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Title: God

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1/20/2008--My colleague Robert Taylor is attempting to introduce me to the thinking of Martin Heidegger in Contributions to Philosophy, the thoughts that Heidegger more or less wrote to himself in the early 1930's and put in the drawer for a long while. This work is famously difficult and I am not claiming to understand it, but I have understood one matter: Heidegger is trying to bring us to a new beginning away from the influence of traditional metaphysics. A large part of the problem for people like me in regard to the designation, God, is the feeling that "God" understood as a being—as person-like for example—could not possibly be real. And the religions of the book—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—can feel as if God is a person. I know that this is not quite fair to those religions, in each of which there have been protests against understanding God that way, but that is the sense I always get from these monotheisms. In contrast, Heidegger engages what is most real in un-being like ways. Heidegger refers to Seyn, translated be-ing, as the ground for beings. I am still trying to understand what he means, but he clearly means that be-ing is not a being (as Heidegger elsewhere says). This seems to me at least a better starting point. There is clearly something at the heart of reality upon which everything is dependent. (We did not invent ourselves, nor did we invent the possibility that anything at all would come to be). And that something is plainly not like us. More than that it is hard to say. These thoughts explain my impatience with the theism-atheism debate. That debate centers around outmoded concepts that no longer speak well to our time. The debate does not bring us closer to a question worth asking—such as, what is the truth of be-ing? Surprisingly, unlike doctrine, the Bible is not that far from these thoughts. There is something very mysterious about God in the Bible. Plainly, God is described in anthropocentric terms in the Old Testament. But the rabbis knew and said that these ways of thinking were not faithful descriptions of God. Jesus, of course, is a being, but even in his case, the resurrection is very strange. His followers do not recognize him even when he is in front of them. It may turn out that philosophy rescues us from the misleading debate about the God of metaphysics.