Being itself, we need to take the way of silence instead of saying: "Silence (*Erschweigung*) originates from the essentially occurring origin of language itself" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 79). Silence occurs in the place where language comes from.

Heidegger even creates a new word *Sigetik* to describe the function of silence. *Sigetik* is based on the Greek word *sigan*, which means silence.³ In his view, silence is the "logic of philosophy" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 78). The word "logic" here should be understood from the meaning of its Greek etymology *Logos*, that is, discourse. "The essence of 'logic' is *Sigetik*" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 79). The direction of discourse has undergone a reversal, which is to absorb the possibility and power of saying in the bottomless silence. *Sigetik* is the essence of logic and discourse. Therefore, *Sigetik* is more original than logic. "Silence has higher laws than any logic" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 79). Furthermore, the saying based on deep silence itself is shown as a kind of "hint", which corresponds to "hinting-resonating concealment of *Ereignis*" (Heidegger 2003b, p. 78). In other words, saying as "hint" is consistent with the showing and concealing of Being itself.

6. Storm of Being

However, is stillness just no sound? No. Just as silence is not simply without any words (Heidegger 1997b, p. 61), stillness is not without any sound. Stillness is not a weakened search for peace. This kind of stillness just wants to simply escape noise and remain in peace all the time. For Heidegger, stillness is the preparation for the "storm" (Heidegger 1997b, p. 86).

Stillness opens the “essential violence” of Being and makes Being to be perceived (Heidegger 2003b, p. 23). In another place Heidegger says that still space is “the unprotected in-the-midst-of (*Inmitten*), which unleashes the storm of *Er-eignung*” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 243). Therefore, Daniela Vallega-Neu, who is one of the translators of *Contributions to Philosophy*, commented: “stillness does not mean motionlessness but its opposite, a most intense motion which culminates in an intense vibration, in a trembling (*Erzitterung*) which marks the moment of the decision of the gods and the inceptive swaying of being” (Vallega-Neu 2003, p. 98).

The stillness which contains the storm of Being leads to decision-making. “Decisions are made in the stillest stillness and have the longest history” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 100). In Heidegger’s view, “decision” (*Entscheidung*) is different from “resolution” (*Beschluß*). Resolution is to choose among existing options, while decision is a creative opening and differentiating (Heidegger 2003b, p. 100).

Only when there is a decision can there be a history. In Heidegger’s view, this history is a hidden history of “the great stillness” (*der Großen Stille*) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 34). Heidegger says that this great stillness must come to the world for the sake of the earth (Heidegger 2003b, p. 34). The expression here seems to indicate the dimension of the holy and “salvation”.

In contrast, the “the incidents of world-historical revolutions” require clamor, the gigantic (*das Riesige*) and the loud (*das Laute*), which destroy the great stillness (Heidegger 2003b, p. 97f.). For Heidegger, real history is not made by noisy slogans, loud cries, chaotic and blind group actions, but from a quiet and powerful stillness. We will find that Heidegger’s revelation of the stillness of historical creation contains a reflection on the whole situation in Germany at that time, especially the Nazi movement. For Heidegger, real history is a quiet change belonging to thinkers, not a mass revolutionary movement.

7. Restraint

Apart from the mass clamor, only a very small number of individuals can approach this stillness: “only those great and hidden individuals will create stillness for the passing by of God, and create stillness among themselves for the still chorus of people who are ready” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 414). This stillness prepares a possible space for “the last god”.

The first appearance of the word “stillness” in *Contributions to Philosophy* is related to the last god. At the same time, it corresponds to a grounding attunement *Verhaltenheit*: “Restraint (*Verhaltenheit*), that is, the attuning center of shock and diffidence, the fundamental characteristic of the grounding attunement, in which *Da-sein* attunes itself to the stillness of the passing by of the last god” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 17).

Verhaltenheit occupies an important position in *Contributions to Philosophy*.

In everyday German, *Verhaltenheit* means suppressedness. In terms of word formation, the root of the word is *halten*. *Halten* is a common word in German, which means “hold”. For example, Heidegger says: “every saying of Being holds itself to (*hält sich*) words and namings” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 83). Heidegger also directly uses the present participle form of *halten* to describe *Verhaltenheit*: “*Verhaltenheit*: the self-holding leaps ahead (*der an sich haltende Vorsprung*) into the turning of *Ereignis*” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 36). Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann caught the root of *halten* when explaining *Verhaltenheit*: “*Verhaltenheit* means: self-hold (*Ansichhalten*), abide (*Innehalten*) and suppress (*Verhalten*)” (von Herrmann 1994, p. 76). This is probably the most basic meaning of *Verhaltenheit*. Other verbs related to the root of *halten* used by Heidegger in *Contributions to Philosophy* include *aushalten* (endure) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 36), *innehalten* (abide) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 24), *hinübersichhalten* (keep) (Heidegger 2003b, p. 29), etc. These verbs all contain the basic meaning of *halten*.

The word *verhalten* related to *Verhaltenheit* has different usages of noun, verb and adjective. In these different usages, two directions of meaning can be distinguished. One direction points to behavior, attitude. For example, *verhalten* as a verb means to take an attitude and be in a certain situation (Grimm and Grimm 1971, p. 508ff.). *Verhalten* as a noun, means attitude, behavior. From this direction, the noun *Verhältnis* is also related,

which means relationship. Another direction of meaning is to suppress and restraint. The verb *verhalten* also means to hold back, slow down, lower, etc. *Verhalten*, as an adjective, has the meaning of depressing, holding back, restraining, lowering and so on.

To sum up, holding is the most important and basic meaning of *Verhaltenheit*: *Verhaltenheit* means standing in a state of holistic self-holding and self-controlling in relation to something.

Why does Heidegger emphasize to hold and control?

First, restraint is related to the concealment of Being. The concealment is by no means nothing, but intrinsically related to the manifestation of Being. There is a tension between concealing and manifesting. Heidegger calls it “refusal as gift” (*Verweigerung als Schenkung*): “Restraint: the pre-attunement (*Vor-stimmung*) of readiness for the refusal as gift. In restraint, there reigns (without eliminating that return) a turn toward the hesitant self-withholding as the essential occurrence of Being” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 15). “Refusal” retains the irreducible richness of Being. Restraint is “self-holding” (*ansichhalten*) in the face of this kind of refusal that is ready to come out but always controls itself (Heidegger 2003b, p. 382).

Secondly, restraint is related to a powerful experience. Heidegger uses a very special word in describing restraint, which rarely appears in other texts, “sustained wrath” (*Grimmbeständnis*): “Restraint, as style: the self-certainty of the grounding measure and of the sustained wrath of *Da-sein*” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 33). The word *Grimm* means wrath, violence and so on. It refers to an experience full of tension. Obviously, this experience is extraordinary. Human being must withstand this high-intensity experience and not be overwhelmed by it.

This powerful experience is embodied in two relationships. One relationship is the strife between world and earth. Restraint runs through the strife between world and earth (Heidegger 2003b, p. 34). Therefore, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, a contemporary text that discusses the strife between world and earth in the most detail, there is also the use of the word “restraint”: “To submit to this displacement means: to transform all familiar relations to world and to earth, and henceforth to restrain (*ansichhalten*) all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work. The restraint of this dwelling (*die Verhaltenheit dieses Verweilens*) allows what is created to become, for the first time, the work that it is” (Heidegger 2003a, p. 54)⁴. Heidegger here explains the state of people’s appreciation of works of art. Appreciation of works of art is the process of staying in the truth of the works. Staying in the truth of art works means staying in the strong and turbulent strife between world and earth. Therefore, this staying needs an ability of self-restraint, otherwise it will be swept away by this strife.

Another relationship concerns human being and the last god. The self-holding corresponds to the “stillness of the passing by” of the last god: “Restraint (*Verhaltenheit*) . . . grounding attunement, in which *Da-sein* attunes itself to the stillness of the passing by of the last god” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 17). Therefore, this stillness is not simply silence, but full of tension. Stillness and restraint work together here. The more silent it is, the more it needs to be restrained. On the other hand, the more restrained it is, the more it opens up the depth of stillness. This is probably why Heidegger believes that restraint is the most powerful thing and the softest thing at the same time (Heidegger 2003b, p. 34). In the deep stillness, we need not only remain the high-intensity of self-holding, but also keep attention. Human being then becomes the “guardian” (*Wächter*) of stillness.

8. The Last God

Through the description of solitude, stillness, silence, restraint and other moments above, the deep experience in *Contributions to Philosophy* has been unfolded. This experience is the condition of the manifestation of the last god.

About “the last god” Heidegger talks not so much. There are only four sections devoted to the part of “the last god”, which takes up a very small space in *Contributions to Philosophy*. From the perspective of history, Heidegger emphasizes that “the last god” is

different from the Greek gods, especially from the Christian God. In this sense, “the last god” is “a completely different other” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 403). This description of the specificity of “the last god” corresponds to Heidegger’s project of another beginning in the “history of Being”. In another beginning based on the new ontological foundation, divinity also appears in a completely different style.

The relationship between “the last god” and “Being” (*Ereignis*) is involved here. Heidegger points out that “the last god” needs “Being” (Heidegger 2003b, pp. 243, 409, 415). “Being” or *Ereignis* means the meaningful space in which the essence of other things appears (Heidegger 2003b, p. 412). Only when such a kind of meaningful space is opened, can “the last god” arrive. Therefore, the elucidation of “Being” is the precondition for the appearance of “the last god” (Heidegger 2003b, p. 411). In other words, the experience of “Being” and the experience of “the last god” are corresponding with each other. “The last god” is the divine experience that belongs to another beginning in the history of Being. This is similar to the relationship between medieval metaphysics and Christian God (Heidegger 2003b, p. 411).

The expression “last” indicates the extreme and “uniqueness” of the God that appears in this situation (Heidegger 2003b, pp. 408, 406, 411). “The last god” is in an extreme position in the history of Being. Therefore, it is a “deepest beginning” for history (Heidegger 2003b, p. 405).

The concrete way of manifestation of the last god in *Contributions to Philosophy* is “passing by” (*Vorbeigang*). The word *Vorbeigang* is a special formulation. At first glance, it seems very difficult to understand. In this regard, we need to refer to the description of the winter semester lecture course in 1934/35 *Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine”* (GA 39) in order to get some clue for understanding. There, Heidegger says: “*Vorbeigehen* is exactly the pattern of the presence of the gods. It is the transience of a scarcely graspable hint, which can show all the blessings and all the horrors in the passing moment (*Nu des Vorüberganges*). God has his own measures. He lingers only for a moment and hardly touches the dwellings of humans” (Heidegger 1999a, p. 111). From this expression, we can roughly see that “the passing by of the last god” points to a moment which is bright and fleeting like lightning. This instant experience with high-intensity can only be experienced by a rare person, such as Hölderlin.

In this unique experience, human being’s mission is to watch the stillness of passing by of the last god (Heidegger 2003b, pp. 252, 294, 309, 331, 406), to take care of it in restraint, to wait for it, and to make all preparations for its coming or not.

Funding: This research was funded by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant Number: 22120210229) 中央高校基本科研業務費專項資金資助.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Heidegger distinguishes between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. *Erlebnis* is criticized by Heidegger, because *Erlebnis* is something subjective and based on the separation between subject and object. On the contrary, Heidegger uses *Erfahrung* positively. *Erfahrung* corresponds to the voice of Being. I use the word “experience” in the sense of *Erfahrung*. In English translation, *Erlebnis* is translated as “lived-experience” and *Erfahrung* is translated as “experience”.
- ² Where the translation of *Contributions to Philosophy* is involved, I have referred to the translation by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. However, some specific translations will be changed and will not be indicated one by one.
- ³ The word “*swigen*” (keep silent) in medieval highland German may come from this Greek word (Duden 1997, p. 659).
- ⁴ For the translation of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, I have referred to the translation by Julian Young (Heidegger 2002, p. 40).

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