

ONTO-THEOLOGY UNVEILED

ONTO-THEOLOGY UNVEILED: HEIDEGGER AND MARION
ON THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

By

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Abstract

Heidegger defines onto-theology as a calculative form of thinking that reduces everything to an object or being on the basis of an absolute grounding term. God is called upon in onto-theology to be this highest term upon whom all other beings taken as a whole are grounded in their universal “Being”. Historically, Onto-theology grounds the relationship between philosophy and theology on this system of universal ontology that admits only sameness under the conditions of causality and sufficient reason. Heidegger calls for a “step back” from onto-theology into a mode of philosophical thinking that allows beings to appear on their own terms and that gives theology a relative degree of autonomy to treat the believer’s *existential* relation to the Other. Jean-Luc Marion, on the other hand, rejects Heidegger’s “philosophical” solution to onto-theology in favour of a radically “theological” one. Marion contends that the ontological concept itself is the source of onto-theology and as such, it must be overcome in a mystical relation to the Wholly Other that accomplishes a radical reversal of philosophical thinking. Marion bolsters his theological project with a phenomenology of “givenness” that treats the paradox of the arrival of transcendence as philosophy’s highest possibility.

In this project I trace the contours of Heidegger’s and Marion’s respective steps back from onto-theology and argue that Heidegger’s earliest accounts of “factual life” offer fruitful resources to expose a residual onto-theology in Marion’s thought. I identify the deepest source of onto-theology to be any commitment to the *absolute* autonomy of theoretical thought vis-à-vis grounding commitments or worldview. Furthermore, I argue that Marion’s step back from onto-theology is not only incomplete but perpetuates the philosophical view that ontology is necessarily or structurally violent. I conclude by sketching a program for a Christian philosophy that respects the *relative* autonomy of philosophy and theology as theoretical disciplines mutually existentially rooted in worldview. This retrieval respects the basic hermeneutical conditions of philosophizing even while it opens a space for Christian philosophy to express its own ontological assumptions about the subject’s relation to the Wholly Other.

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Abbreviations

Works by Martin Heidegger

- BPP *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. Lecture course (1927). Frankfurt am Main : V. Klostermann, 1975. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Revised Edition. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.
- BT *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1977. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- FC *Die Grundbegriff der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*. Lecture course (1929/30). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1983. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.
- HT *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*. Lecture course (1925). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1979. *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, translated by, Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.
- IM *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1983. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.
- IP *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*. Lecture course (1921/22). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1985. *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, translated by Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005.
- LH "Letter on Humanism." In *Basic Writings*, edited and translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. 193-242.
- MF *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*. Lecture course (1928). Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1978. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, translated by Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- NW Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead.'" In *Martin Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, edited and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: UP, 2002. 157-99.
- OM "Overcoming Metaphysics." In *The End of Philosophy*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- OT "On The Essence of Truth." In *Basic Writings*, edited and translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. 114-41.
- OTM "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics." In *Identity and Difference*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- PA *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die Phänomenologische Forschung*. Lecture course (1921/22). Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001.

- PRL *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*. 1. *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion*, 2. *Augustinus und der Neuplatonismus*, 3. *Die philosophischen Grundlagen der mittelalterlichen Mystik*, edited by Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly, and Claudius Strube. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1995. *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, translated by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004.
- PT “*Phänomenologie und Theologie*.” Lecture (1927). Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1970. “Phenomenology and Theology.” In *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976.
- TB “Time and Being.” In *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. 1-24.
- WM “What is Metaphysics?” In *Basic Writings*, edited and translated by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. 95-112. 287-317.

Works by Jean-Luc Marion

- BG *Etant donné : Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: UP, 2002.
- CP “‘Christian Philosophy’: Hermeneutic or Heuristic?” In *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, edited by Francis J. Ambrosio. New York: Fordham UP, 1999. 247-64.
- EP *Le phénomène érotique: Six méditations*. Paris : Bernard Grasset, 2003. *The Erotic Phenomenon*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- FA “The Final Appeal of the Subject.” In *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, edited by Simon Critchley and Peter Dews. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996. 85-104.
- GWB *Dieu sans l'être: Hors-Texte*. Paris : Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982. *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: UP, 1991.
- IE *De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2001. In *Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham UP, 2002.
- ITN “In The Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology’.” In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999. 20-53.
- ITO “Is the Ontological Argument Ontological? The Argument According to Anselm and Its Metaphysical Interpretation According to Kant.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 30:1 (1992), 201-18.
- MP “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology.” *Critical Inquiry*. 20:4 (Summer 1994) Symposium on “God” 572-591.

- RG *Réduction et donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phenomenologie.* Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1989. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998.
- SP “Le phénomène saturé.” In *Phenomenologie et theologie*. Paris : Criterion, 1992. “The Saturated Phenomenon,” translated by Thomas A. Carlson. *Philosophy Today* 40 (Spring 1996): 103-24.

Introduction

The well-worn parable of the blind men and the elephant is a fitting analogy for my attempt in this project to develop a framework for the relation of philosophy and theology in the context of Heidegger's "destruction" of onto-theology. We recall that in the parable each blind man touches a different part of the same elephant – the ear, the leg, the trunk, and so on – and attempts to relay his experience of this unseen "other" to his companions. Since each man's experience of the elephant is different, each describes to the others his own interpretation of what an encounter with the *Wholly other* (*tout autre*) is really like. One blind man, touching the ear, claims that the elephant is smooth and thin; another man, whose hand encounters the leg, reports that the elephant is rough, wrinkled, and thick like a tree. Each of the blind men takes his turn at sharing the "truth" of his vision, or better, of what has been disclosed to him through his living experience, what Heidegger would call *Erlebnis* (*Er-leben*, "living through"), of the unseen other.¹

According to the common interpretation of the parable goes, the blind men are supposed to represent different individuals, each in his common failure to transcend his own horizon of finite experience in order to grasp the whole that gives itself to be perceived. The story is interpreted as a metaphor for the radical inadequacy of our experiences to the Wholly other and the necessity for a multiplicity of viewpoints to fill in the perceptual "gaps" regarding the profiles or adumbrations to which each perceiver is privy. The Wholly other is usually interpreted as God or more precisely, as a divine manifestation whose essence withdraws from view. Furthermore, the event of revelation, the self-giving, is also an experience of God only to the degree to which the (essentially blind) individual can grasp it. Further still, since no one has immediate access to the divine, one must by right accept every reasonable interpretation of it (that is, every religious tradition and belief) as though it were equally valid. The force of the parable is didactic. It is driven by the suggestion that no one claim to knowledge of the object (where the Wholly other is an important limit case) can possibly live up to its promise to deliver the whole. Indeed, though the one who asserts the veracity of his experiences is assured of their reality, the assertion itself (e.g., "the elephant is thick and rough") neither captures the essence of the whole to which it refers (since parts of the elephant are thin and smooth) nor even adequately relays the experienced "portion" of the absolute to the consciousness of others (perhaps one's understanding of thickness and roughness is not the same as another's). The parable thus implies that we ought to accept as authentic not only our own experiences of the absolute, but those of others as well, no matter how different from our own, since in the end there is assurance of a transcendental reality to which the differences conform in their phenomenal unity. In a manner that is reminiscent of the parable of three rings from Lessing's *Nathan the wise*, the parable of the blind men so interpreted leads us to concede that we must accept the epistemological conclusion that all religious experience is fundamentally unverifiable, giving each (blind) individual

¹ "Glossary of German Expressions," John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. *Being and Time*, by Martin Heidegger. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962. 509.

cause to act “as if” his beliefs were true, since an attitude of fundamental respect towards others is required in order for one to communicate one’s perspective. The ethical imperative of respect therefore accomplishes what metaphysical speculation could not. The transcendental conditions limiting each perceiver’s access to the Wholly other compels him to transcend his particular vision in favour of the universal program of respect.

Despite its apparent strengths, the above solution contains a residue of the problem Heidegger calls “onto-theology”. Heidegger’s deconstruction of onto-theology (which we will examine in Chapter 1) entails the end of every purportedly self-evident claim to knowledge of the divine, these claims are rightly bracketed by the above solution. But this solution also errs quite subtly in its claim to the self-sufficiency of knowledge. It presupposes another sort of “God’s eye view” that gives one an edge or a special narrative angle that is able to arbitrate between religious views. It is the arrogance that bans the unverifiable elements of experience from the pristine sphere of “pure” philosophical inquiry. Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology reminds us of the danger of privileging any one vision too much—to the point of establishing as an absolute what is only of relative value. For, the process of turning the epistemological principle back upon itself discloses its inner groundlessness. As has been suggested by Jeffery Robbins, it exposes a totalizing program that in a certain way codifies and explains the mystery of the unknowable Other that it encompasses into its circle of sameness, which means calculative thinking, thinking that regulates all possible encounters with the Other on the basis of some principle of reason or regulative ideal.²

The hidden *ontological* assumption Heidegger exposes in such a program is the implicit claim to have thought the hidden essence of every possible experience. The suppression of the unthought difference of the experience from its articulation results in a definitive move toward difference qua itself. Difference is reduced to different articulations of one essential experience of the Wholly other, which is, in turn, posited as an eternal principle of rationality. At the heart of onto-theology thus is a system of regulated differences that requires no ground beneath itself, since the highest ground is given on account of its sufficient reason. Heidegger’s preoccupation with difference qua difference in “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics” may seem rather peculiar until one understands his concern to allow philosophical thinking to step away from oppressive rationalist frameworks.

This thing that is called difference, we encounter it everywhere and always in the matter of thinking, in beings as such—encounter it so unquestioningly that we do not even notice this encounter itself. Nor does anything compel us to notice it. Our thinking is free either to pass over the difference without a thought or to think of it specifically as such. (OTM, 63)

² Jeffrey W. Robbins, “The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 141.

Ultimately, Heidegger contends, thinking is led to question that which slips away *as difference* in every manifestation or appearance. Another way of putting this is to say that thinking finds itself tracing the contours of the essential withdrawal of the whole from view, the “transition” of Being to beings (64). The alternative, according to Heidegger, is to name the structure of this withdrawal, which requires that one posit a term under which the structure finds its proper ground (66).

Onto-theological thinking thus fails to ask the question of thought’s origin. It thereby fails to address the essential unthought (the difference of the withdrawing ground from that which thought grounds) that makes all thinking possible.³ This is why Heidegger can say both that “The difference between beings and Being is the area within which metaphysics, Western thinking in its entire nature, can be what it is” and further, that “The step back [from onto-theological thinking] thus moves out of metaphysics into the essential nature of metaphysics” (OTM, 51). In onto-theological thinking, difference is made to serve the metaphysical purpose of achieving an absolute standpoint; it raises philosophy (*Aufhebung*) out of the contingencies of experience toward the absolute foundation (49); or else, it relates back to an absolute in the form of a regulative ideal. Accordingly, if the wholly other (*tout autre*) is to appear under the strictures of onto-theology it will appear in the sphere of the same or else remain nothing. Onto-theology cannot “see” any possibility of an interruption by the *wholly other*. Onto-theological thinking continually “skips over” this possibility (49, modified).

To counter philosophy’s “skipping over” of the experience of the *wholly other*, Martin Heidegger proposes his famous (or infamous, depending on one’s perspective!) “step back” from metaphysics construed as onto-theology. This step back is simultaneously a step into the heart of the matter. Its aim is to trace the contours of philosophy’s treatment of difference in order to think difference anew. It is simultaneously a distancing of thought from violent forms of onto-theological domination as well as a commitment to think through the concerns at the heart of onto-theology. This study is thus defined as an attempt to get a handle on Heidegger’s step back from metaphysics, to understand it, and perhaps even to rethink it in a way that Heidegger himself did not allow. At the same time I will expound and question the relationship between philosophy and theology that Heidegger forges in the course of his critique of onto-theology.

Of central importance to my investigation is the work of Jean-Luc Marion. While Heidegger’s step back from the onto-theological tradition entails thinking difference ontologically, Marion calls for a step back from the ontological tradition as a whole. Whereas Heidegger’s thinking holds open a clearing for the Other to be experienced otherwise than as an object for calculative thinking, Marion pushes even further for a more radical thinking of difference. Marion seeks to think difference without ontology, as it were. In *God Without Being* (46-47) this is theological thought that risks itself in thinking what cannot properly be thought; this thinking crosses itself by giving itself

³ See also Jeffrey W. Robbins, “The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2003): 144.

entirely over to its unseen origin (Marion's Gxd). This essential *unthought* is so only because it is "unthinkable"; hence, it is brought to bear on thinking most properly without (the conditions of) Being, without even the *unthought thought* of ontological difference (46). Marion's reversal of thinking is theology without Being, beyond onto-theology to be sure, but also beyond difference thought ontologically.

Both thinkers in some sense aim their inquiries at what transcends thought – at the pre-theoretical conditions of our experience – in an attempt to signal the way in which the Wholly other may enter into experience. For the young Heidegger this pre-theoretical "field" is what he calls *factical life*, the concrete, historical living experiences taking place in the context of a totality of pragmatic relations he calls the "world". Factical life is not the abstract relation of an autonomous subject (reduced to transcendental egoity) with its objects of experience; rather, it is the phenomenon of concrete relations lived prior to any theoretical abstraction. Factical life is the existence (*ek-sistere*) of human being that makes possible every theoretical attitude toward the world. It is in this field of pre-theoretical, factical life that, to Heidegger, religious experience takes place, prior to any theological delimitation of its possibilities. In his 1927 Marburg lecture "Phenomenology and Theology" Heidegger notes that religious experience itself "springs" from factical life in the mode of faith. This faith in turn supplies the internal impetus and motive of theology. Faith is a necessary condition of theology; it is its *positum*. Philosophy, on the other hand, remains aloof with respect to faith (19). It is pure thinking as such, and though the philosopher may indeed have faith, this thinking cannot admit the finality of theological claims if it is to carry out its task of clarifying the hidden ontological frameworks in which these claims operate (17).

For Marion, Heidegger's strategy fails to move outside of onto-theology. Indeed, for him factical life must be radically reversed and emptied of ontological self-reference if it is to be the proper site of religious experience. Phenomenologically, Heidegger's account of facticity, his "existential reduction" of the field of phenomenality to what most properly accords to Dasein. In Heidegger's account of the human subject, the self's "call" from its own Being is a call only to itself. No radical exteriority to this ousiatic domain is admitted. James K. A. Smith, in his analysis of Marion's critique of Heidegger, notes that Dasein cannot allow the *wholly other* to be *wholly* wholly other.⁴ Dasein, like any transcendental ego, cannot admit phenomenality beyond the scope of intentionality. There is still an ontological substratum, a "screen of Being" mediating the appearance of the Other and forcing it to show up on Dasein's terms. To Marion, thus, the only suitable condition from which to begin thinking about the possibility of revelation is, paradoxically, the purely unconditioned – in short, purely transcendent – phenomenon. Otherwise, one runs the risk of laying out idolatrous conditions for God's self-giving.⁵ (After all, who is going to tell God when and how to show up?)

⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Logic and the language of incarnation* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002, 158.

⁵ Marion defines conceptual idolatry as the "anterior instance, which determines the experience of the divine starting from a supposedly unavoidable condition". Hence, to Marion onto-theology is the historical

Marion contends that this “final appeal of the subject” in Heidegger represents the death throes of onto-theology.⁶ It is the last great metaphysical attempt to bring the Other into the idolatrous domain of ousiatic thought. Marion is the prophet of another possibility – the possibility of receiving a call from elsewhere, from beyond the Being of the subject according to the very givenness of the phenomenon itself. Seeing this possibility requires a step back from ontological thinking to follow the trace and contours of the gift in its very givenness as such. This alternative path leads thinking out of its enclosure in the immanence of subjectivity back to the full transcendence of the giving source. Philosophy elevates itself through this radical passivity that allows the Other to surface and to speak. Philosophy thus ends in a paradox that only revealed theology can properly name. Ontological thinking, even Heidegger’s commitment to think ontological *difference*, violently imposes the concept of the same on the Other. It collapses the distance of the Other from the Being of beings or the “fold” of ontological difference.

In what follows I summarize Marion’s and Heidegger’s respective approaches to the religious phenomenon in two figures. The first of these figures, Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis of factual life, discloses the radical hermeneutical conditions of Dasein.⁷ To be is always to be interpreting oneself in a totality of pragmatic relations within one’s “world”. Heidegger shows that hermeneutics is not simply the scientific practice of interpreting texts or of working out principles of induction, but is a necessary condition of Dasein. There is a sort of interpretation involved in one’s day-to-day activities, negotiations, and interactions with people and entities. In *Being and Time* Heidegger calls this hermeneutical grounding of the self jointly the “as-structure” of Dasein’s concrete relations with entities encountered in the world and the “fore-structure” of Dasein’s pre-theoretical historical inheritance of shared meanings (more is said on this in Chapter 1) (BT, 149-51/189-90, 150-53/190-94). Since hermeneutics is a condition of being, one cannot step out of one’s hermeneutical situation to obtain a “God’s eye view” of the whole or to “see things the way they really are”. This is because one’s access to reality, prior to any theoretical mediation, is always conditioned by one’s embeddedness in context and tradition. For Heidegger, thus, even religious phenomena are always understood from out of this basic existential condition, as Heidegger emphasized in some of his formative works prior to the publication of *Being and Time*. There is no extra-interpretive standpoint from which one may have unmediated access to a given absolute. Our experiences, even our religious experiences, are always highly mediated events. I will call Heidegger’s analysis of factual life the “hermeneutical approach” to philosophy of religion.

outworking of conceptual idolatry in all of its metaphysical expressions. See *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 34-35.

⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Final Appeal of the Subject,” in *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, edited by Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

⁷ When Heidegger speaks of Dasein he is referring to the particular manner in which the subject’s existence is characterized by its stepping out (ek-sistence) into concrete relations enacted in a world of inherited meanings. Dasein’s Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) is the Heideggerian phrase that best captures the verbal sense of existence indicated here.

Marion, on the other hand, does not reject facticity so much as question its primacy.⁸ As mentioned he justly fears the violence entailed by treating the *authentic* self as though it were a constancy of one's *ownmost* Being. Heidegger's "hermeneutical approach" thus appears to root itself in an ontological enclosure that restricts access to the transcendent phenomenon (CP, 252-53). The restriction acts as but another imposed transcendental condition regulating one's discourse about religious experience. It fallaciously assumes that the philosophical tradition is self-sufficient and that its "findings" are the result of natural reason without the supplement of revelation. The effect of this assumption is that the history of Christian insight into the unfolding of charity (respect for the Other) is reduced to merely one hermeneutic among many. "Christian philosophy" becomes a *mere* interpretation instead of a heuristic device that bolsters the work of charity in revealed religion (260). I call Marion's approach to philosophy of religion, following his practice in an earlier work, "heuristic" philosophy. Marion's views philosophy as a heuristic of charity, maintaining that his view is the best way to curb the ossification and break of philosophy from the theological tradition from which it inherits its deepest concepts. To Marion, modernity is largely responsible for uncritically perpetuating the notion that the subject is the proper ground and source of philosophical wisdom.

I agree at least in part with Marion's critique of Heidegger. Marion is right to point out the residual onto-theology in Heidegger's account of the self-constancy of Dasein and his privileging of philosophical (ontological) thinking as an autonomous venture in its own right. But I disagree with Marion that his critique of Heidegger warrants a step back from the hermeneutical approach to philosophy of religion. The trajectory of Heidegger's thought, especially of his work on facticity during the Freiburg period resists the errors of the "formalization" of human experience that Marion critiques most vehemently.⁹ Indeed, from the basis of a critical retrieval of Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity to the interpretation of human experience I think that Marion's charge can be addressed to himself. It will become clear that there is a residual onto-theology in both of these thinkers as the result of their lingering commitment to the *absolute* autonomy of theoretical thought.¹⁰ In my view, even Marion's castigation of theoretical thought for its insufficiency to the task of treating its object presupposes that ontology is necessarily set over against the Other as pure immanence. It assumes that philosophy as a sphere of inquiry that could never be reworked or reinterpreted according to different fundamental ways of viewing the world.¹¹ Marion's critique of facticity fails

⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, "'Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?" in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, edited by Francis J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham UP, 1999), 247-64.

⁹ Here I am in agreement with James K. A. Smith, "Confessions of an Existentialist: Reading Augustine after Heidegger," *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001): 123-39.

¹⁰ For this critique of the notion of theoretical autonomy I acknowledge my debt to Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Theoretical Thought* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1965).

¹¹ James H. Olthuis, for example, calls for an "ontology of love" to replace Western philosophy's ontology of power and domination. See "A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking 'with' Radical Orthodoxy,"

to contend with some of Heidegger's most fundamental insights into the hermeneutical conditions of knowing that preclude one's immediate access to pure givens. Throughout this argument I trace Marion's *ontological* assumptions back to his reversal of the autarky of the subject.¹² That is, Marion's projection of auto-sufficiency onto the Other does not accomplish his anticipated step out of onto-theology. Coming more fully to terms with onto-theology, I argue, will involve a radical revision of what James Olthuis calls the legacy of the "reason/faith dualism" in philosophy.¹³

Furthermore, I argue that Heidegger's account of facticity provides fruitful resources for showing how the *wholly other* can be thought ontologically without being conceptually reduced. Heidegger's notion of the formal indication, as James K. A. Smith has pointed out, provides a path for signaling experiences of the Other without reducing the content of experience to a constituted object. Heidegger's model makes Marion's appeal to an absolutely transcendent phenomenon unnecessary. Moreover, it accounts for a fully and more diverse appearance than does Marion's homogeneous givenness.

In the final chapter of this study I rework my critique of onto-theology in Heidegger and Marion into a positive account of how a radically *confessional* Christian philosophy is possible. By this I mean not the findings of a neutral sphere of natural reason serving as the propaedeutic of faith, but a philosophical account of experience that is thoroughly informed by "Christian" interpretations of the world. I argue that the relationship of philosophy and theology is ultimately determined by the pre-theoretical beliefs and assumption of philosophers and theologians. I thus reject the notion that rational thought forms a neutral, autonomous sphere of "pure", disinterested inquiry. As others have argued, the legacy of Heidegger's thinking shows us that philosophy and theology both are completely contingent human activities.¹⁴ A further step back from the transcendentalism that is present in Heidegger's thought would, I think, insist on a more radical hermeneutics of facticity that acknowledges the role played by worldview in philosophy.¹⁵ A Christian philosophy that is guided by a Christian worldview will best suit the needs of Christian theology without reducing one theoretical science to the other. On my account of Christian philosophy, metaphysics is not something to be overcome, either by thinking its essence (Heidegger) or by abandoning itself to the Other (Marion). Metaphysics does not necessarily have to be onto-theological; I contend that, in fact,

afterword in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, edited by James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 277-93.

¹² I acknowledge my debt on this score to Joeri Schrijvers, "Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentering of Modern Subjectivity," *Modern Theology* 22:2 (April 2006): 221-53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 278-79.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁵ My major sources of inspiration for this argument are the works of John D. Caputo and James K. A. Smith, as well as those of Dutch phenomenologist Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977). Caputo and Smith have to a large extent laid the groundwork for my own retrieval of Heidegger's notion of factual life. Dooyeweerd has largely inspired my rejection of the neutrality thesis of theoretical thought.

philosophy that owns up to its fundamental pre-theoretical commitments may be metaphysical without committing the central fallacies of onto-theology. I conclude the study with an alternative interpretation of the opening parable in light of my “unveiling” of these particular dimensions of onto-theology.

I: Unveiling onto-theology: thinking at a crossroads

Can philosophy treat revelation in any substantive way without thereby reducing it to the sum of its concepts? Jean-Luc Marion is in disagreement with Heidegger on this question. To Marion, there is no room for speaking about God in philosophy. He argues, instead, that philosophy properly functions as theology's propaedeutic. This is because, on Marion's account, whilst philosophy always looks to the vast otherness of the Wholly other (*tout autre*) that is the occasion for its wonderment, it simply cannot transverse the distance between the immanence of the concept and the absolute otherness of God. Every attempt in philosophy to thematize the absolute becomes the idolatrous (and nihilistic) work of metaphysical reduction. This is the Nietzschean logic that demonstrates how a concept becomes an idol as soon as it is used in an objectifying mode. The concept ends up taking the place of the indeterminate absolute. The intentional aim of the subject is arrested upon the concept, which in turn mirrors the gaze back upon itself. Against conceptual idolatry "Feuerbach's judgement stands: 'it is man who is the *original model* of his idol'" (GWB, 27/16, author's italics)¹⁶. Even Heidegger's claim to "step back" from metaphysics construed as onto-theology by thinking the irreducible difference of the absolute from every finite being – in order to allow something like revelation to make an appearance on its own terms – presupposes a "screen of Being" through which everything must pass in order to make that appearance, as Marion lays out in *God Without Being* (58-61/37-40). Heidegger's step back from one form of idolatry undercuts itself with another, redoubled form. For, if God is love, and if love is unconditioned, why must love first give itself according to the conditions of (finite) intentionality? (11/3)

I argue in this chapter that Marion does not give the most charitable reading of Heidegger's step back from metaphysics. In *God Without Being* (1991) Marion claims critically to appropriate Heidegger's denunciation of the "onto-theological" constitution of metaphysics whilst simultaneously suspending Heidegger's question of Being (GWB, 11/3). He finds in the figure of the gift the "trace" of an instance anterior to Being. The unseen origin of this gift can be thought precisely when thinking (ontology) is interrupted by the excess of the infinite Other. This is the Gxd that crosses itself in every thought, the Wholly other that circumvents ontology by speaking itself in and through thought. This can be likened to an operatic score that suspends every finite characterization by calling its perceiver into the ecstasy of the artistic vision.

Theology for Marion is thus the radical suspension of thought in the face of the excess of the unthought. It is the *mode* of thinking that allows the worshipper to be drawn into the beatific vision of the absolute. Theology alone becomes the embodiment of this unthought source of the gift; it alone allows its words to be spoken from an infinite source.¹⁷ For Marion, the Other is therefore precisely the Wholly other than thought itself. He thus aims to treat the possibility of the occurrence of revelation (the gift)

¹⁶ Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Berling, 1968), V, 11.

¹⁷ This is in line with Jeffrey Robbins' discussion of *God Without Being* in "The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology," *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 147-148.

without giving priority to (finite) thinking. To begin one's step back with question of Being is to admit the worst of metaphysical vanities.

My argument in this chapter is that Marion's theological dualism of finite thought and infinite Other betrays a nostalgia for immediate contact with the Wholly other. The result is that ontology is reduced to a necessary violence (mediation) whilst theology is given the privilege of an absolute standpoint.¹⁸ Marion's model does not respect the relative autonomy of these two modes of investigation, but instead significantly narrows philosophy's field in order to privilege another mode of totalizing speech. I retrieve elements of Heidegger's earliest work phenomenological work on "factual life" to show that philosophical thinking need not defer to its Wholly other in order to escape the reductive violence of the concept. I argue that Heidegger's phenomenological treatment of religion opens the field to a plurality of religious experiences freed of this homogenizing concept of infinity.¹⁹

Heidegger's 1930s seminar from *Identity and Difference* entitled "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics" has an interesting corollary in his earlier work (from the Freiburg period, 1920-1923) on what he calls the hermeneutics of factual life. In these lectures, as in the later seminar, Heidegger searches for a way to speak of the absolute in philosophy without objectifying it. His work on the phenomenological meaning of religious experience also supplies resources for thinking about the possibility of revelation without collapsing philosophy into theology. These two crucial points in Heidegger, I think, not only counter Marion's reductive critique of philosophy but they show how we might conceive of the possibility of revelation whilst respecting the differences amongst believing traditions. The thread linking these works is Heidegger's concern to show that no one particular tradition, theological or philosophical, has a corner on speaking the truth, which is not to say that nothing truthful can be spoken. Between metaphysical dialectics that aspires to raise philosophy to an absolute standpoint (*Aufhebung*) and Marion's theological mysticism that risks the assertion of its own sort of totalizing violence that excludes religious differences, Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity represents something of a third way. To Heidegger, any claim to speak from an absolute standpoint represents a demystification of the "oblivion" that belongs to experience (OTM, 50). What this means, simply, is that because finite human finite experience is conditioned by a perspectival horizon, by definition the essence of the horizon itself is never understood. The presence and absence of objects of our experience signal the withdrawal of the Being (the horizon) that allows their play of appearance. Heidegger never claims that ontological difference itself is ever brought fully to view in the understanding. Even in thinking the ontological difference one is still oblivious to it because thinking only approximates – never fully grasps – the concrete historical experience it figures. The brilliance of Heidegger's insight into the problem of speaking

¹⁸ I am indebted for this observation to Marianna Papastephanou, "Onto-theology and the incrimination of ontology in Levinas and Derrida," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31:4: 461-485.

¹⁹ I acknowledge my debt for this portion of my argument to James K. A. Smith, "Liberating Religion from Theology: Marion and Heidegger on the possibility of a phenomenology of religion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46 (1999): 17-33.

of the absolute is precisely in his point that the speech itself cannot be absolute because it is always conditioned, contextual, tentative.²⁰

This is where Marion's reading of Heidegger falters: If one is to claim that the gift gives ontological difference, this presupposes that ontological difference is a closed system of reciprocity. This is the worst sort of metaphysical imposition on Heidegger's thinking, because it fails to allow concrete historical experience ("factual life") to "speak" for itself. It is once again to seek an absolute standpoint from within experience. It is, as Smith notes, the theological strategy of fundamentalism that claims to speak from some undisclosed infinite point of view.²¹ There is no possibility for error in this theology, nor does it allow that another tradition may speak truthfully without participating in its rituals. It is a different embodiment of the same hubris belonging to the metaphysical tradition of onto-theology (which I explain in detail below).²²

The task that is ahead, thus, is to lay out what Heidegger means by the step back from metaphysics. I will develop this in relation to his notion of metaphysics as onto-theology and in correspondence to his critical analysis of factual life. Finally, I will counter Marion's critique of Heidegger in *God Without Being* by way of an appeal to difference – a different reading of Heidegger that signals the possibility of difference in theology, in short, of speaking differently about revelation without reducing it to the same.²³

What is metaphysics? Heidegger and Marion on the "step back"

In *God Without Being*, Marion interprets metaphysics as a region of thought determined by the founding concept Being (*ens*). As Marion's story goes, since Aquinas, who made God the highest being (*ipsum esse*), philosophical thought has privileged the concept of Being and the finite understanding from which it is derived as the proper starting point for any critical investigation (GWB, 118-19/80). This was not so with Christian

²⁰ This is not to say that Heidegger's project lacks a certain "essentialism" critiqued, for example, in the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism. I address the ramifications of Heidegger's essentialism in Chapter 3, where I argue that it belongs to Heidegger's own commitment to the Enlightenment notion of the autonomy of theoretical thought.

²¹ James K. A. Smith, "How to Avoid Not Speaking: Attestations," in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997) 222-223.

²² Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," *Modern Theology* 13:2 (April 1997): 215. Westphal also critiques the hubris central to onto-theology, arguing that a common feature of this hubris is the tendency to overlook the presupposition often hidden from oneself that one's own perspective of the absolute is itself absolute.

²³ In James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002) 67-69. Smith argues that one of Heidegger's strategies for this allowance is to develop a non-reductive use of the concept that "formally indicates" (as opposed to objectifying) its referent. To a large extent, my own argument follows Smith's line of reasoning on this crucial point.

Neoplatonists such as Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Bonaventure, according to whom Being refers in its essence to a donating source beyond itself, the *ipsum bonum*, Good beyond Being (112-13/72-75). Thomas Aquinas inaugurated an idolatrous reversal of the beatific vision of the ancients by arguing that God's essence *is his Being* by analogy from the Being of finite entities (*ens commune*) (41-42/27, 115-18/76-79). To Marion, Aquinas thus opened the way for the metaphysical reduction of God's self-revelation to a mere possibility of showing up according to the conditions set by the finite understanding. The history of "Being" carries forth from there: it is not such a large step for modern thought to reduce this "God" to a moral limit concept and eventually, for Nietzsche to proclaim the death of this reified ego (122-123/82).

Metaphysics thus represents to Marion the worst kind of reductive naming that collapses the difference of God from finite creation under the idolatrous immanence of the "categorical statement" (*énoncé catégorique*) (GWB, 114/76). This type of statement ends up forcing phenomena to appear according to the conditions of perception set by a constituting subjectivity or not at all. The phenomenon of revelation presents no exception to the rule. The categorical statement, predication, aims at the object of an intention of a finite consciousness. Hence, whilst Marion is in agreement with Heidegger's perception of the need to clear a path for the possibility of God's appearing without a priori *conceptual* reduction, he is highly critical of Heidegger's privileging of the question of Being.²⁴ Marion agrees that a step back is necessary, but he is highly skeptical of the *ontological* character of Heidegger's step. He sees in this commitment to ontological questioning Aquinas's metaphysical idolatry toward God.²⁵ A large portion of the argument of *God Without Being*, however, is based upon insights about the nature of metaphysics as onto-theology gleaned by Heidegger. A brief exposition of Heidegger's conclusions is thus necessary in order to allow us critically to respond to Marion's theological step away from metaphysics.

An opening: Heidegger's question of Being

²⁴ I am also critical of Heidegger in this regard, but for different reasons than Marion, which I explain in detail in Chapter 3.

²⁵ In the preface to the English Edition of *God Without Being* (1991) Marion qualifies his critique of Aquinas by drawing a clear distinction between Aquinas's *esse* and the "'Being' of nihilism". Marion notes that only the latter, and not the former, is idolatrous according to his (and Nietzsche's) definition of the conceptual idol. However, Marion never really changes his position on the history of Being. He still thinks that Aquinas "marks a rupture" by "substituting *esse* for the good" (xxii-xxiii). It is beyond the scope of my project to argue the subtleties of this properly theological debate, but I note in passing that Marion's qualification of his position on Aquinas does not mark any significant change to his overall argument in *God Without Being*.

For Heidegger, metaphysics is an historical phenomenon.²⁶ One consistent development across the spectrum of Heidegger's thought is the notion that metaphysics consists in the peculiar manner of questioning which both inaugurates and elucidates the "happening" (*Geschehen*) of history (*Geschichte*) (IM, 6). By "happening" Heidegger means the peculiar manner in which the human being takes place as a radically temporal, and thus historical, phenomenon. That is, human be-ing (*Dasein*: literally "there-being" to denote the necessity of context and tradition to the situation of being human) itself "happens" in that it exists (*ek-sists*) by standing out towards a totality of meaningful relations spanning across time. When Heidegger says that metaphysical questioning is historical, he means this in an ontological, not merely ontic, sense (IM, 46-7). Metaphysics happens *as* (being) the most basic tradition of interpreting the meaning of human existence from out of that concrete, context embedded existence itself. In this sense, there is no metaphysical "content" outside and beyond *Dasein*'s existence. The theist's proofs of the existence of God as a being standing outside of history, for example, are nothing more than the reification of historical subjectivity. "God" is brought into philosophy as an extra-temporal subject for whom everything, including its own existence, falls neatly into a systematic whole. The intention behind the projection is the desire to find a ground from which existence itself may be understood – and thus controlled – as a systematic totality. (This is the root of onto-theology, which I discuss below.)

Heidegger seeks to disclose the hidden existential structures underlying this reification of the subject. Rather than taking him beyond metaphysics into yet another "God's eye view" position with respect to the whole, Heidegger's thinking, his "step back" takes him to the hidden heart and centre of the metaphysical project, which is for him an oblivion of the true existential situation of human being (OTM, 55). *Dasein*'s existing (also called "factual life") is both an inheritor and a producer of meaning. *Dasein* always enables the opening of a distinct relationship of human be-ing²⁷ to "beings as such and as a whole" but only because it first clears the space for their encounter through a fundamental question with regard to its Being as such (see IM, 181; WM, 129). This questioning is not merely empirical; it is an essential way of being that characterizes the sort of existence that *Dasein* has. This being-as-a-question (my term, not Heidegger's) is not something that stands over against the world, calling its existence into question like

²⁶ Iain D. Thompson convincingly argues that Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as onto-theology has its roots in his earliest works and does not represent such a radical break from *Being and Time* as other critics have claimed. The difference between *Being and Time* and Heidegger's post-1934 works on metaphysics, argues Thompson, is that Heidegger eventually dropped the project of *fundamental* ontology signaled in BT in favour of an even more radically historical interpretation of ontology as a series of epochs rooted in distinct onto-theological posits. In the latter sense, the basic character of ontology changes with every epochal shift such that there is no transhistorical anthropological structure forming the basis of human experience. For the purposes of my own project, I am adopting Thompson's interpretation of Heidegger's "turn". See *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: UP, 2005) 114-129.

²⁷ Heidegger's term for human being, *Da-sein*, means literally "being there" – the fundamental condition of being human ("ex-sistential") as an entity thrown or projected into a "world" on the basis of its own Being.

a caricatured Socrates wandering through the streets of Athens. Neither is it something that precedes all interpretive decisions, as if Heidegger wishes to isolate an instance anterior to the context of relations constituting Dasein's world. If questioning and interpreting go together it is because they belong to the same essential *temporal* structure of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). In *Being and Time* Heidegger speaks a lot about the way in which Dasein's self-questioning existence takes place in the manner of interpretation itself. My interaction with things and with other human beings in a context of relations presupposes that I understand something about my own existence as that which is always moving ahead of itself. I am always anticipating what is to come on the horizon of my experience. In that sense, I am always holding myself in question, knowing full well that at no time have I grasped the full essence of my being-human. The possibility that I might enter in to this or that relation, work towards this or that goal, gives the opportunity for more expression of the essential question of what I might be.

This basic question thus has a temporal manner of Being "in" a world always already at a moment, "now". Being-in is not to be thought of as some sort of container, nor is Being-here "now" to be conceived as a discrete point as this would be to impose an unnecessary spatial interpretation on what cannot be reduced to mere spatial relation. In Heidegger's terminology, this would be to construe Dasein as something "present-at-hand" (*vorhanden*), that which has been abstracted from its initial pragmatic context and reduced to an isolated object of cognition (BT, 42-43/67-68). Being-in-the-world "now" is best conceived as fundamental relationality whereby Dasein is always encountering beings and understanding them "as" something pertinent (or not) to its projects and goals (190-191/149-150). This relation with beings takes place "now" but only because Dasein has already inherited its understanding of present entities from whence (from having been formed by an interpretive tradition) and is already projecting this past as a "process" in the future: "Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in the process of having been" (401/350). The "ecstases" of Dasein's temporal moments "temporalize" because they consist in the dynamic of concrete factual life – in short, experience – as opposed to static (abstract), discrete points. This process of temporalization is essential to the question Dasein puts to itself with regard to its own Being (Heidegger sums up the process in *Being and Time* as Dasein's "care-structure") (410/350).

An implication of Heidegger's characterization of temporality is that when something like an extra-temporal reality enters into philosophy, it is an abstraction from factual life that obscures the dynamic of Dasein's world-temporal existence. It is the product of thought's tendency to prefer static, manageable structures to the radical indeterminacy of living experience. Thus, if God is an object of thought – even the highest object who alone is capable of thinking itself – thinking has already settled into what is (has been) thought. Thinking treats itself as the essence of the thought, as self-reflection at the bottom of every possible object of experience. Whereas the question is radically open to what Dasein can be, indeed is the very possibility of Dasein to be itself, metaphysical thought prematurely answers the question by forcing thought to settle on a determinate content.

This brings us back to the initial point about history. As we might guess, history for Heidegger is not the mere collection of past events “presented” to Dasein as its objects of study. The historical event as concrete phenomenon is always “arriving” as a futurally directed “happening” (*Geschehen*)²⁸ – an unfolding of presence – of possibilities made available from Dasein’s already having been an entity in the world and in a tradition of meanings and inherited significances (BPP, 378-79/267-68). Heidegger almost echoes this notion in *Introduction to Metaphysics* by arguing that history (*Geschichte*) is the happening of human being in whose very structure as opening for meaning and interpretation is constituted in the form of a question (IM, 152-53). As such to be human is to be historically emergent. History is not an extraneous field of knowledge of objective “facts”, nor is it merely a collection of past events. This is why when Heidegger calls metaphysics an historical phenomenon he is not talking about anything like the history of philosophy.

But in order to understand our assertion that the “metaphysical” asking of the prior question is historical through and through, one must consider one thing above all: in this assertion, history is not equivalent to what is past; for this is precisely what is no longer happening. But much less is history what is merely contemporary, which also never happens, but always just “passes,” makes its entrance and goes by. History [*Geschichte*] as happening is determined from the future, takes over what has been, and acts and endures its way through the *present*. It is precisely the present that vanishes in the happening. (IM, 46-7)²⁹

Metaphysical questioning “opens up the happening of human Dasein in its essential relations [with beings]”. Metaphysics is the philosophical process of clarifying the essential question that constitutes Dasein in its factual life. Dasein clarifies the question that it essentially *is* in metaphysics. Moreover, in Dasein’s clarification of the question of its own Being, the Being of entities is also at stake, as Heidegger had already signaled in *Being and Time* (1927) prior to his publication of *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) (albeit under the framing of the question of *fundamental* ontology) (BT, 23-25/44-47).

Metaphysics to Heidegger is thus essential to all theoretical discourses because it underlies them and thus clarifies for them their fields and objects of study; it is not an appendage question or the mere quibble of philosophers. But on the other hand, neither is metaphysics the final word upon which everything hangs. The young Heidegger had devoted much of his attention to the loosening up and reworking of metaphysical concepts that have formed stubbornly rooted patterns of thinking in the history of the

²⁸ This term carries the deliberately ambiguous sense of both that which happens and the manner of happening of that which happens. As I will argue further on in this study, Heidegger’s notion of history, unlike Marion’s, does not presuppose the purity of the event from intentionality. Instead, Heidegger’s notion of history prioritizes the future (the happening of what happens) instead of the past (what happened). History for Heidegger is always arriving as intentional experience, always a future possibility from the past carried forth into the present. As we will see, the purely detached arrival of an event that saturates all meaningful intention (Marion) does not correspond to Heidegger’s conception of history.

²⁹ See also *Being and Time*, 378/430-31.

West (the aforementioned “destruction” of ontology). He finds that inherited conceptual meanings become so deeply rooted that they take on an immediately “self-evident” character (BT, 21/43, modified). The path of thinking is the path of tracing the concepts of metaphysics back to their roots in anyone’s ungraspable historical-temporal experiences.

Heidegger’s “step back” from metaphysics is not a retreat from metaphysical questioning; it is a shift that focuses metaphysical questioning back upon metaphysics itself (OTM, 56). It is the disclosure of the hidden will to power underlying totalizing discourses that unify beings as a whole on the basis of an absolute foundation (66). It is also an exposure of the inner nihilism of this logic of domination. As Laurence Paul Hemming observes, since the metaphysical interpretation of the absolute springs from factual life (because it cannot be rationally demonstrated as factual life’s ground) it is nothing in itself, that is, outside of factual life.³⁰ Metaphysical reflection pushed to its limits exposes the utter groundlessness of its concept of the absolute. This is why Heidegger’s step back from metaphysics is also a leap into its very essence. He commits to thinking ontology as radical difference that cannot be reconciled under the ruling of the singular. This commitment to think *ontological difference* clears a site for factual life to encounter beings, even a deity, without subjecting these experiences to the scrutiny of imposed conceptual standards. In short, Heidegger’s thinking, which by his own account is a “god-less” thinking that abandons the god of philosophy, “is thus perhaps closer to the divine God” because it frees factual life from the straitjacket of objectivity (OTM, 71-72). It prepares the way for a radically historical and temporal encounter with the divine. Or at least this is Heidegger’s story in *Identity and Difference* about the efficacy of philosophical thinking as the way out of onto-theology.

The way out of onto-theology

Onto-theology is defined by Heidegger as a peculiar synthesis of philosophy and theology that aims to ground metaphysical self-sufficiency and absolute certainty. I usually cringe internally when at prayer meetings and church potlucks I hear people speak of “God’s logic”, as though they were privy to some absolute standpoint grounding their knowledge of the world. In a way, this trivial example gives us insight into the pervasive structures of onto-theology or at least the fact that onto-theology is not a problem merely dreamt up by academics. Jeffrey W. Robbins best sums up onto-theology as a calculative manner of incorporating God – the wholly other – into a tightly encapsulated system of certainty. Philosophy realizes that its concepts are groundless, so it appeals to theology’s highest being as its ground. Theology, on the other hand, recognizes that faith alone never wins at epistemological arguments, so it speaks of God as though this Wholly other belonged to the “order of knowledge”.³¹ Philosophy and

³⁰ Laurence Paul Hemming, “Heidegger’s God,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 378.

³¹ Jeffrey W. Robbins, “The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 144.

theology commingle to form an absolutist metaphysics that is responsible for the systematic reduction and exclusion of difference.

At stake is nothing less than the task of freeing one's experiences of the Wholly other from the encroachment of set patterns of thinking. Both Marion and Heidegger seek a way out of the metaphysical thinking that calls upon God to supply a ground for its program of absolute knowing.³² Jean-Luc Marion gives a nice summary of the basic assumption at work in the "theological" side of onto-theology:

In thinking "God" as *causa sui*, metaphysics gives itself a concept of "God" that at once marks the indisputable experience of him and his equally incontestable limitation; by thinking 'God' as an efficiency so absolutely and universally foundational that it can be conceived only starting from the foundation, and hence finally as the withdrawal of the foundation into itself, metaphysics indeed constructs for itself an apprehension of the transcendence of God, but under the figure simply of efficiency, of the cause, and of the foundation. (GWB, 54/35)

Onto-theology indeed "apprehends" its founding essence, but rigorous metaphysical thinking discloses the internal groundlessness of this essence. The god of onto-theology is the stuffy, lifeless *causa sui* that philosophers dream up in their stove-heated rooms (and deconstruct from their cozy offices!). At the heart of onto-theology lies the autonomous subject, the reflexive ego for whom everything is a constituted object of its experience. Even after the so-called "Death of God" this subject lingers in Western philosophy's treatment of the Other. This, I think, forms the basis of Marion's subsequent critique of the onto-theological residues in Heidegger.

If Heidegger and Marion are basically agreed on the problematic nature of "bringing the deity into philosophy" for the sake of grounding certainty (OTM, 57), they are not agreed as to the proper way to step back from this totalizing metaphysics. As Westphal also observes, this has a lot to do with the fact that Marion qualifies onto-theology as an attitude of thought that subordinates the highest Good (*summum bonum*) to the question of Being.³³ To be sure, Dasein is not a *causa sui*, but Heidegger's refusal to suspend the question of Being betrays his own violence toward the unconditioned Other. After all, if God, the Wholly other, is essentially unconditioned, why should it be subject to the conditions of Being? Why should God have to pass through the "screen of Being" in order to be experienced as God?

God Without Being thus represents another step back – the step back from Heidegger's step back. It is a commitment to radicalizing Heidegger's critique of metaphysics by invoking the trace of the Other to disrupt ontological thinking. Marion

³² Ibid., 150-53. It is interesting to note that, in "What is Metaphysics," Heidegger characterizes metaphysics as the "inquiry beyond or over beings which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp" (WM, 109).

³³ Merold Westphal, "The God Who Will Be," 3.

redefines the task as a liberation not of factual life from conceptual restraints, but of God from the strictures of the intentional aim:

In assigning ourselves to the task of liberating “God” from the question of/on Being, we at first believed that we found, following the tracks left by Heidegger, our journey’s path. We now glimpse that this is not the case. (GWB, modified, 103/68)

Thought onto-theologically, God is the god of the philosophers. Heidegger’s step back from onto-theology was supposed to free religious experience from metaphysics, which is why Heidegger claimed that his “god-less” thinking “is perhaps closer to the divine God...than onto-theo-logic would like to admit” (OTM, 72). But Marion argues that Heidegger’s step back comes at the price of formalizing religious life (theology) as an ontological problem. God is still forced to show up as the result of a modification of a more originary (a-theistic) experience. Dasein’s existence is treated as the most anterior instance and so theology is subordinated to fundamental ontology.

Nowhere is this more evident, argues Marion, than in Heidegger’s 1928 lecture on the phenomenology of religion, “Phenomenology and Theology”, where theology plays the role of a positive science of faith (GWB, 104/69; PT 21/11-12). Theology treats a mere “region” of Dasein’s possible existence: its possibility of being faithful. It is always open to ontological “correction” by phenomenological inquiry which supposedly indicates the formal structures underlying factual life as a whole. Revelation (which is disclosed in and by faith) must thus always correspond to some neutral, ontological structures at the root of human existing. Marion’s contention, thus, is that Heidegger privileges human existentiality over revelation. If in order to show up God must be constituted according to an ontological horizon, “God” is still merely the projection of an intentional aim.

Marion’s alternative to Heidegger’s question of Being is his theological “turn” away from absolute ontology. He achieves this in a radical reversal of thought that refuses to give the game entirely to Being. Furthermore, God must be thought on his³⁴ own terms, which means that thought as such must be entirely given over to the absolutely unthinkable.³⁵ This is, of course, another sort of thinking. However, for Marion this thinking encounter with the God that crosses thought (Gxd) must transcend all conditionality if the experience is to remain authentic. God, after all, is the God of unconditional love.³⁶ This is how God chooses to manifest himself. If the metaphysical

³⁴ My use of the masculine personal pronoun here is in keeping in line with Marion’s presupposition that this absolutely anterior “Other” is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the pope. As James K. A. Smith observes, Marion’s purported broadening of the field of religious experience in his work on saturated phenomena (discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work) is really a reduction of religion to (Roman Catholic) theology. See James K. A. Smith, “Liberating religion from theology,” 17-33.

³⁵ Jeffrey W. Robbins, “The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 43 (2002): 147.

question of Being involves circumspection and enclosure, love ruptures this ontological ground by diffusing itself endlessly outside of itself (GWB, 74-75/48). “This transference of love outside of itself, without end or limit, at once prohibits fixation on a response, a representation, an idol” (74-75/48, modified). Love is the *diffusivum sui* over against which no self-generating *ousia* can be shored: its transcending “flux” thus cannot be referred back to any finite condition (74-75/48). Even Heidegger’s fundamental question of metaphysics thus ceases to be of the utmost importance in this de-centering of the subject (GWB, 75-76/48-49; EP, 72). The love of God calls even what is not into being. God is the one who shows up to speak to his people (non-beings) and to call them (to be) out of the “world” of ousiatic domination (GWB, 124-148/83-102). The call comes from a source originating beyond the metaphysical call to think the essence of beings.

Marion believes that his step back from Heidegger’s question of Being broadens the field in which revelation may be understood to occur by freeing up theology from ontological restrictions. Theology proper is the only “discourse” capable of naming the unseen Gxd because it happens only in the ritualistic site of the Eucharist. To Marion, no philosopher will hear the call of this Gxd without Being without renouncing the metaphysical idolatry of grounding thought in ontological questioning. Theology is restored to its proper dignity as the (non-scientific) mode of speaking the divine Word (GWB, 214-215/153-154). In the Eucharistic community, the bishop-theologian speaks the Word. Better, the Word speaks in and through the theologian and the community of worshippers (214-218/153-156). The hermeneutics of factual life (centered upon the subject) is replaced by a hermeneutics of charity that de-centers the subject; God is thought only to the extent that he is loved. The Eucharistic hermeneutic is the site that allows the manifestation of the Wholly other on its own terms as this radical love without being. Only Marion’s model of theology can accomplish this task of speaking the wholly other because it alone allows the wholly other to speak it.

At this juncture I am compelled to ask why Marion moves from the claim that one tradition in ontology is riddled with violence toward the wholly other to the more contentious claim that ontology as a whole is necessarily violent. Could we not conceive of the possibility of the Wholly other appearing under the (ontological) conditions of experience whilst still preserving its transcendence?³⁷ Does not Marion’s transferal of power from one ultimate term (Being) to another (love) repeat the onto-theological nostalgia for the immediacy of an absolute standpoint in knowledge (thus committing a sort of violence against others traditions that do not share Marion’s theology and which therefore do not “know” in the same manner)? If theological language is the only non-

³⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the logic of incarnation* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002) 18.

³⁷ I am indebted to James K. A. Smith for envisioning this possibility, which he suitably describes as the *condescending* movement of the deity. In contrast to Marion’s logic of mystical ascension, where the conditions of perception are suspended in order to receive the Wholly other on its own terms, Smith proposes an “incarnational” logic of condescending deity. The condescending deity gives itself to finite experience, shows up on a horizon, without thereby abandoning its transcendence. Smith observes, correctly I think, that the Wholly other cannot remain “*wholly* Wholly other” if it is to show up at all within experience (158). See James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 157-161.

violent language, and if it is necessarily without universal ontological conditions, then presumably anyone who does not belong to this theological tradition (“the” tradition) speaks violently toward the Other. Granted, Marion appeals to GxD instead of to the *causa sui*, and he wishes to secure theology from philosophical domination. But does he not in the process give theology too much power? Indeed, is not Marion’s theology infallible? If GxD speaks in experience, he (and it is always *he* for Marion) must speak from an unmediated standpoint. The gift must remain absolutely distinct from the conditions of perception in order to give itself, otherwise it risks being constituted by a finite perceiver. There is thus no ground for dissent from the tradition: After all, the theologian’s words are the incarnation of the Word, and who is going to argue with God? Is it not Heidegger’s step back instead of Marion’s that frees religious experience from a totalizing horizon? To be sure, Marion’s theology is an endless hermeneutic that takes place in the irreducible gap of the Word from all other texts. But the hermeneutics of charity that arises in that gap is absolutely singular. It represents a unifying horizon apart from which no religious phenomenon is possible. The singularity and universality of this phenomenon ensures the homogeneous manner of its reception. When the Word speaks, it speaks only theology and naught else. All roads of religious experience lead to theology.³⁸

Following Smith, I thus question whether Marion’s theology of the Wholly other really fully steps out of the realm of onto-theology. I tend to agree with Marion that Dasein’s self-constancy (which is really just reflexivity in disguise) is the worst element of Heidegger’s thought. But it seems that Marion merely reverses the elements of *constituting* subjectivity that he critiques in Heidegger. The subject finds itself “envisaged by the icon” when its gaze is summoned beyond itself onto the invisible (GWB, 19-20). The act of objectification is inverted so that the finite perceiver, not reality, is the one who is “engulfed” in an intentional aim (19). Facticity is still swallowed up, as it were, by a process of objectification whereby the being of the subject is “visibly laid out in the open” (22).³⁹ *God Without Being* reduces the perceiver to an utterly passive object of a power not its own. Marion’s GxD does not, after all, seem to be much different from onto-theology’s absolute Subject for whom everything is reduced to object, spoken (theologically) from an eternal elsewhere.

It would seem that Marion’s desire to give theology the final say blinds him to the way in which onto-theology pervades his thinking. As Joeri Schrijvers contends, a more careful program for describing one’s relation to the transcendent phenomenon will respect the fundamental “secret” of facticity as something that cannot be fully rendered to any transpiercing gaze. Schrijvers’ concern is an epistemological one. The claim does not to rule out *belief* in a transcendent God whose perspective of finite existence may very well be all-encompassing.⁴⁰ This is not a program to keep God out of philosophy so much

³⁸ See also James K. A. Smith, “Liberating religion from theology,” 23-24.

³⁹ I acknowledge my debt for this point to Joeri Schrijvers, “Ontotheological Turnings?” 230.

⁴⁰ Joeri Schrijvers, “Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentring of Modern Subjectivity,” *Modern Theology* 22:2 (April 2006): 230.

as it is a built-in mechanism of suspicion against any (all too human) attempt to secure an absolute standpoint for an absolutizing discourse.⁴¹ To a certain degree, this was the concern of the young Heidegger in his phenomenological treatment of religious experience.⁴² I think that Heidegger's step back from onto-theology is best understood in the context of these earlier attempts to treat religious experience in a non-objectifying manner that does not also *theoretically* posit an absolute standpoint that serves as an ultimate horizon under which religious discourse is normalized. Heidegger sought to protect the radical singularity of concrete experience especially from grand systems of thought with a deeply entrenched subject-object dualism.

Phenomenology of religion as the hermeneutics of facticity

As it turns out, the young Heidegger showed much care to give a phenomenological account of religion that avoided imposing conceptual frameworks, especially the subject-object dualism of metaphysics, on religious experience. Heidegger wished to open the field of phenomenology to treat the possibility of religious experience as a mode of factual life. To him this meant preserving the singularity of religious experience from imposed horizons from either traditional philosophy or theology. Heidegger's phenomenological task could be likened to the careful endeavours of one keeping a canoe under control amidst heavy rapids. The "waters" of onto-theological thought processes pull against the thinker who aims to preserve the radical singularity of factual life from the ravages of objectification.⁴³

This is not so with Marion. As I have already attempted to point out, it seems that Marion's de-centering of the subject through the iconic gaze of counter-intentionality (Gxd) tends to steer the entire course of hermeneutics in one particular direction that is, nonetheless, absolute. The finite "textual" events of speaking, intending, referring, etc., are all subsumed as the "indefinite repetition" of the anterior event (or advent) of the

⁴¹ Merold Westphal makes this point in the context of his treatment of the "theological" resources in Nietzsche. A healthy Nietzschean suspicion with regard to metaphysical claims that provide absolute standpoints, Westphal reminds us, need not preclude belief in an absolute standpoint. In fact, it does not follow that because we (as finite perceivers) do not have access to an absolute standpoint in knowledge that there is no such absolute standpoint. Kierkegaard, for example, claims without fallacy that existence is a system for God, but not for the finite perceiver. See Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," *Modern Theology* 13:2 (April 1997): 213-226.

⁴² Thus, I am not claiming that I am retrieving Heidegger in any radically new way. These tendencies to read Heidegger differently have been around for a while in Heidegger scholarship. My own reading of factual life is largely indebted to the works of Laurence Paul Hemming and of James K. A. Smith (who acknowledges his own debt to John van Buren). Without fallaciously appealing to authority I can still observe that my reading of Heidegger certainly gains strength when I acknowledge my debt to these scholars.

⁴³ I acknowledge my debt for this point to Joeri Schrijvers, "Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentering of Modern Subjectivity," *Modern Theology* 22:2 (April 2006).

Word outside or beyond words (*hors-texte*) (GWB, 145-46). This brings every determinate possibility of every finite being under the master sway of an infinite perspective. The entire “world” of Being is cashed out as either iconic deferral to this Gxd who remains without Being or else, idolatrous self-enclosure. But this is to bring the multiplicity of contexts, perspectives, “worlds”, under another dominating metaphysical “fusion” of horizons. The order of objectivity remains intact, if only reversed. Marion (the neutral theoretical observer) becomes privy to the reversal that sets the course of history as this eschatological unfolding of the event. One of Heidegger’s greatest accomplishments was to break up this Cartesian certainty about the “order” of Being and to push knowledge to own up to its radically context-embedded characteristic.

During his early Freiburg period Heidegger was very concerned to steer away from presupposing an absolute standpoint by which one may grasp the meaning of historical experience in an exclusive sense. At the time Heidegger wanted to disturb the “Platonic” and popular nineteenth-century interpretations of history (Rickert, Simmel, Spengler) that tend to universalize it by relating it back to some pre-interpretive absolute – either supra-temporal ideas or the pure “form” of (immediately experienced) history itself (PRL, 38-49/37-33). Here we have an early stage in Heidegger’s development of a hermeneutic that avoids onto-theological discourses of domination with their attendant nihilism, although Heidegger himself did not use these terms at the time. In each case of universalizing discourse, historical experience is related back to an archetype of existence: an ideal world of forms an “objective” process of historical becoming (43/30). Heidegger’s contrasting hermeneutics of facticity acts as a counterweight against these tendencies in philosophy to objectify pre-theoretical experience as something that “happens” in accordance with abstract ideals or *a priori* instances, or else as purely intuited raw material for intentional construction. He argues that these extremes mirror each other as attempts to grasp some immediate historical essence.⁴⁴ Heidegger seeks to free the radically singular experiences of Dasein from these universal typologies and their *telos*. His method is to use concepts as a way of intentionally pointing out experiences without constituting them as objects. Heidegger names this strategy the “formal indication”. It is a way of the intentional subject to point to its concrete experiences of the Other without reducing these experiences to the sum of their conceptual parts.

The formal indication as phenomenological method

⁴⁴ Monotheist religious fundamentalism, which often presupposes of the sacred texts, also quite often presupposes access to some unmediated, pristine “truth” outside the hermeneutical conditions of knowing. Here “unmediated” means without the mediation of concepts or intentionality. Marion’s notion of the pure historical event that saturates (as “saturated phenomenon”) all possible meanings with an excess of givenness repeats the fundamentalist dream of immediacy. Marion imagines that historical events are intuited as homogenous givens whose radical singularity and purity exceeds every intention. This secures for him a basis for arguing that only in theology is this pure event recognized as being one and the same as revelation.

I have argued that Marion's *theo*-logic is totalizing in that it relates every horizon of religious experience back to a unifying/universalizing form. This is precisely what Heidegger seeks to avoid when he employs the method of the formal indication (*formale Anzeige*) to give a phenomenological account of religious experience.⁴⁵ The formal indication is a non-classificatory mode of using concepts. Heidegger argues that it is different from both generalization (*Generalisierung*) and formalization (*Formalisierung*). In generalization, the material content (*Sachlichkeit*) of the object is ordered by an absolute idea or archetypal genus. In formalization, the manner in which experiences take place refers back to an ordering region of possible experience (PRL, 56-60/39-42). In contrast, formal indication does not function at all as an ordering concept. Its function is akin to the indexical that merely indicates by referring beyond itself to the field it opens. Heidegger observes that the "formal" aspect of the indication means precisely that its content is the directing of the gaze toward the ungraspable concrete that it draws forth to be experienced (PA, 33/26).⁴⁶ The aspects of phenomenality (the "what" and "how" of the phenomenon) are "held in abeyance", so that the phenomenon itself may be "enacted" (*vollzogen*) in radically historical factual life which Heidegger characterizes as "enactment" (*Vollzug*) (PRL, 62-63/42-44).⁴⁷ Heidegger argues that the formal indication "refers to the 'how' of a genuine encounter [*eigentlichen Begegnung*]" that "lies in the actualized in-forming [*Ein-bildung*] of the full phenomenon" (PRL, 63/44 modified, translator's parentheses; PA, 33/27).

Stated simply, this means that in the formal indication the phenomenon of religious experience (the believer's concrete situation) is not the object of scientific inquiry. Objectifying discourses collapse the uniqueness and singularity of the experience. Instead, the formal indication holds open a region of intended content that can only be fulfilled when one actually experiences the being for oneself. Intentionality plays a determinate role in the enactment, to be sure, but the experience itself is never reduced to the concept of experience. The formal indication respects the incommensurability of factual life to description much in the way that a map points to

⁴⁵ As Smith observes, Heidegger's formal indication is very similar to Marion's icon. Both are uses of the concept in a non-objectifying manner. The issue I take with Marion is that he does not allow for the iconic use of concepts outside of theology. Why is it impossible for philosophy to use concepts as icons? See *Speech and Theology*, 92-94.

⁴⁶ Laurence Paul Hemming recognizes the relationship of this manner of indicating to Heidegger's use of the term *logos* as a "producing-perceiving of a thing in its 'how' as a this-thing rather than a that-thing and as a finite thing" (409). Hemming's point is that the production – the enactment – involved in speaking is not an objectifying one that forces beings to be according to a model of the "real" that is already present. See Laurence Paul Hemming, "Heidegger's God," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 409-411.

⁴⁷ I would like to acknowledge my debt to James K. A. Smith for his observations of the crucial importance of Heidegger's formal indication and of the value of his early Freiburg courses on factual life. See James K. A. Smith, "Confessions of an Existentialist: Reading Augustine after Heidegger," *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001) 123-139; "Liberating Religion from Theology," 17-33; "The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and Philosophy in Early Heidegger," *Faith and Philosophy* 14:1 (January 1997) 71-81.

the landscape it represents without reproducing it.⁴⁸ In short, we might say that every concept has an object, but not all concepts are *objectifying*. The map has an object-referent but it certainly does not replace its referent as the thing itself.⁴⁹ (The phenomenology of cartography attests to this, since here maps are disclosed as an indication of particular cultural experiences of landscapes rather than the pure “form” of landscapes themselves.)

In the context of my analogy from the Introduction, I could say that each of the blind men may recount his experiences to the others by way of indicating said experiences. This means that the experience itself is not perfectly relayed to the other, since one man’s facticity is radically incommensurate to that of the others. But the indication allows for a certain sort of analogical description of experiences that serves the purpose of directing others to experience the things for themselves.⁵⁰ Because the indication of the experience is not the experience itself, said indication does not fall into the danger of imposing onto-theological restrictions on the meaning of experiences as a whole. The formal indication never attempts to arrest the dynamic of factual life by formalizing experiences through the imposition of limit concepts or absolute grounds. In the language of *Being and Time* the formal indication leaves factual Dasein open to its future possibilities rather than predetermining all possibilities in relation to a first cause for whom everything is arrested in full presence (*ousia*) (BT, 25-26/47-48). The formal indication, in other words, is Heidegger’s philosophical method for avoiding the pitfalls of onto-theological domination.

It is not surprising, then, that Heidegger calls on formal indication in order to describe the phenomenon of religious experience. The object of the formal indication exceeds it and brings it forth. Smith nicely summarizes the role formal indication plays in Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity: “Rather than forcing the phenomenon to play a role it did not choose in a theatrics of present-at-hand categories, formal indication maintains and *respects* the alterity and incommensurability of the phenomenon.”⁵¹ I wish to suggest that Heidegger’s “step back” from metaphysics functions as a sort of indication of the field of religious experience and of the possibility for the arrival of a god whose “being” cannot be reduced to something that is wholly *constituted* by Dasein. To

⁴⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the logic of incarnation* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2002) 91-92.

⁴⁹ Apart from what it may seem, this is not a correspondence theory of truth. The objects of the formal indication are not things somehow subsisting beyond experience to which the concepts refer as copies of the original. Rather, one might say that because the structures of factual life presuppose interpretation – interpretation itself is Dasein’s mode of being-in-the-world – the formal indication is a way of constructing meanings within the pragmatic context of life. Granted, Heidegger does indicate that pragmatic experience gives rise to the concept, but this does not necessarily entail that it has an “essence” outside of language. Dasein inherits shared meanings – shared concepts – as part of its experience with/in the world.

⁵⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 91-92.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

admit intentionality (“enactment”) in the structure of the appearance of phenomena is not necessarily to admit the reduction of the phenomenon under a concept.

This is where I think that Marion’s interpretation of Heidegger falters. He supposes that, outside of his own theological reversal of the priority of the gazes, the intended object is always indistinguishable from the constituted object. But it is not necessarily the case that because the religious phenomenon must appear as something meaningful to Dasein – as something belonging to Dasein’s world-temporal horizon – this does not necessarily mean that it is wholly determined from the human finite standpoint. The paradox of the religious phenomenon is that the transcendent must show up in experience in order to mean something to the believer. Marion’s over-insistence on communal piety and bishopric authority, blurring individual confession, seems to be compensation for the meaninglessness of a gift thought outside of or beyond Being (as if any gift could ever remain absolutely anonymous). Marion’s insistence on GxD without Being carries the unfortunate consequence of the erasure of conditions by which re(ve)lation can be signaled as such to the believer.⁵² Marion thus seems to evade rather than to embrace the paradox of the religious phenomenon. He is caught in a discourse that, instead, reduces facticity to something merely “given” without any co-intentionality on the part of the perceiving subject (GWB, 147/101). As John Milbank observes, Marion’s dualistic model (gift/Being) ends up locking factual life into the model of the subject projecting its will onto an absent but objective “Other”.⁵³ (I develop this argument in more detail in Chapter 2.) It is no wonder that in the face of the sheer emptiness of such a concept of the gift, an appeal to an absolute hermeneutic fills the gap.

John Milbank is largely in agreement with Richard Kearney on this point. Of course, these scholars agree with Marion that religious experience involves an encounter with transcendence (giving it a depth beyond Being). But while Marion concludes that this encounter must entail the absolute otherness of GxD (revelation), Kearney and Milbank conclude that Being is actually the site of realization of the infinite possibility for God “to be”.⁵⁴ This strategy for thinking revelation accords quite well with the formal indication. One may speak of one’s encounter with the deity (a deity?) as an encounter with a being without thereby collapsing the phenomenon of the encounter under the machinations of the subject-object conceptual apparatus. No relation between transcendence and immanence is posited at all. Phenomenologically, the question of how the relation takes place is bracketed in order to make room for the particular experiential encounter. Kearney acknowledges that his inspiration comes from Meister Eckhart’s

⁵² James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the logic of incarnation* (London / New York: Routledge, 2002) 158-160. Smith correctly points out that, “the Wholly other cannot remain *wholly* Wholly other without denying the possibility of relation or connection.” This means that any wholly other must have some way of relating to the finite perceiver, it must give itself in a manner that can be understood as something, even if this giving does not exhaust the essence of the phenomenon that gives itself. I say more on this in Chapter 2.

⁵³ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997) 38.

⁵⁴ Richard Kearney, “God Who May Be,” 75-85. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 43, 46.

ontological insight that the “dialogue between God and being” is always “*provisional* rather than final”.⁵⁵ A provisional encounter ensures a provisional (not insubstantial!) discourse. It ensures that the horizons of possible encounter with the Wholly other are left open, not under the sway either of immanent reduction to an ego or collapse of finitude into transcendence.

That is not to say that there is absolutely no possibility for establishing analogical grounds for communication between individuals and traditions. Heidegger recognized that experience always takes place within a tradition or traditions “as” something according to inherited and shared meanings. What Heidegger would say, I think, is that Marion’s gift is a bogey that ensures that religious experience is brought squarely within the domain of theology.

Conclusions: *Theo*-logy or *theo*-logy?

The overall problem that I have attempted to resolve in this chapter is the possible relation of theology to philosophy after onto-theology. I have argued that Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity provides resources for describing the meaning of religious experience in philosophy without violent reduction. Hence, an absolute theology is not a necessary antidote to onto-theology, since ontology itself is not inherently violent, although much of traditional philosophy has indeed reduced it to systematic relations of domination.

One matter remains left for us to resolve in this chapter. What is the role of theology in relation to the religious phenomenon? If theology (singular) is not the only possibility for authentically interpreting religious experience, then from whence does its authority derive? Why call upon any theology as an interpretive norm at all? Does not our view of the radical singularity of religious experience dismiss theology as but a hopeless endeavour to describe the indescribable? Does Marion correctly fear that treating theology as a science entails mere “positivistic” exegesis of texts “without admitting any spiritual meaning”? (GWB, 216/154)

Marion is not satisfied with Heidegger’s definition of theology because it reduces theology’s object – its referent – to something posited by a finite perceiver. Marion counters with his dichotomy of *theo*-logy and *theo*-logy. Whereas *theo-logies* are humanistic sciences that merely consist in exegetical methods and principled approaches to sacred texts, *theo*-logy (or should I say *Theo*-logy?) is worshipful approach to the Wholly other itself. Only *theo*-logy, and not *theo*-logy, is actually spoken by its Word-Referent (GWB, Ch.5). It is, however, precisely this sort of erasure of difference that Heidegger sought to avoid in the Marburg lecture Marion cites. It is not that Heidegger reduces theology to *positivistic* science; rather, to him theology is a *positive* science of faith. The difference is that theology as such is not perfectly autonomous from religious

⁵⁵ Richard Kearney, “God Who May Be: A Phenomenological Study,” *Modern Theology* 18:1 (January 2002) 83-84. Author’s italics.

experience. In fact, not only does it presuppose religious experience, it springs from it as its interpretation. Theology as positive science is practiced from within the believing community as “the science of believing comportment” (*Wissenschaft vom glaubenden Verhalten*) (PT, 21/11). It is always a contextually embedded practice, full of idiosyncrasies and blind spots.

This entails several interrelated points for Heidegger. First, theology treats revelation as it is disclosed in the faithful existence of the individual and community of believers. Secondly, theology’s ultimate purpose is the reflective cultivation of faithfulness. Its entire field and *telos* is delimited by and for faith (PT, 21/11-12). In short, then, theology is not a system of irrefragable “truths” of positivistic science but is an “historical science” (*historische Wissenschaft*) that treats a region of factual life in its concrete historical (*geschichtlichen*)⁵⁶ existence (20/12). In freeing up religious life from the theology to which it gives rise, Heidegger shows us that there can be as many theologies as there are religious traditions. Each theology has relative autonomy according to the respective tradition and worldview that it serves. In broadly “Christian” traditions this means that it always begins with revelation (the relation of God to the believer) in expounding the meaning of the Scriptures. But theology will be different depending on the particular historical inheritances and emphases of the particular tradition.

At the same time, Heidegger notes how theologies can stand as normative modes of interpreting religious experience within particular believing communities. My belief that the biblical canon is divinely inspired is certainly inherited from a core theological tradition to which I subscribe. As a believer belonging to this theological tradition, I submit to the normative weight of this tenet (it is binding on my faith). However, I also recognize that there is no ground for the theological tenet outside of the shared faith and worldview within the community of believers.⁵⁷ The referent of my own theological

⁵⁶ The German text of “*Phänomenologie und Theologie*” is very revealing, as Heidegger uses the same word, *geschehen*, to describe the simultaneous occurrence of revelation and faith. Stambaugh translates “*Das Offenbarungsgeschehen*” as “the occurrence of revelation”, and “*Gläubigkeit selbst geschieht*” as “occurs through faithfulness itself” (19/10). Heidegger’s *selbst* carries much more resonance than the English reflexive pronoun “itself”. It indicates the sense in which revelation makes the faithful self present to itself *in the occurrence*. Moreover, Heidegger’s text implicitly provides the sense in which the meaningfulness of this “occurrence” is held open in the practice of “speaking” theology, in short, in cultivating the faithfulness that is revealed alongside the being that presents itself in the revelation. Laurence Paul Hemming makes a similar point with regard to Heidegger’s recovery of the original meaning of *logos* (transcending comportment) while he brilliantly traces the connection between this recovery and Heidegger’s later destruction of onto-theology (abstract self-presence of I=I; arresting the futural movement of transcending). Marion’s complaint is that even under the original sense of human *logos* as transcending God is forced into being spoken in advance rather than speaking himself. But this is not the case in Heidegger: faithfulness is inaugurated in revelation, even if, paradoxically, intentionality (comportment) cultivates the event by holding open the site for its arrival. See Laurence Paul Hemming, “Heidegger’s God,” *The Thomist* 62 (1998) 409.

⁵⁷ I discuss the ramifications of this position in more detail in Chapter 3. I am not simply attacking Marion’s Eucharistic theology. Aside from Marion’s absolutist position on theology, I am actually quite

tradition is not *the* Referent. There is no absolute Referent to which all genuine theologies must correspond. This is a dangerous fantasy that risks adopting a shadow version of onto-theological domination – one where theology (singular) usurps the “truth” of every discourse, including philosophy.⁵⁸ The results of this sort of theology are potentially devastating to any tradition that does not fall in line with its distinct religious experiences and interpretation of revelation. Heidegger argues that phenomenology describes the meaning of faith in broader ontological categories while it works out and supplies basic concepts to theology. As such, even phenomenological investigation of religious experience is not imposed from without but is “employed by theology” as a “corrective” that continually clarifies the ontological meaning of the basic problems treated in theology (PT, 32-33/20-21).⁵⁹

I thus close this chapter with a question to be pursued in the remainder of this study: Do we have to buy Heidegger’s story about the constitution of human existence as the pure form of the question? Is it possible to philosophize starting from the distinct assumptions of a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) or should philosophy bracket all such assumptions and commit itself to radical questioning? Marion might, after all, be correct in pointing out a tension in Heidegger’s thought. It would seem that by Heidegger’s own admission of so-called “transcendental-ontological structures” of Dasein he is indeed suggesting that neutral ontology can arrive at universal structures of experience. Why must the ontological meaning of guilt, for example, have nothing to do with sin? (PT, 28/19) Is Heidegger not arbitrarily imposing his own interpretation of the factual meaning of guilt as the “ontological” version in contradistinction to mere “ontic” religious interpretations? It is this “transcendental” element in Heidegger’s step back from metaphysics that Marion has rightly pegged as residual onto-theology.

As I argue in Chapter 2, while Marion critiques this element of arbitrariness in Heidegger, his critique is not radical enough.⁶⁰ For, Marion too wishes to hold on to the notion of a “pure” phenomenological description of the “things themselves”. His “saturated phenomenon” is supposedly gleaned through the labours of neutral phenomenological inquiry – presumably (to Marion) any reasonable phenomenologist would reach the same conclusions – so it is a transcendental structure closed off to

sympathetic to his Catholic interpretation of the (Eucharistic) time phenomenon. Alternately, to a large extent my reflection here tempers my own Pentecostal tradition, which tends to claim unmediated access to the “Word of God” in opposition to the (mere) interpretations fostered in other traditions. For an extended critique of fundamentalist hermeneutics see James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*.

⁵⁹ As I argue in Chapter 3, this does not necessarily have to mean that the ontological structures described in phenomenology are universal “forms” of life. The Dutch phenomenologist Herman Dooyeweerd agrees with Heidegger on the role of phenomenology in relation to theology but argues (pace Heidegger) that a distinctly Christian philosophy is necessary to the project of working out the ontological meaning of theology. See Herman Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*.

⁶⁰ In some sense my argument develops Milbank’s observation that Marion replaces one “correlationist” strategy uniting philosophy and theology with another. Milbank argues that Marion’s supposed neutral inquiry into the things themselves, yielding the phenomenology of pure *donation*, simply repeats the project of natural theology without appealing to ontological grounds. See John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*,” 36-37.

revision. In Chapter 2 I critique these transcendental structures on the basis of a further retrieval of the hermeneutics of facticity.

II: Interpretation of *donation*: a phenomenological critique of Marion

At the close of the previous chapter I argued that Marion's theological step back from metaphysics (interpreted as onto-theology) substitutes one totalizing discourse for another. Marion's (infinite) Gxd without (finite) Being is no less but one term in an objectifying relation than the *causa sui* of onto-theology. Marion's Gxd never shows up "as" anything to be grasped in the material context of relations of a finite perceiver. This Gxd is always a force of interruption that reduces "ontic" relations of meaning to sheer indifference (GWB, 87-89). There is no reciprocity here: the finite gaze always finds itself stripped of its intentional power and reduced to the object of an opposing gaze. It is difficult to imagine how this radically absent Gxd can be received at all by any finite perceiver or how, given Heidegger's initial concern to retrieve factual life from objectifying systems, Marion's theological program evades onto-theology. The only difference is that ontology is put out of play; but it is put out of play precisely in an *indifference* to any relation of the finite perceiver towards the Wholly other. The "relation" itself is one of complete abandon to a transcendent will to power.

Heidegger's step back from onto-theology, in contrast, gives theology a place of relative autonomy in relation to philosophy. Philosophically (phenomenologically), Heidegger indicates the possibility of factual religious experience without onto-theological reduction. On his account of the corresponding relationship between philosophy and theology, the latter is a positive science that interprets this relationship from within its contextual situation of the particular experiences of a faith-tradition. "As a kind of science of faith, theology is also a kind of 'intentional analysis' which reflects on meaning within the believing community *from within* the believing community."⁶¹ The *positum* of this science according to Smith, in Christian theological traditions for example, would be the believer's relationship to the deity in light of the biblical canon, church liturgies, and other core elements of ecclesial life. Hence, the object of theology is not the wholly other itself. As Smith observes, "For Heidegger, and in contrast to Marion, 'God' is not a field or topic of research; 'God' could never be a *Gegenstand* – even for theology."⁶² Theology springs from and cultivates faithful existence, and so its object is determinately bound to its manner of being-in-the-world, which we might (with some reservations) describe as "subjective". Heidegger teaches us that it is a philosophical pipedream to look for any pre-interpretive starting point for either philosophy or theology. Factual life as such is interpretive in its very existence; interpretation has existential roots. To be-in-the-world is to be in such a manner that one has already interpreted oneself (temporally) in respect to a context of meanings. Thus, philosophers should be wary of those who boast of "pure" starting points of their thinking, even if they do represent so-called "postmodern" attempts at de-centering the traditional subject.

Whereas Heidegger intended his step back from onto-theology to disclose the non-objectifying possibilities of *logos* (as interpretive disclosure rather than conceptual

⁶¹ James K. A. Smith, "Liberating religion from theology," 26.

⁶² Ibid.

constitution), Marion's step back rejects any such perspectival starting point of the subject by thinking the possibility of "theological mystical reality" without the limiting conditions of ontology (GWB, 181, modified).⁶³ Marion gives theology the upper hand in its relationship to philosophy by drawing a crucial distinction of the particular mode in which theology contemplates its object: "Theological thought undoubtedly never experienced in such an imperative way the duty of formulating its own radically *theological* logic." (182) The logos by which theology articulates its object emanates from the object itself; the finite logos thus speaks, even despite its limitations (139), from God's perspective.

However, I concluded the last chapter by suggesting that Marion's critique of Heidegger is warranted on at least one front. By the time Heidegger published *Being and Time* (1927) and gave his 1928 Tübingen lecture "Phenomenology and Theology," his phenomenological thinking tended toward the project of *fundamental* ontology. In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, a lecture course from the same year, Heidegger claims, "Ontology has for its fundamental discipline the analytic of Dasein" (BPP, 25-26/19). Ontology is a transcendental science and, as such, its task is to lay bare the a priori structures of human be-ing. But is this not indeed a "screen of Being" through which any deity must pass in order to show up in experience? Does this not justify Marion in arguing that in Dasein, "the truth on 'God' could never come but from where truth itself issues, namely from Being as such, from its constellation and from its opening" (GWB, 41)? Does not Heidegger's "existential reduction" (RG, 260) of the phenomenon to Dasein's Being entail that no call could ever interrupt the perfect autarky and *kath auto* of subjectivity?

Indeed. Marion rightly challenges Heidegger's phenomenological project on the grounds that Dasein looks very much like the traditional subject of metaphysics. Is Dasein anything more than the "final appeal" of this subject in the form of a being that risks only itself and so gains nothing more? (FA, 87) Granted, Dasein no longer constitutes its object (87), but is it not still the grounding being "which alone opens a world" (88)? Is not Dasein thus responsible for constituting this world by risking its own Being? (90) "The ipseity of the self positing itself as such, absolutely unsubstitutable by virtue of care and through anticipatory resoluteness, defines *Dasein* through an autarky which is existentially proper to it and supposedly authentic." (90) If anything, it is difficult to imagine how Dasein's self-constancy is not also a revamped subject given these objections.

⁶³ Laurence Paul Hemming nicely links Heidegger's break from onto-theology to his disclosure of ecstatic temporality. It is not that Heidegger's critique of onto-theology shows that an absolute standpoint is impossible (Thomas Aquinas, for example, is not doing onto-theology when he claims that only God can conceive his own essence); rather, what its critique destroys is the claim that one's own perspective, or the perspective of an entire tradition, is conditioned by an absolute standpoint – which antecedes all perspectives. This is to arrest the "futural" dynamic of factual life against the horizon of static past that determines every present. Heidegger's critique shows that every perspective is always incomplete, always open to futural possibilities. It frees up factual life to speak for itself as something undetermined. See Laurence Paul Hemming, "Heidegger's God," 373-418.

However, much of what Heidegger has to say about facticity in his earlier works (pre-*Being and Time*) resists this later, formalized interpretation of the self that Marion justifiably denounces as onto-theological. Smith (here taking his direction from Caputo) has pointed out that the “authentic” self of factual life need not be construed as a fundamental autarky because one need not presuppose the ontological priority of the autonomous self.⁶⁴ In short, one need not suppose with the Heidegger of *Being and Time* that there are any neutral, transcendental structures of Dasein to be had. Indeed, I argue that Marion’s critique of the formalization of factual life from Heidegger’s Marburg period (1923-1927) forces the rejection of a transcendental science of Being, but not of Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity as a whole. I will revisit Marion’s critique of Heidegger in order to make this crucial distinction and to turn Marion’s own critique of transcendentalism back to his own phenomenology of givenness.

Marion’s critique of Heidegger revisited

Let me take up Marion’s basic objection that I raised at the close of Chapter 1, which asks whether it is not perhaps a little arbitrary for Heidegger to claim that he has secured the universal ontological structures of factual life?⁶⁵ Why does the religious experience of sin, for example, have to be related back to a “neutral” ontological structure (guilt) supposedly available to faithless thinking? I think that there is some merit to Marion’s claim that, at least in “Phenomenology and Theology”, revelation is still determined – it is still forced to play by the rules of Being.

Marion seems to suggest that even if Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity frees up the possibility of revelation without objectifying what reveals itself, the revelatory phenomenon (what is shown and how it is shown) still has to be construed in ontic terms. If any God is to show up on the horizon of Dasein’s experience, argues Marion, it must first “be” – it must pass through the “screen of Being” by which Dasein alone is given ontological primacy (44). Whether or not God has ontic primacy with respect to human beings, Dasein has ontological primacy in its very essence as a self-questioning being. To Heidegger, formulating this question of Being is tantamount to bringing thought to bear on the most essential unthought of the metaphysical tradition: “Ontological research itself, when properly understood, gives to the question of Being an ontological priority which goes beyond mere resumption of a venerable tradition and advancement with a problem that has hitherto been opaque.” (BT, 11/31) Because Heidegger’s construes God’s arrival as an “ontic” occurrence, it follows, Marion contends, that God must intrude into foreign territory in order to show up at all (GWB, 41). Anything in excess of

⁶⁴ James K. A. Smith, “Confessions of an Existentialist,” 274. See also John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*. The latter work presents another case for a radical reinterpretation of factual life.

⁶⁵ This is especially in reference to “Phenomenology and Theology” and *Being and Time*. As argued in Chapter 1, I think that both of these works mark a transition in Heidegger’s thought from the earlier lectures on the hermeneutics of factual life.

being (because in excess of Dasein's Being) is thereby excluded from the "field" of possible experience. To Marion this is still to place metaphysical restrictions on revelation. It is to view the *Seinsfrage*, the question of Being, anteriority with respect to the (ontic) question of revelation. It is still to force religionists to play the game the way modern philosophy wants it to be played.

In light of Marion's later works I interpret this objection to mean that Heidegger's phenomenological reduction is insufficient to the task of describing the things themselves. Heidegger simply does not allow for the possibility of a religious phenomenon to appear without the conditions of Being. This is because for Marion Heidegger's "existential reduction"⁶⁶ still admits a subject of experience as the constitutor of phenomenal appearance instead of treating the phenomenon solely as it gives itself. Factual life still decides what "counts" as revealed on the basis of the deeper question it puts to itself. If the Christian deity shows up at all in experience it is because he has been given permission to do so by the radically a-theistic existence of Dasein.⁶⁷ He shows up in foreign territory when he shows up "within" an existence that admits only what will be able to be thought according to ontological difference.

The merit of Marion's objection to the *Daseinsanalytik*⁶⁸ of the Marburg period is that it challenges Heidegger's construal of the tendencies of factual life as a *transcendental* structure (see BT, 199-200/243-44). Marion rightly fears that Heidegger's radical ontological separation of universal structures of human life from (mere) interpretations of these structures imposes alien meanings on Christian revelation.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ The work in which the term "existential reduction" appears is: *Réduction et Donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1989. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998).

⁶⁷ By the term atheism Heidegger does not mean dogmatic atheism – commitment to the non-existence of God – but the result of phenomenological bracketing of any commitment whatsoever to the existence or non-existence of God. The hermeneutics of facticity is a-theistic in that it does not presuppose the metaphysical claims of either theism or atheism. For an extended discussion of Heidegger's atheism, see Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁶⁸ Where I use the term *Daseinsanalytik* instead of factual life I am referring primarily to the period where Heidegger develops his hermeneutics of facticity in a certain direction, placing primary emphasis on the project of *fundamental ontology* and the primacy of the question of Being. In this I am following Marion's critique of *Being and Time* and "Phenomenology and Theology".

⁶⁹ For example, it is not at all clear why Heidegger argues in "Phenomenology and Theology" that the "pre-Christian" meanings of concepts disclosed in the hermeneutics of facticity should be given "transcendental-ontological" status in opposition to the "positive-ontic" uses of these concepts in theology (PT, 21). It could have sufficed for Heidegger to stop at his claim that there is an *existentiell* (pretheoretical) opposition between two modes of factual life - faithfulness and philosophical thinking (20). Here, I would even suggest a qualification of Heidegger's thesis. It seems that the "pure" (faithless) thinking of philosophy responsible for gleaning transcendental-ontological structures is a remnant of the very onto-theology that the later Heidegger isolates and critiques in Western metaphysics. Smith argues along these lines as well. He asks, "Would not a more insistent hermeneutic phenomenology honor the role played by faith in

However, I argue that Marion is too hasty in dismissing *Daseinsanalytik* in its entirety only because it refers back to an intentional subject. As we have seen in Chapter 1 with the formal indication, intentionality need not be construed as an objectifying aim. My major concern here is simply that Marion sees no significant difference between being-in-the-world and transcendental autarky because both “structures” rely on intentionality as the mode of grasping the meaning of phenomena. But why must Heidegger’s qualification of phenomena as meaningful appearances be read exclusively through the lens of fundamental ontology? Why must intentionality be bracketed along with the ontological priority of the question of Being?

A response to these objections may be articulated. One might say that Marion is concerned to free the transcendent phenomenon from all conditions. In other words, one might argue that Marion’s goal is to open a site for the phenomenon to show itself precisely as it gives itself and not according to (finite) intentionality. Just as the phenomenon’s “givenness” (*donation*) transcends every objectifying gaze, so it also transcends the totality of significances that Dasein finds in its world. A thing may be given to me, but the sheer givenness of the thing does not necessarily unfold according to my own concern. Givenness itself secures the phenomenon its right to disclose itself in a radically autonomous manner as an inconceivable depth beyond the appearance itself.

A useful example of this might be the family heirloom which has no particular use as an object of study or as a being for some practical task-at-hand. Rather, the heirloom “gives” itself as the unfolding fabric of experiences of an entire family. The phenomenon of the heirloom may thus interrupt one’s experiences with the occasion of a memory of loved ones even while one is about the everyday task of cleaning out the attic. No intentional comportment is responsible for the interruption. Rather, the given phenomenon pulls the finite perceiver out of the “world” of common meanings into the memory that the visible item evokes.⁷⁰ The ensuing interpretation of the given never encircles the givenness of the phenomenon itself. The phenomenon always remains completely transcendent to the context of meanings to which the finite perceiver belongs.⁷¹

philosophizing?” Despite Heidegger’s intentions to keep faith and philosophy radically separate, his hermeneutics of facticity ends up offering tools for the deconstruction of every remnant of the transcendental ego. This is also to counter Laurence Paul Hemming’s appropriation of Heidegger’s question of Being as necessary precursor to Christian theology. I take up this matter in detail in Chapter 3. See James K. A. Smith, “The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and Philosophy in Early Heidegger,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14:1 (1997) 77.

⁷⁰ I acknowledge my debt to Joeri Schrijvers, “Ontotheological Turnings? Marion, Lacoste and Levinas on the Decentering of Modern Subjectivity,” *Modern Theology* 22:2 (April 2006): 226.

⁷¹ By this I mean a reduction to what essentially disrupts the conditions of phenomenality by its own impossibility. This is Marion’s “saturated phenomenon” that gives itself according to the principle of *donation*. This phenomenon is *absolutely* transcendent in that there is no way that it can show up according to any constituting horizon. But for Marion it is still a phenomenon (not a Kantian noumenon, for example), because Marion signals the possibility of its arrival in experience (a paradox) from within phenomenology.

But is this not merely another way of articulating the common phenomenological argument that the intentional subject does not *constitute* every given? Had not Heidegger already argued this from the standpoint of the formal indication? On the basis of the hermeneutics of facticity I thus contend that Marion's phenomenology of givenness does not offer much beyond Heidegger to the discussion of a non-objectifying philosophical treatment of religious experience. In fact, givenness may end up imposing arbitrary restrictions on the phenomenon itself – as Marion's claim that the phenomenon gives itself in excess of what experience can contain seems to do.⁷² I defend Heidegger's notion of the "unfolding" (*Auslegung*) of the phenomenon in experience as interpretation (BT, 1/19; ¶32).⁷³ The "as-structure" of meaningful experience (the idea that when I encounter something I encounter it "as" this or that particular thing) does not entail an *exhaustive* reduction of the things themselves to objects of experience or even to beings for my pragmatic use. This means that Dasein's encounter with God as something meaningful does not necessarily entail any imposition of conditions on the phenomenon.⁷⁴ This has important implications for my discussion of the phenomenon of revelation. To do justice to the nuance of this discussion I will first have to outline the phenomenological debate in greater detail.

The fact of the matter: Marion's reduction to donation

In *God Without Being* Marion hints at the phenomenological possibility of treating the Wholly other on its own terms as "gift" given (giving) beyond Being (GWB, 148-155/102-107). The gift represents to Marion an irreducible fact that intentional experience cannot be fully appropriated into any particular context of meaning. The gift gives outside of the scope of intentionality. The fact of this gift is thus not so much as a determinate meaning ("what") but as the presence of the irreducible phenomenon, the being-given ("how"). This may seem like a rather peculiar way to talk about facts, but we

⁷² Smith makes this point as well. While he agrees with Marion that "to appear is to be given", Smith disagrees with "Marion's hyperbolic qualifier which claims that the phenomenon is perfectly given." Smith goes on to argue that Heidegger's formal indication is a "giving *and* a withholding" of the phenomenon. This accords with Heidegger's treatment of the giving as *Auslegung* in *Being and Time*. James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 59n40

⁷³ This translation of *Auslegung* (normally translated as interpretation) belongs to Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology "Wide Open": After the French Debate*, translated by Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 50-51.

⁷⁴ Here we are taking up Marion's objection that for Heidegger factual life replaces God as the Wholly other. I am arguing that in order for any sense of God as Wholly other to arise in experience, this concept must arise from a context of meaningful relations to which something like the Wholly other can be compared in its difference (as absence). This presupposes factual life experience. Laurence Paul Hemming argues something similar about the possibility of a deity who might show up – and speak – "in the dimension of being" whilst withdrawing its essence from view. See Hemming, "Heidegger's God," *The Thomist* 62 (1998): 418.

must remember that Marion is not talking about ordinary facts subject to an intentional aim but the event of a givenness that exceeds any such aim. This latter sort of fact reverses the order of facticity. The natural attitude assumes that factual life is responsible for all possible “factual” meaning, whereas phenomenology proper recognizes that the phenomenon gives itself (as fact) prior to and saturates any possible intention (SP, 120).⁷⁵ The phenomenon is the possibility of “giving” that is anterior even to the totality of involvements belonging to Dasein. Marion’s phenomenological project is to treat this pure possibility from its own basis through a reduction to pure givenness (*donation*) itself.

Marion’s objective is, of course, to secure a phenomenological standpoint that can signal the possibility of a givenness that reverses the priority of intentionality. This project serves as the “philosophical” correlate to Marion’s theological reversal.⁷⁶ Marion wants to treat the phenomenological possibility of revelation without actually assigning any philosophical meaning to this phenomenon.

We might thus think of the relation of Marion’s phenomenology to his theology in terms of the relation of music theory to music. The theory itself is never music nor is it music’s “ground”; it merely signals the possibility and patterns of music without making any actual determination about music. The “content” (the fact) of the music itself precedes and exceeds every possible theory. No theory can capture the full meaning of music just as the possibilities of a musical piece being repeated anew cannot be circumscribed. Likewise, Marion observes that phenomenology must treat the possibility of a “content” that exceeds every intentional aim if it is to do justice to the phenomenon that only theology properly recognizes and names. Only this way will phenomenology respect the distance between the phenomenon and the perceiving subject. Otherwise, phenomenology runs the risk of imposing external restrictions on the phenomenon by forcing it to correlate to an anterior concept or intentional aim. Outside of theology – the discourse of praise – the intentional aim is a *constituting* aim. It grasps finite objects and beings that can be reduced to a determinate mode of understanding. These “common” phenomena are the result of an imposition of customary (metaphysical) limitations on the right of the phenomenon to give itself (BG, 276-77/197-98). The rules of the finite aim

⁷⁵ Perhaps Marion’s best example of this “fact,” I think, is the historical event. As *fait accompli*, the event gives itself without any prior intentional determination. Only after the event takes place (as fact) does an endless hermeneutic ensue. There is always an absolute gap or distance between the phenomenon itself (the event) and the interpretations of that particular phenomenon in factual life. The fact exceeds facticity. *Being Given*, 159-163.

⁷⁶ This is also the view of John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1997) 36-37. Milbank observes: “If...Marion continues to develop the characteristic twentieth-century theology of divine word as gift and event, he also effects the most massive *correlation* of this theology with contemporary philosophy, but in such a fashion that at times it appears that he usurps and radicalizes philosophy’s own categories in favour of theological ones: donation intricately slides into charity.” Milbank goes on to argue that Marion presupposes the structures of eidetic phenomenology (subject-object dualism, for example) that Heidegger had already surpassed in the *Daseinsanalytik*.

limit the range of ways in which anything can arrive within its experience. A closed context of meanings becomes the arbiter of possible experience.

Consider as an example the world of production and consumption. The consumer product must meet the standards of disposability, repeatability, and potential for use in the context of circumspective understanding. Under the “rule” of consumerism – a custom that limits possibilities – phenomena are restricted to what produces value for the consumer. The consumer mentality is “blinded” to other possibilities of valuable experience outside of the narrowly defined object-context of consumerism. Everything becomes a product for consumption. To extend the metaphor, Marion thinks that there is a sort of consumerist violence in “metaphysical” reductions that privilege the intentional aim (objectifying/dominating) over what gives itself solely from itself. Hence, he calls for the reversal of the phenomenological reduction from the meaning-constituting acts of a subject to a reduction to the possibility of being-given according to nothing else but sheer givenness itself. The critic of consumerism may, at every turn, force the gaze toward what could never be an object of consumption in order to shock it out of its complacency to set ways of thinking (the practice of “culture jamming” comes to mind). So Marion’s phenomenological aim is to admit philosophy’s paradox – its Wholly other – in order to shock thought out of its patterns of ousiatic domination.

Hence, on the logic of the reduction that admits only the given phenomenon, Marion “suspends and brackets all that, in appearance, does not succeed in giving itself, or is merely added to the given as its parasite” (BG, 26-27/16). Bracketed also are intentional limitations placed on intuitive givenness. Husserl’s eidetic reduction was meant to uncover the acts of intentionality by which determinate meanings were brought to bear on a particular subject, but in the process of disclosure, the phenomenon is subjected to common law of the finite intention. “The phenomena are characterized by the finitude of givenness in them, so as to be able to enter into a constituting horizon and to be led back to an ‘I’” (SP, 111). In like manner, Heidegger’s “existential reduction”, as Marion calls it, reduces phenomenality to Dasein’s “lifeworld” in a way that forces the phenomenon proper to register as something meaningful to Dasein. In the existential reduction the phenomenon must accord with Dasein’s “mineness” as closed, temporal self-projection. Both of these reductions, the eidetic and the existential, place conditions on the phenomenon because they force it to give itself according to an intentional anteriority. For phenomenology to do justice to revelation, Marion reasons, the reduction must not allow any anteriority to the phenomenon itself. In the Catholic tradition, God calls the world into being; the world is not called into being by a finite perceiver. Theology thus supplies the pattern or blueprint for phenomenology just as music does for the theory of music. The phenomenon – whose limit case is revelation – must not be made to conform to a transcendental autarky in order to give itself to experience. “In the realm of the phenomenon, the concept is not king, but rather intuition: before an object is seen and in order to be seen, its appearance must be given; even if it does not see what it gives, intuition alone enjoys the privilege of giving” (SP, 109).

In his essay “The Final Appeal of the Subject,” a work later published as a segment of *Being Given*, Marion critiques Heidegger’s *Daseinsanalytik* as just this sort of

transcendental subjectivity.⁷⁷ For Marion this subject is the transcendental ego whose intentionality serves as a constituting horizon, playing a pivotal role in allowing or disallowing the appearance of phenomena. Marion argues that, though the existential analytic of Dasein eliminates the ego's substantiality by reinforcing the subject's pure self-transcendence (*ek-sisting*), yet it still serves to reinforce auto-sufficiency and "autarky" (*ousiatic ground*). To Marion, Dasein can never be the starting point for a proper phenomenological analysis because, like the subject, it forces every phenomenal showing to conform to a horizon, no longer the "objectivization exercised by a subject" (Kant, Husserl), but the "mode of manipulability which, in return, determines Dasein itself" (FA, 86). Dasein is indeed the metaphysical subject's "final appeal". Philosophy stands at the threshold of witnessing the completely unthinkable self that *gives itself* to be experienced.

Marion claims that phenomenology must treat the "self" of the phenomenon that gives it-*self* without recourse to any intentional horizon. He thus broadens Husserl's "principle of all principles" which states that the phenomenon is to be taken as it gives itself through intuition. This "broadening" is meant to include the phenomenon that gives itself solely from itself – even prior to intuition (SP, 105). As the logic of Marion's argument goes, if phenomenology treats what gives itself in the "how" of the giving, this is because the reduction itself brackets (*epoché*) everything outside of being-given as such. Marion thus claims to concentrate Husserl's "breakthrough" principles of phenomenology in a final reduction that allows the phenomenon to show itself as it *gives itself*, that is, according to its givenness (*donation*) as such. A phenomenon becomes absolutely given only to the degree that it was reduced; but the reduction is in turn practiced only phenomenologically—namely, for the sake of giving, thus making the phenomenon appear absolutely (BG, 25/15).

Hence, a final reduction that reverses Husserl's original formulation, reduction to givenness (or "reducing givenness"), "means freeing [that givenness] from the limits of every other authority, including those of intuition" (28/17, modified, my parentheses). In this final reduction not only is the being-given no longer a priori determined according to an intentional horizon, it is no longer restricted to capacity of a finite intuition. In short, the concept no longer acts as limit-case to what can be given to experience. This conclusion is a logic step beyond Husserl's freeing of the donating intuition from intentional determination. Rather than restricting the phenomenon to give itself to intuition according to the diminishing requirements of an intention-concept, the reduction to givenness allows the phenomenon to give itself infinitely beyond all concepts and all

⁷⁷ In the following argument I also draw heavily from *Etant donné : Essai d'une phenomenology de la donation*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997. *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: UP, 2002, and "The Saturated Phenomenon," translated by Thomas A. Carlson, *Philosophy Today* (Spring 1996): 103-124.

horizons from itself alone. This way the phenomenon may be thought to saturate even the intuition with an excess of infinite givenness (more will be said on this further along).

Not surprisingly, Marion contends that not only does his reduction to givenness move past the eidetic reduction of Husserlian phenomenology, but it also surpasses in phenomenological significance Heidegger's "existential reduction" (RG, 304-305/204-205). The reduction to givenness broadens the field of phenomenality to include even what cannot possibly be intended as either a present-at-hand object of intentionality or a being for pragmatic "concern". It brackets every substratum of self-referentiality posited at the heart of phenomenal giving – acts of intentionality or interpretive comportment – and so opens phenomenal possibility to what does not have to be in order to give itself (304/204). Marion's radical reduction discloses the irrevocably donated nature of the self – the subject as the passive being-given – in place of its usual autarkic role.

For Heidegger and Marion both, phenomenology must treat the phenomenon solely on the basis of what gives itself to be shown.⁷⁸ However, Marion is highly critical of Heidegger's preference for "showing" or manifesting as the model of phenomenality. For Marion, this means that the phenomenon does not have to give itself according to a constituting horizon. Marion observes that, "the obsession of the Cartesian ego still keeps Husserl and even Heidegger from giving up its interpretation, which is, if not still theoretical, at least still constituting, if only through 'anticipatory resoluteness'" (MP, 586). To Marion, the *Daseinsanalytik* is a sort of deepened version of Cartesian solipsism in which phenomena reduced to "things" for experience. The phenomenon shows itself from itself only insofar as the "showing" indicates a reception of the possibility "to be" according to Dasein's being-in-the-world (583). Privileging phenomenal "showing" is thus tantamount to merely paying lip service to the role of the phenomenon in giving itself whilst reinforcing the subject's role as true constitutor of phenomenality.

Even Dasein's temporal "projection" of its own possibilities reduces the field of phenomenality to what can be projected in experience. The existential reduction thus restricts phenomenological access to the "self" that gives itself by preferring over it entities that show up for pragmatic use (BG, 101-102/69-70). In this sense, existentiality amounts to a "mimed" subjectivity that stands silently – as possibility rather than actuality – at the bottom of phenomenal meanings.⁷⁹ "The entire analytic of *Dasein* is

⁷⁸ For Marion "self-givenness in person" to "pure seeing" antecedes "self-showing". See *Being Given*, §3: "It is not so much the case that givenness belongs to phenomenology as it is that phenomenology falls entirely under the jurisdiction of givenness...For nothing appears except by giving itself to pure seeing, and therefore the concept of the phenomenon is exactly equal to that of a self-givenness in person." *Etant donné : Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997). *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: UP, 2002), 27.

⁷⁹ Marion's emphasis on Heidegger's failure is perhaps nowhere more evident than in *Reduction and Givenness*, where he treats both the *Daseinsanalytik* and Heidegger's later notion of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). To Marion, both of Heidegger's attempts to bring the phenomenon into full view failed as a result of his Cartesian allegiances. See *Réduction et donation : Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1989).

concentrated into this result” (FA, 90). As the logic of Marion’s argument goes, because there is nothing outside of what is given, and since the given belongs intrinsically to its being-given, it is a mistake for Heidegger to reduce phenomenal unfolding (being-given) to what can be shown through pragmatic experience. The “screen of Being” cannot possibly register the invisible phenomenon – the aesthetic quality of a painting, the richness of an historical event, the spiritual significance of an icon – each of these things has no pragmatic value yet is superabundantly given to experience.⁸⁰ Each of these phenomena ruptures coherent meaning by breaking into experience. Marion’s logic of *donation* thus signals the possibility of the phenomenon’s being-given without intention and without circumspection (MP, 581, 586; RD, 61).

Two key passages from *Being Given* will serve to show the link between Marion’s critique of the *Daseinsanalytik* and his reading of onto-theology.

Not only does just a fragile denegation, by the way advanced without reason, keep Dasein from drifting toward the level of a subsisting ground, but it is difficult to see what true phenomenological criteria separates this metaphysical ‘constantly present-at-hand [*ständig vorhanden*]’ from a ground and from the ‘constancy of Self [*Ständigkeit des Selbst*]’ proper to Dasein which will follow (BG, 359-360/261, author’s bracketed insertions).

A little further on in the same passage Marion claims:

These aporias [of the subject] will remain as long as we claim to begin with the ego, the “subject,” or Dasein presupposed as a principle or, to speak like Aristotle, as a that ‘from which one would start first’ in general. They will eventually dissipate only if, by a radical reversal, we substitute an ‘unto whom/which,’ a receiver to which/whom the phenomenon that shows itself by giving itself always ends up arriving (360/261, my bracketed insertions).

We must understand that Marion is not substituting one metaphysical *a priori* for another; rather, he is claiming that being-given is an *a posteriori* arrival or an event that gives “me”, “employs” me to receive myself (BG, 179-180/127). The reduction to *donation* is supposed to free up phenomenology from the dilemmas of onto-theology (that Marion pinpoints even in Heidegger) whilst safeguarding it from the ravages of the Nietzschean destruction of the auto-referring subject. A tall order indeed! We should first ask what, if anything, is onto-theological in the *Daseinsanalytik*. As I argued in Chapter 1 with respect to the objectified self placed at the centre of the gaze of the Other, Marion’s reversal of subjectivity remains, at least in part, within the paradigm of onto-theology.

⁸⁰ These are some of the “saturated phenomena” Marion identifies in *Being Given* and elaborates upon in its sequel, *De Surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2001). In *Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham: UP, 2002).

Dominique Janicaud has remarked how Marion's refusal to name this transcendent source that gives *itself* cannot hide the fact that it still unifies of the given under one "quasi-personalized" transcendental horizon.⁸¹ Is this not another appeal of the subject?

Moreover, is a break from metaphysics as easy as reversing the priority of *ousia*, substance, or egoity in a set subject-object relation? Why does *donation* not simply embody another auto-sufficiency, another autarky of the fully present-to-itself? What qualitative difference separates the rights of the subject to *constitute* the phenomenon as full presence from the rights of the phenomenon to unfold the subject as *fully present*?⁸² What is the source of violence if not an *exhaustive* making-present that reduces one of the terms of the relation to the other? Should we not treat like cases alike? Once again, I turn to factual life for an alternative perspective on the given.

A matter of fact? In defense of the hermeneutics of facticity

As I have pointed out, Marion's critique of the "shadow ego" in *Being and Time* need not impel us to reject the entire structure of the *Daseinanalytik*. Dominique Janicaud denounces as "reactionary" strains in Heidegger's thought the Western individualistic tendency that runs through *Being and Time*. Dasein's "existential solipsism" is evident at many of Heidegger's interpretive turns throughout the work, from the "mineness" (*Jemeinigkeit*) of the self's individualistic concern for its own being to its utmost potentiality-for-Being itself consisting in the utter non-relationality of its terminus (death) (BT, 313/361). Heidegger is telling a very old story in the history of metaphysical reflection on the self; but the point I have been arguing is that it is not a necessary story. Marion seems to accept *prima facie* Heidegger's construal of the ontological self, which is why he turns to another term (givenness) to disrupt it.

But this turn to pure transcendence, the Wholly other, is both unnecessary and is a hindrance to any step back from onto-theology. Janicaud maintains that the most primordial elements of factual life – especially the hermeneutical condition of being-in-the-world – can be retrieved without having to admit the more solipsist elements of the *Daseinanalytik*.⁸³ If Janicaud is right (as I suspect he is), then there is also good reason to question the "reactionary tendencies" and the shadow solipsism lingering behind

⁸¹ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology 'Wide Open': After the French Debate* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 34-35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 29-34.

⁸³ Dominique Janicaud, "The Question of Subjectivity in Heidegger's *Being and Time*," in *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, edited by Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 47-57. This particular matter is widely agreed upon in Heidegger studies. James K. A. Smith has acknowledged his own debt for his deconstructive retrieval of factual life to John D. Caputo, John van Buren, Robert Dostal and Daniel Dahlstrom. Smith perceptively asks why Heidegger had to treat Dasein's "thrownness" and its inter-subjectivity as something to be escaped rather than embraced. See James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 94-104.

Marion's own project. If the problem with Heidegger is his reluctance to let go of the transcendental ego even while he vehemently critiques "subjectivity", one might wonder if Marion's solution to the problem is not radical enough. In the wake of all of Heidegger's deconstructive labours and his disclosure of the radically perspectival nature of truth are we now in the position to buy yet another story about the final possibility of the hermeneutics of the self or of the Other?

The best clue that helps us to make sense of Marion's own failure to overcome this solipsism is, as Janicaud observes, the fact that he never sees any need to disrupt the truth-mechanisms of eidetic phenomenology. Truth to Marion still means adequation – presence – of the thing intended.⁸⁴ In Husserl, adequation means the degree to which sensory intuition fulfills its intentional limit-concept in the intentional act of consciousness. Marion inverts the structure to measure the adequacy of the intention against the excess of givenness overflowing the intuition. The phenomenon is given more than adequately. This means that it is not the intention which is inadequate to the intuition. But the adequacy-structure itself is never disrupted. Full presence remains the phenomenological ideal; it is unachievable now not because the object intended is always partially absent and in need of adumbrations, but because the intention itself cannot make-present the superabundance of presence in the intuition. The intentional self is bedazzled by this excess of givenness. The point is that inadequacy falls to the intentional aim rather than to the intuited phenomenon.

But why must there be an inadequacy in givenness? This is only the case if one assumes that the phenomenon *necessarily* gives itself beyond what the intention can handle. It would seem a tad strange for me to sit my two-year-old son down and proceed to have a philosophical discussion with him. The superabundance of givenness would be lost because untranslatable, inconceivable to the mind of a toddler. If I insisted on the continuance of the conversation even while my son gave me definite signs of wanting to play with his toys instead, one might be able to accuse me of a sort of violence perpetrated against the agent. Why, then, is it necessarily the case that the event of givenness is without experiential analogy? (SP, 117) According to Marion, the only way to avert this "danger" of the saturated phenomenon (the overflow of intuition) is to "recognize it without confusing it with other phenomena" and, therefore, to "allow it to operate on several horizons at once" (SP, 117, modified). The violence of inadequate perception is the fault of the perceiver, not of givenness itself. This violence can be reduced with the increase of interpretive horizons receiving the same phenomenon, but it can never be fully averted because of the inherent inadequacy of finitude. But why is this assumption of inadequacy necessary to respect the alterity of the Wholly other? What if one was to suppose with Heidegger that the phenomenon simultaneously gives and withdraws itself?⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology 'Wide Open': After the French Debate*, translated by Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 29-34.

⁸⁵ James K. A. Smith makes this argument with regard to both Heidegger and Husserl. He therefore critiques Marion's reception of the phenomenological tradition. See "Respect and Donation," 523-538.

In contrast to Marion, Heidegger's analyses of factual life do not require this strict eidetic paradigm of phenomenality as full presence. In *Being and Time* Heidegger sees the unfolding (*Auslegung*) of the phenomenon in interpretation as a structure that withdraws the phenomenon from full view as much as it discloses or "shows" beings to be encountered in experience (BT, ¶32). This means that experience of the phenomenon is never present to itself as an entirety, not even in an intuition that saturates the intention. The notion that Dasein interprets everything "as" something meaningful according to context of relations does not force the phenomenon into the mold of prior intentionality. Heidegger is merely suggesting that that which is experienced - the phenomenon - is experienced precisely because it "shows up", it appears, as something meaningful (BT, 192-193/151-152). I contend that in order to mean anything, to be understood, at all, even things like heirlooms or paintings must be interpreted. There must be some way for experience, intention, comportment - whatever we may call it - to get a handle on concrete meanings by "using" the painting "as" something: a reminder of social injustices, a way of escaping into the past, a method of communicating complex spiritual meanings, etc. I may even come to realize that I cannot possibly fathom the depths of meaning of a particular painting. In no way does each of these ways of interpreting the painting exhaust its possible meaning - though it is possible that particular readings may do violence to it. Still, a plethora of interpretive horizons can encounter the painting in different ways. We need not posit the "fact" of the painting as some given phenomenon lurking behind every interpretation.

It might be helpful to develop this critique through a reading of Marion's "saturated phenomenon". This phenomenon supposedly exceeds every meaningful intention and every finite horizon. It cannot thus be brought into view by an intentional aim. It "saturates" every aim with an excess of *donation*. It is thus not only "the possibility that surpasses actuality," argues Marion, "but the possibility that surpasses the very conditions of possibility, the possibility of unconditioned possibility" (SP, 120). The saturated phenomenon is the phenomenological figure of the Wholly other as such. It is pure, unconditioned givenness. Hence, it could never show up according to any finite horizon. In the figure of the saturated phenomenon *donation* exceeds all possible meaning (analogy); it is too weighty for any gaze to bear; it bedazzles every interpretive horizon (118). It enters phenomenology in the figure of the paradox according to the logic of givenness: what most properly cannot be exhibited on any horizon is precisely that which is most "phenomenal" about the phenomenon that gives itself.

The saturated phenomenon thus supposedly sets in motion an endless hermeneutics of the infinite. Marion's best example of this phenomenon outside revelation is the historical event. The event is "pure" of determination, wholly unconditioned, because it "happens" prior to the intentional aim. However, in the wake of the event an infinite number of possible horizons ("perspectives") interpret the event in an infinite number of possible ways. But the "essence" of the event is never exhausted in the hermeneutic (SP, 121).

Much like the event, revelation - the superlative of saturation - is also supposedly a "purely phenomenological concept" because "an appearance that is purely of itself and starting from itself" (SP, 121). It is the "concentration" of the types of saturated

phenomena into a figure of the advent of Christ. Marion is supposedly not importing positive theological content into phenomenology but only “describing a given phenomenological possibility” and articulating the “conceptual role” of Christ “as Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, or Schelling dared to do” (BG, 329/236). In strictly phenomenological terms – as a possibility of experience – the Christ phenomenon saturates intuition, calling the subject as witness to the irreducible event of its arrival (325-335/234-241). This conceptual figure of revelation shows the way to the phenomenological possibility of what theology already recognizes and names as a fact. In the spirit of Kierkegaard and Pascal Marion leads phenomenology to place of either/or – whereby every phenomenologist is encountered by the possibility of revelation and is called to respond. The response acknowledges a fact, just as my response to a painting supposedly acknowledges its givenness. Because revelation exceeds every horizon, there is no end to the hermeneutical possibilities it opens.

But could such a phenomenon really be experienced at all? Could we not ask how it is even possible to generate discourse about this “given” without the anteriority of context and tradition? How is this experience of the absolute – this absolute experience – even possible without relation?⁸⁶ Smith rightly criticizes this figure of revelation as something that could never show up to any finite perceiver because it lacks any way of relating to it/him/her.⁸⁷ It seems to me that just as my understanding of a painting is “conditioned” by my way of receiving it, so any particular encounter with revelation must be conditioned in the same ways.⁸⁸ Art appreciators still interpret art to mean this or that, which is not to say that the interpretation must reduce the artwork in its entirety to something “projected” by the subject. Similarly, revelation may be “co-intended” as something meaningfully belonging to the subject’s context of experience without being wholly determined by transcendental-ontological structures.⁸⁹

Of course, Marion’s critique of these structures in the “ontological” works from 1927/28 holds true.⁹⁰ Marion rightly perceives that these structures can only end up

⁸⁶ I acknowledge my debt for this line of inquiry to James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 158-159.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁸⁸ Marion is quite fond of citing biblical examples of overwhelming bedazzlement, but I think his hermeneutical framework does not adequately account for other biblical examples of “revelation” where God communicates on the level of the recipient. For every bedazzling transfiguration there is a still small voice speaking in the wilderness. And even the examples of bedazzlement are not without relation. Bedazzlement is never so absolute as to be without context, else the bedazzled would not perceive anything – not even the fact of bedazzlement.

⁸⁹ Smith gives three useful criteria that show how this can be the case. He says that any meaning-giving horizon should never be construed as that which constitutes the Wholly other (Kant), as that which imposes conditions on the Wholly other (1927/28 Heidegger), or as that which collapses the alterity of the Wholly other. The model can be analogously applied to my painting example without any significant alteration in the model’s meaning. See James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 160.

⁹⁰ The two works I have in mind here are *Being and Time* and “Phenomenology and Theology”.

imposing conditions on whatever and whomever wishes to show up in experience. Incidentally, the ontological “essentialism” underlying his later pursuits is perhaps the cause for Heidegger’s reductive interpretations of works of art.⁹¹ Marion justly argues that Heidegger’s radical ontological questioning never completely steps out of the province of onto-theology. But while Marion would use this point as ground to eschew the *Daseinanalytik* in its entirety, I would remain of the opinion that Heidegger’s thought as a whole is not so easily dismissed as another failed attempt in the history of the metaphysics. At least if one were to argue this, one would have to be very careful not to commit the same mistakes one condemns in Heidegger. I think that we do not have to construe factual life as the solipsism Marion reduces it to (“existential reduction”). In the final portion of this chapter I will tie these conclusions into my critique of the latent onto-theology in Marion’s givenness.

*Destruction of donation: A hermeneutical investigation*⁹²

Marion’s use of the term “existential reduction” targets the problematic assumption in the *Daseinanalytik* that all phenomena occur only within the question of Being. Marion rightly contests the embedded notion here that nothing Wholly other can disrupt the radical self-questioning that Dasein’s puts to itself (RG, 104-110/66-71).⁹³ To my mind, however, the deeper model for phenomenal showing uncovered in the existential analytic resists even the formal-ontological interpretation by which Heidegger intends to secure it as a totality. At least it is open to alternative retrievals. To a large extent Marion attempts to cash in on the assumption in *Being and Time* that the phenomenon can be thought in its totality – whether as Being or as givenness – which leads to solipsism or quasi-solipsism.⁹⁴ Once again, we will see that the hermeneutics of facticity does not

⁹¹ See Brigitte Sassen, “Heidegger on Van Gogh’s Old Shoes: The Use/Abuse of a Painting,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 32:2 (May, 2001): 160-173.

⁹² My subtitle alludes to Marion’s *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. It is also intended as an allusion to Heidegger’s project of phenomenological “destruction” (*Destruktion*). By this term Heidegger means the process of *working through* conceptual frameworks to trace their origins in factual life. The project of destruction is closely related to the formal indication. Concepts are adopted, reworked, and even discarded so that factual life can be allowed to show itself in new ways not available to the objectifying tendencies of common usage. Here, my “destruction” of givenness will be an indication of the sense in which Marion’s phenomenological project remains tied to conceptual frameworks, especially the subject/object dualism, that do not necessarily apply to factual life. See Martin Heidegger’s BPP, 31/23.

⁹³ Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” trans. Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham UP, 2000, 16-103) 60.

⁹⁴ Marion’s strategy for this is in *Reduction and Givenness* to translate and interpret both Husserl’s *Gegebenheit* and Heidegger’s *Geben* under the uniform figure of givenness. Dominique Janicaud argues that this interpretive gesture overshadows the difference Heidegger establishes between the structure of

necessarily entail this principle. It only observes the structure of interpretation as an unfolding (*Auslegung*) whereby nothing is *exhaustively* given, though phenomena are given insofar as they are appropriated as something meaningful to Dasein.⁹⁵

As my analysis of the formal indication in Chapter 1 has shown, Heidegger never claims that factual life can be exhaustively treated in any reduction. The phenomenological concept can only “indicate” what happens in factual life by pointing it out. To attempt to pinpoint an instance responsible for “giving” factual life to itself is, I think, to miss the young Heidegger’s point about the partial hiddenness of this phenomenon. Factual life is never sheer presence to itself like a Cartesian ego. Factual life is always interpreting itself; consequently, any phenomenological approach to factual life must also be an interpretation of it – partial, incomplete, tentative. Heidegger carries over this deepest structure of factual life to his investigations in *Being and Time*, where he identifies this structure of phenomenal unfolding with the interpretative structures underlying factual life (BT, 35/59, 56-57/83).⁹⁶ Heidegger tells us that “The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting” and further, “this hermeneutic also becomes a ‘hermeneutic’ in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends” and in the “specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence” (37-38/62).⁹⁷ Some expository work is necessary to flesh out what Heidegger means by this.

Existentiality in this broader sense of *Auslegung* means specifically that understanding is always *interpretive* and takes place “as” the manipulation of entities for a particular project of its concern (BT, 149/189; 407-408/460). “Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets” (149/189). By this Heidegger means that Dasein understands something “as” something only insofar as it has already received the conditions for the possibility of interpretation. Dasein inherits a totality of significances in its “fore-having”; it sees its possibilities for interpretation from a definite point of view (Being-there) within its world, its “fore-sight”, and it grasps the entity to be interpreted from the basis of an inherited conceptual context, a “fore-conception” (150/191). Heidegger tells us that this

“giving” and the gift, the unfolding of phenomenal manifestation and the appearance of a being. By neutralizing this differentiation, Marion’s strategy erases any sense in which the phenomenon can be thought to give itself only partially. Givenness becomes another phenomenological figure of the full presence – full abandonment – of the phenomenon. It then follows that phenomenality must be thought starting from the full presence of the phenomenon without remainder. The absolute otherness of the phenomenon thus absorbs all difference under its homogeneous givenness. See Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology ‘Wide Open’*, 36-37. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 43.

⁹⁵ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology ‘Wide Open’: After the French Debate*, 59n40.

⁹⁶ Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” translated by Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn*, 50-51.

⁹⁷ Henceforth, I use Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation of *Auslegung* and *Interpretation* respectively as interpretation and Interpretation. See BT 1/19.

“fore-” structure of “understanding interpretation” is a priori, which means two essential things for our purposes: For one, to be Dasein is already to have “expressed” oneself in an interpretation of entities and oneself. In other words, interpretation does not begin with reading texts; as a phenomenological structure interpretation happens at the level of one’s everyday interaction with entities. When I type at my computer or drive my car I have already negotiated an interpretation of the entities I am encountering in my experiences. Moreover, and this leads to the second point, my interaction with entities is made possible because I have already disclosed myself in an interpretation. I have already come to encounter my own existence (here/now) as the very context of meaningful relations that concern me. Dasein is given possibilities for interpretation only because it *is* interpretation right from the very basis of its own existence. This is what Heidegger means when he claims that interpretation is an *existentiale* structure (151/192-193).

Hence, the way in which the phenomenon shows itself in Dasein’s fore-having, fore-structure, and fore-conception is inextricably bound to the structure of phenomenal giving. Presumably, even givenness itself must be understood starting from phenomenological investigation of these hermeneutical structures of Dasein. In Heidegger’s language, we might say that Marion’s *myself/me* that acknowledges its being-given does so only because it has already interpreted itself as something given *on the basis of interpretation itself*. In virtue of the existential analytic it is hard to imagine how something like a fact or fixed point of origin falling outside of the aegis of interpretation would amount to anything besides a solipsistic reification of the Wholly other. An investigation of Dasein’s phenomenal horizons for its self-interpretation, its “world” and temporality, will serve to flesh out our point.

Through an analysis of the “average everyday” way in which things appear, Heidegger emphasizes that in each case Dasein is “thrown” into a world, a context of inherited public meanings from which the agent can never extricate itself (BT, 135/174). Thrownness is essentially factual (*Faktizität*) in that it discloses the basic conditions of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world alongside entities that occupy its concern and with other Daseins with whom it shares common, inherited associations of meaning (221/264). The “world” horizons into which Dasein is thrown comprise Dasein’s belonging to a totality of significances (“for-the-sake-of-which”) that it inherits from a public understanding and from public discourses (“they-self”) (86/119; 129/167). Since the self is never able to wrest itself from the public identity that it inherits or from the conditions that make up its belonging to a complex and multiform totality of significances, this means that the “world” is not so easily reduced to the figure of an “intentional comportment of opening” as Marion calls it (BG, 205/145), because world is not primarily opened in an eidetic gaze. It is unfolded as “there”, the complete structure of which is always hidden from Dasein’s view.

This phenomenal structure of the unfolding, *Auslegung*, is the key to our grasping the essential relation between Dasein’s world-temporal and its hermeneutical structures. As the opening of a world, Dasein is a “projective” structure that throws itself upon some possibilities whilst rejecting others. In each case, Dasein’s “position” in the world, if you will, is hermeneutical in that it always finds itself and expresses itself already “as” a particular (this and not that) interpretation of itself from within the world that it inherits

(BT, 223/266). Therefore, Dasein is never thrown into a position where it is not already choosing to position itself “there” in relation to entities that it manipulates and as a particular expression of the “they-self” of public existence (223/265). Moreover, the “as-structure” of Dasein’s Being “there” in its world ensures that all of Dasein’s “intentional comportments” never themselves constitute the full phenomenon as an opening. Instead they are intrinsic to the hermeneutical opening or the “as-structure” into which Dasein finds itself thrown. Dasein may choose to forget or to bury over its existential as-structure but in so doing it has already projected itself as this or that particular possibility in light of its having been thrown into the world. Dasein’s self-interpretation is thus rooted in its very manner of existing.

The temporal structure of Dasein’s world further helps us to understand the existential relation of understanding and interpreting. Inasmuch as the self wants to posit itself as a coherent identity, to make itself present, something that Heidegger does not deny, it always finds itself fraught with the difficulty of finding itself thrown “ahead of itself” (*sich vorweg*) into a context of meanings, its world, in which it is never completely “at home” (*zu Hause*) with itself (BT, 192/236-237; 275/319-320). The “ahead” of the thrown projection specifically takes on the ecstatic temporal meaning as a projection from the future (327/375). In fact, temporality is a unity of three primary horizons of time that encompass the “moments” of the others in their ek-stasis. From the future Dasein realizes a possibility of its past (“having been”) in the Present. Heidegger calls this process temporality’s “ecstatico-horizonal” character (426/479). Dasein is “stretched” across these temporal ecstasies and is thus never a complete identity at any one moment in time.

Heidegger elucidates the ways in which Dasein’s projection of its “concern” for entities “with-which” it can order itself toward a goal is at root a temporal structure. To be in the world is necessarily to “take time” for oneself for this possibility or for that. The thrownness of every projection means that Dasein is always situated in the context of time-relations. Something given to Dasein in the present “now” moment of its making-present (BT, 422/474) happens as an interpretive “reckoning” with time (408-409/460-461). When Dasein “dates” itself by assigning “then” to the moments in which something is made present to it, it actually retains as present what has been in its past by anticipating the future. The “now-point” in which something is made present is never a discrete moment for the arrival of something in the present, but is rather the ecstatic opening of a temporal projection that makes possible Dasein’s fixation on something that is present for it “now” (409/461). The phenomenon is thus never fully given. Dasein’s temporal situation makes withdrawal into absence just as essential to the structure of the showing as the making-present of an entity for view. Every “showing” is the presence/absence disclosed as a temporal structure. On this reading of the hermeneutical conditions of showing, it would seem that Marion’s hyperbolic reduction to the phenomenon that gives itself without remainder violates the phenomenon by forcing it to give itself exhaustively.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ My critique of Marion on this score is inspired by James K. A. Smith’s defense of Husserl. Smith argues that Husserl was really the one to identify the principle that the phenomenon gives itself only to the degree

What does this mean in the context of our present analysis? For one, Heidegger has shown us that the phenomenon is never fully given, intuitively or otherwise, for good reason: Temporality and world are the horizons that hide themselves as the opening in which Dasein, as it were, “now” makes-present for-itself something meaningful (BT, 407/459, 410/463). These horizons are what constitute the “phenomenality” of the phenomenon. Moreover, since Dasein is always a *thrown* self whose identity to a large extent derives from its relation to others, there is room for interpretive “sharing” of the given that respects difference. This sharing need not collapse the given into the solipsism of a transcendental ego or fuse it into the transcendental horizon of pure givenness. Secondly, what gives itself to Dasein is clearly not necessarily the phenomenon in its entirety, but is the result of Dasein’s co-intending (making-present) from the standpoint of its world-temporal horizon. The phenomenon gives itself in varying degrees to the immanence of experience without allowing its *essence* to be constituted as such. The radical perspectivalism of this account acts as a protective buffer against the arbitrary imposition of anyone’s absolute substance or unmediated givenness – in short, there are resources that aid one’s step back from these (often disguised) forms of onto-theology.

Here I have attempted to trace the deepest contours of Heidegger’s proposed step back from onto-theology and have concluded that it entails not a step out of the interiority of the self per se, but a suspicion against the absolutely autonomous self. As such Heidegger’s call to think ontological difference is a gesture of respect not only for the alterity of the Wholly other, but also for the incomprehensible depths of factual life. In its most basic form Heidegger’s call is, I think, to think ontology differently. Overcoming onto-theology does not entail the reductive task of delimiting the sphere or region of ontology against some transcendent absolute. It entails, rather, the commitment to thinking otherwise than the logic of ousiatic domination or its mere reversal (that perpetuates the logic of domination).

Conclusions: Thinking ontology differently: Interpretations

I do not claim to have resolved the entire complex of issues surrounding onto-theology. I admit that there are a lot of things to be worked out, especially with regard to the task of thinking the ontology of relations differently. However, here I have attempted to show that Marion’s givenness does not broaden the field of possible religious experience past Heidegger’s hermeneutics of facticity. It seems that Marion perpetuates the logic at the heart of onto-theology of the autonomous self for whom everything is a present-at-hand object. The *Auslegung* structure of phenomenal disclosure from *Being and Time*, on the other hand, provides resources for treating religious experience – or any encounter between the self and an Other – without the theoretical antithesis of the subject-object

to which the finite perceiver can receive it. The phenomenon’s alterity is not threatened by its retrieval in the mode of something concretely understood. Moreover, Smith recognizes that Marion’s hyperbolic reduction of the phenomenon under the principle of givenness takes away the phenomenon’s right to withhold itself (at least in part) from being-given. See James K. A. Smith, “Respect and Donation,” 523-38.

relation. Of course, Marion's objection to the transcendentalism in Dasein stands. The "call" of Being issuing from Dasein's care for its *ownmost* self is a remnant, indeed a miming, of the onto-theological tradition that sets an absolute self (resolute in its own Being) over-against the diffusive pull of the world.

In Chapter 3 I argue that Heidegger and Marion in fact share the deepest residue of onto-theology in common, which is the transcendentalist notion of the autonomy of theoretical thought from any worldview which perpetuates the dialectic of radical separation or attempted synthesis between philosophy and theology. I propose that a possible way of rethinking the relationship of philosophy and theology is to accept the deepest implications of factual life as a radically perspectival account of knowledge and being. In a constructive move I suggest that a Christian philosophy attempts to think the deepest questions of ontology and epistemology not from a transcendentalist standpoint to which Christian interpretations are appended, but from a more radical starting point of thought in the pre-theoretical conditions of interpretation and worldview.

III: Possibilities: toward a hermeneutic Christian philosophy

The notion of Christian philosophy is not something that is widely discussed in mainstream philosophical circles. This is not without reason: the notion may seem to many a throwback to ages past or else a futile effort at reconciling the apparently incompatible elements “Christian” and “philosophy.” After all, one of Heidegger’s claims in the wake of his attempted step back from onto-theology is that philosophical thinking stops precisely at the point where belief begins. He argues, “faith is so absolutely the mortal enemy [of philosophy] that philosophy does not even begin to want in any way to do battle with it” (PT, 20, my bracketed insertions). Faith is an existentiell modification, an interpretation, of the underlying “form of existence” that is properly the region of philosophical investigation (PT, 20). This is because Dasein’s Being-in-the-world is “the free and spontaneous self-involvement with beings as such” (OTM, 56); Dasein does not require faith in order to “be”; hence philosophy as transcendental science of Being brackets faith so as to allow radical questioning to perform the task peculiar to its own essence. Radical questioning turned back upon itself brings Dasein back into the ontological centre of its ownmost self. “To accept this kind of question means to accomplish the step back” (56). Any claim to a Christian philosophy would thus remain dogmatically chained to the onto-theological idea that an absolute being grounds every possible relation to beings. Christian philosophy is not radical thinking at all, since it is bound to commitments of a dogmatic nature. Heidegger comes to associate the “Christian-ecclesiastical” with the “theological” interpretation of the world, both of which he claims order the world from the point of view of an inherited conceptual superstructure (NW, 165). Thinking qua thinking, on the other hand, cannot accept any such superstructure for the sake of faith or belief. To do so would be internally inconsistent with the aspirations of true philosophy, a “square circle” (PT, 21).

Yet, one of the things that I have attempted to demonstrate in this study is that Heidegger’s step back into “pure” philosophical questioning may actually entrench the very onto-theological presuppositions he wishes to overthrow by such a step. Indeed, Marion has done much work towards disrupting the purity of Heidegger’s ontological thinking. Such purity entrenches another metaphysical subject for whom everything must pass through the “screen of Being.” As I argued in agreement with Marion in Chapter 2, the dualism of the merely ontic and the purely ontological means that even God, if it is to appear at all, is forced into an “ontic” determination of its being. In contradistinction to this merely ontic call, Dasein calls itself ontologically, as it were, from the anterior instance of its own Being. I recapitulate, the call of the care of the self moves against the pull of intersubjective relations or even any relation with the wholly other. It is only because Dasein “risks itself” in opening a world for beings to appear that anything can give itself. As Marion observed in Heidegger’s path of thinking, all giving therefore happens for the sake of the “accomplishment of Being” sought in the risk (FA, 87-88, modified). But has Heidegger really convinced us of his *interpretation* of facticity? As Smith keenly notes, the whole of Heidegger’s work demonstrates that “theory is not free from prejudice, from ‘extra-philosophical’ commitments” but at the same time Heidegger himself insists on the neutrality of his own reading of the existential life of human be-

ing.⁹⁹ John D. Caputo has argued something very similar as part of his task of “demythologizing Heidegger”. By this he understands the task of replacing one myth of the authentic self with another.¹⁰⁰

It is in the vein of these philosophers that I argue in this chapter that not only is Christian philosophy a possibility, but it can even positively constitute its own particular version of the step back from onto-theology. Contrary to attempting to colonize all of philosophy under the totalizing theological gaze, Christian philosophy would consist in particular tendencies of interpreting factual life from the basis of its pre-theoretical, pre-philosophical commitments, in short, from its “worldview” (*Weltanschauung*).¹⁰¹ Heidegger defines “worldview” in *Basic Problems* as jointly “a conception of the contexture of natural things” and “an interpretation of the sense and purpose of the human Dasein and hence of history” (BPP, 7/5). In other words, worldview is a way or manner of viewing the world that both orients one to the fundamental place of the human being in its world and subsequently conditions one’s access to and reception of givens within the world.

Hence, I am arguing that Heidegger’s disclosure of the radically interpretive and perspectival nature of facticity levels the playing field, so to speak, for religious perspectives to have a voice in philosophy. Christian philosophy would be but one voice in the broader philosophical community made up of a plurality of interpretations of the most fundamental nature and meaning of human experience. I even leave open the question of difference within the community of Christian philosophers. For example, Reformed philosophers may tend to theorize about the creation myth (its ontological implications, etc.) differently than Catholic philosophers, though both communities generally share similar beliefs about the creational characteristic of reality. This frees particular religious experiences to form particular philosophical (and theological) voices without the intervention of any totalizing onto-theological horizon. It does not force the particular religious experiences rooted in the distinct worldview of individual traditions to be annexed by an overarching program that sets a common agenda with supposedly neutral philosophical starting points.

⁹⁹ James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 111.

¹⁰⁰ John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana UP), 1993.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 77. Smith’s definition of “commitment” is roughly analogous to what Herman Dooyeweerd means by “ground-motive” and what Jean-François Lyotard means by “narrative”. Each of these terms, I think, denotes commitment to “something ‘ultimate’ which cannot be rationally proven, but rather stands at the beginning of all reason and theory.” This “ultimate” need not be God; it need only be pre-theoretical commitment to some grounding narrative that constitutes a fundamental way of interpreting the “givens” encountered in one’s world. Lyotard observes that the narrative serves to ground the primacy of the community in tribal cultures. One of the founding principles of onto-theology, I am suggesting, is the idea that philosophy can extricate itself of these grounding commitments – that philosophy is a “pure” science of reason. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 18-23. Herman Dooyeweerd, *In The Twilight of Western Thought*.

In short, whereas Heidegger insists on excluding worldview from philosophizing (BPP, 15/11), one could ask if a more radical position on the hermeneutical structure of Dasein might acknowledge the role played by pre-theoretical commitments in philosophizing.¹⁰² Is not my role as a philosopher conditioned by my “worlded” position as a being who interprets? Is not the notion of a neutral philosophy also, therefore, an unverifiable dogma? Is there ever such a thing as unmediated access to the way things really are?¹⁰³ Heidegger rightly asserts that the essence of philosophy cannot consist of the construction of a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), since a worldview “springs in every case from a factual Dasein in accordance with its factual possibilities, and it is what it is in each case for this particular Dasein” (BPP, 12/9). But Heidegger goes on in *Basic Problems* to assert that ontological questioning is of another order of knowledge than that of worldview, as if ontological questioning were somehow originally devoid of worldview (15/11). It is this latter claim that I think is unwarranted. For example, much work in the Reformed tradition to develop an ontology of neighbourly love attests to this. The distinct Reformed worldview that affirms the goodness of intersubjective relationships as the site of the authentic formation of self-identity lends itself to an alternative ontological account of the meaning of the self to the one Marion (justly) deconstructs.¹⁰⁴ Ontological questioning is always firmly rooted in pre-theoretical commitments and beliefs that belong to a philosopher’s worldview.

It is for this reason, too, that I find Marion’s construal of philosophy rather troubling. Marion has spilled much ink in a concerted effort to reintroduce the possibility of God showing up in philosophy. But philosophy itself is to Marion something of a paradox. Its highest possibility is not to articulate meanings, but only to describe the possibility that something entirely inconceivable may show up as that which is absolutely incommensurate to the subject’s unaided (by revelation) modes of knowing. This is to restore to philosophy something of its traditional role as a “handmaiden” to theology. For Marion philosophy itself does not *mean* anything: it is unalloyed description of the pure possibility of the phenomenon. When one makes a judgment as to the meaning of the phenomenon, one has stepped into the domain of faith. But is this not also to privilege the

¹⁰² Ibid., 77.

¹⁰³ Nietzsche enjoys a lot of attention today from those who label their work “postmodern”. However, Kierkegaard deconstructed the “onto-theology” of his day from the standpoint of his Christian faith. What is interesting to note is that each of these philosophers replaces the modern European “faith” in the autonomy of theoretical reason with his own sort of belief commitments. There is no separate philosophical justification for accepting Nietzsche’s worldview over Kierkegaard’s. It just so happens that most of today’s postmodern philosopher’s, at least in Canadian philosophy departments, prefer to be more “Nietzschean” than “Kierkegaardian.” See Merold Westphal, “Nietzsche as a Theological Resource,” *Modern Theology* 13:2 (April 1997): 213-226.

¹⁰⁴ See James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking ‘with’ Radical Orthodoxy,” afterword in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, edited by James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 277-293.

dogma that claims that philosophy's "findings" are completely neutral and available to all in the same way? Is this not another claim to lay access to the way things really are without the mediation of perspective? Is not Marion's phenomenologist the completely disinterested observer that can only belong to the myth of *theoria*?

It is for this reason that I believe that Heidegger's denunciation of Christian philosophy as a "square circle" mirrors almost perfectly Marion's construal of "Christian philosophy" (CP) as the philosophical tradition in its entirety.¹⁰⁵ One thinker disbars Christianity from philosophy; the other subjects all philosophy to the authority of the "tradition" on the basis of a (supposedly) purely rational appeal to philosophy's highest good, the *summum bonum*. As opposite as these conclusions may be, it is perhaps still the case that they are the product of a single trajectory of thought – the assumption that pre-theoretical commitments have absolutely no part in philosophizing. It ends up being this particular assumption about philosophy that gives both Heidegger and Marion reason to privilege, almost to the point of absolutizing, one particular tradition of philosophical questioning over others. I take up this point in a critique of Marion's construal of Christian philosophy.

A critique of Marion's "heuristic" model of Christian philosophy

Marion's heuristic model of Christian philosophy follows from his attempted phenomenological step back from onto-theology. In a shorter work he examines two principal interpretations of Etienne Gilson's scholastic thesis that posits revelation as reason's necessary *supplement* or auxiliary. Marion aims to further Gilson's insight that revelation serves as auxiliary to reason, meaning that it leads reason into radically new interpretations of phenomena that would not otherwise have been discerned on the basis of natural reason alone (CP, 250-51). As one might expect, Marion wishes to evade the conclusions of Feuerbach and Heidegger, for whom Christian philosophy is a "contradictory syntagma," a "square circle," an "iron-wood" (248). But Marion discerns yet another danger in treating Christian philosophy as though it were merely one hermeneutical construction among many, albeit one that happens to "appeal" to revelation. According to Marion, the danger of this reading of Gilson's thesis is that it *prima facie* adopts secular philosophical positions to articulate theological themes. In short, it "proceeds from a Christian interpretation of philosophical theses" rather than leading philosophical inquiry to broach "themes that otherwise [without revelation] would be unreachable" (249-250, my parentheses).

The hermeneutical approach to Christian philosophy, according to Marion, surrenders the domain of revelation over to philosophy. The idea is that revelation must somehow "fit" with the neutral findings of the philosophical mainstream. The resulting

¹⁰⁵ See Jean-Luc Marion, "Christian Philosophy: Hermeneutic or Heuristic?" in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, edited by Francis J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham UP, 1999). The following discussion of heuristic Christian philosophy draws on this article.

“Christian interpretation” of phenomena ends up distorting both the Christian and the philosophical elements involved in the synthesis (253).

Marion gives a threefold critique of this “hermeneutic” Christian philosophy:

- 1) Christian philosophy as hermeneutic is at best commentary on what has already been established in philosophy without the aid of Christian dogma. As such, it has no capacity to internally critique opposing hermeneutical frameworks and models.¹⁰⁶
- 2) Christian philosophy as hermeneutic is arbitrary because at the level of competing truth claims there is no external justification for selecting the Christian “interpretation” of the given over any other theory or model. Moreover, hermeneutical philosophy is always susceptible to deconstruction (“contra-hermeneutics”), since it cannot demonstrate the verity of its position from its own conceptual resources.¹⁰⁷
- 3) Christian philosophy as hermeneutic must treat revelation as though it were “a simple implication of nature and thus of philosophy.” Faith becomes mere assent to the doctrine of the supernatural, which has to be justified on the basis of natural reason alone.

Marion’s position here can be traced back to his critique of metaphysics that I articulated in the first two chapters. Hermeneutical Christian philosophy ends up conceiving the Other onto-theologically. Though no one particular “interpretation” of given phenomena gains any advantage over others, since the playing field of interpretation itself has been leveled to include every perspective, the “game” is given over to the reigning paradigm according to the sheer rules of dominance of the will to power. If Nietzschean

¹⁰⁶ This means that there is no internal criterion that would allow one to privilege one competing interpretation of a phenomenon over another. For example, there would be nothing to privilege a Christian interpretation of economic phenomena over a Marxist one (252). Incidentally, if given a choice between the two positions, I would be much more inclined to side with Marx’s interpretation of poverty as the product of class oppression against Marion’s supposedly “Christian” interpretation of poverty as virtue. Granted, the text in question does not make it clear whether or not Marion really adopts this position, but my point stands to reason: even if the claim is only hypothetically employed, I could still ask whether it plausible to argue that there is only one Christian interpretation of phenomena. One might insist, with Heidegger, that there are as many (or perhaps more) Christian interpretations of phenomena as there are theological traditions.

¹⁰⁷ Counter-hermeneutics, as Marion calls it, come from philosophers (Freud, Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Derrida, et al) who have the nerve to surface the hidden assumptions lurking behind the predominant onto-theological framework. If hermeneutic Christian philosophy adopts the language of first causes and prime movers to express its notion of the divine, there will always be a thinker like Nietzsche or Heidegger to expose (and destroy) the arbitrariness of this “God” from within the very framework that posits its existence.

deconstruction is the order of the day, then Christian philosophers may buy the story or else pack their things and get out!

Only by securing a “heuristic” sense of revelation as “indispensable auxiliary” to reason, argues Marion, can Christian philosophy treat what unaided reason would not otherwise grasp (255). Revelation gives Christian philosophy its critical edge because it reconnects thought with the donating source. “But from now on, the ‘auxiliary’ brought by revelation not only assists in providing a new interpretation of phenomena that are already visible, but also makes visible phenomena that would have remained invisible without it” (255). In the heuristic model faith remains formally distinct from philosophy, but it also regains its power to direct philosophical inquiry by what is revealed in it. It thus supplies philosophy with the external impetus to broach new topics and to disclose hidden phenomena in a way that has not been surpassed in both modern and postmodern philosophy. It also regains the power to internally critique hermeneutical frameworks of “natural” knowledge that would otherwise disbar the inter-ruption of experience by the Wholly other (256-57).¹⁰⁸

There is a direct parallel between this heuristic model of Christian philosophy and Marion’s phenomenological dis-closure of the “saturated phenomenon.” Both concepts “function philosophically even without the Christian convictions of their user” (CP, 260). Revelation supplies concepts to philosophy to help it broach its own, unseen object (259-260). As one might expect, Marion more or less (with minor qualifications) indicates the saturated phenomena – face, person, history, faith – amongst these invisible objects of philosophy proper. These objects are disclosed only in the “order” of agapic love (charity). For example, the phenomenon of the other person, the “invisible face” of the unseen other, is envisaged in love. “To see this invisible face, I must love it.” And “love,” argues Marion, “comes from charity, that is, through the ‘auxiliary’ of revelation” (257, modified). When the philosopher is disconnected from this infinitely higher order of knowing, s/he inevitably closes philosophy off from its transcendent source.¹⁰⁹ Thus, for Marion Christian philosophy as a “heuristic of charity” must take up the mantle of allowing faith to direct its research projects. Philosophy by itself could never reveal anything besides its groundlessness. Because philosophy aspires to what cannot be articulated in words, transcendence, it is founded essentially in a paradox. Philosophy is only properly itself when it is surpassed in faith. “‘Christian philosophy’ dies if it repeats,

¹⁰⁸ Marion’s allusion to the saturated phenomenon is evident here. Heuristic Christian philosophy uses concepts as icons – much in the manner of Heidegger’s formal indications – as a way of pointing beyond the concept itself to the (invisible) infinite that manifests in the finite. Marion’s “exemplary case” of Christian philosophy is the face. The revelation of love (charity) discloses the true (invisible) face of the other. Only those who have the faith to “see” this invisible phenomenon of the face are equipped with a new topic for philosophical research. Every other “closed” ontological framework cannot recognize the appearance of the invisible in the face. Faith is philosophy’s Good Samaritan who preserves the dignity of what has been and what can be disclosed as phenomenon.

¹⁰⁹ In *Being Given*, the types of saturated phenomena are the event, the idol, the icon, and the flesh (BG, 225-233). These types find their rough equivalents in the items listed above.

defends, and preserves something acquired which is already known, and remains alive only if it discovers that which, without it, would remain hidden in philosophy” (258).

An apt analogy for Marion’s model of Christian philosophy is the telephone company that has a monopoly over the lines of telecommunication.¹¹⁰ The monopolistic company, Charity, invented all of the existing lines of communication (the inventors were “inspired” through revelation). As the consequence of right, Charity owns the lines. Other companies may use the lines since they do not have their own, and since by its very nature Charity has no desire to restrict free access to the lines. Charity never asserts totalitarian domination. However, regardless of how many other companies use the lines, Charity alone always provides the best services because it alone knows how to make the best use of the lines of telecommunication. Of all the phone companies, Charity allows its clients to speak the most clearly; it makes audible what cannot be heard through the mediation of the same lines in the control of another telephone company, say, Absolute Spirit or Enlightenment Rationalism. Even companies that want to tear down the phone lines and replace them with their own, companies like Will to Power and Deconstruction, are forced to use the existing lines in order to communicate and thus to establish their projects. Charity makes communication possible at the deepest levels. Moreover, only Charity is capable of restructuring and improving the lines without falling prey to the dangers of nihilism. Only Charity has the express capacity (by right) to communicate with the source that provides the lines and keeps them operational.

This means that, to Marion, modern philosophy is a sort of prodigal son facing the destitution of nihilism because cut off from the donating source of the given. A passage from *God Without Being* is quite helpful here. The parabolic prodigal son demands possession of *ousia* from the father who willingly gives. “Therefore he asks not so much for his share of *ousia*—since he has always enjoyed that—but not to have to owe that share of *ousia* to a gift” (GWB, 142/97). The son does not merely want what is his; he wants to abandon the trace of the father, the gift, in it. “He asks that one grant that he no longer have to receive any gift—precisely, no longer have to receive the *ousia* as a gift: He asks to possess it, dispose of it, enjoy it without passing through the gift and the reception of the gift” (142/97). As a result the *ousia* “dissipates”; the “landed property” of the inheritance turns to “liquid money, which, by definition, seeps and trickles between the fingers” (98, modified). This is the plight of a philosophical tradition that is similarly

¹¹⁰ I am applying James K. A. Smith’s use of Jacques Derrida’s analogy of the postal system to critique his (Derrida’s) reading of the metaphysical tradition to critique Marion’s reading in “Christian philosophy” as well. He argues that, while metaphysics assumes that its “letter” is “not able not to arrive”, Derrida assumes the opposite, that the letter is not “able to arrive.” Smith proposes a third way between these extremes, that the letter is “able not to arrive.” What he means by this is that interpretations give neither an absolutely complete nor an absolutely incoherent perspective of what is given. Rather, interpretation itself is the “enabling” condition for meaning. What this means in theological terms is that while no one tradition has the right to claim immediate access to God, neither does deconstruction have the right to dismiss theological meanings as a whole. Smith argues that no one interpretive tradition would be able to claim that its use of the “lines” of communication gives it immediate access to the source. Smith also has something to say about Marion’s theology – that it belongs squarely to the metaphysical tradition of immediacy. James K. A. Smith, “How to Avoid Not Speaking: Attestations,” in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997).

“cut off” from the source of its wisdom. Not that the father has disowned his sons: Marion argues that all philosophy is “Christian philosophy” insofar as it puts its inherited concepts – traces – of the gift of charity to use. “Recognizing the imprint of Christian revelation on philosophy and thus the heuristic function of ‘Christian philosophy’ in it, does not depend on a subjective conviction, believing or atheistic: it is about facts, which any competent historian of philosophy knows thoroughly” (CP, 260). Once the concepts of charity are discovered, they are freely available to reason; they become the facts of reason. “The heuristic of charity itself is charitable: what it finds, it gives without confiscating” (260).

Philosophy as a whole thus finds itself at a crossroads: it may retreat into ever more refined versions of onto-theology or else provide an outlet for positive investigation of the “order” of charity (CP, 262). Because it finds itself always investigating topics initially *revealed* in the order of charity, philosophy for Marion is always “Christian philosophy.” Like a deconstructionist working at a Catholic university that individual philosopher is indebted to the tradition, which is inherently “Christian”. They may ultimately work against the grain of the tradition, refusing to acknowledge the revelatory origin of philosophy, but this does not mean that these individuals are not still doing Christian philosophy. “In this sense, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Marx, or Feuerbach practice as much ‘Christian philosophy’ as Leibniz, Hegel, Schelling, or Husserl does” (260). As such, the “imprint” of revelation on the concepts and phenomena revealed by the tradition “does not depend on a subjective conviction, believing or atheistic” (260). It is clearly recognizable to all by the eye of reason.

Let us recapitulate. Here, on the one hand, we have Marion’s notion of hermeneutical Christian philosophy which adopts the findings of supposedly neutral philosophy by giving them a “Christian” interpretation. Christian philosophy as hermeneutic belongs to the onto-theological tradition because it presupposes the groundless ground of modern philosophy. On the other hand, heuristic Christian philosophy carries out the hermeneutical task of interpreting what presents itself in experience not on the basis of neutral ontological structures, but from the vantage of the love which surpasses ordinary knowledge. This love is disclosed first in faith and then in philosophy.¹¹¹ But has Marion given us a false dichotomy? It seems that the “heuristic” sense he restores to Christian philosophy is just as totalizing as the onto-theological tradition he denounces? For, why must we choose between two totalizing traditions? Put more sharply: why must we presuppose that any unmediated given purely and simply

¹¹¹ *The Erotic Phenomenon*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago / London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007) is an extended philosophical meditation on the topic of love. Marion begins the work by opening the ancient problem of the consummation of philosophy as the love of wisdom and there proceeds to unravel the phenomenological meaning of this *eros* at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. The point is that once disclosed to reason, this erotic phenomenon, not only attains a place in philosophy, but supposedly becomes common currency of philosophical dialogue. Apparently, any phenomenologist worth her salt, regardless of her convictions, should draw the same *descriptive* conclusions from an investigation of *eros*.

arrives for philosophy to interpret? Why not suppose, rather, that interpretation belongs to, indeed informs, the given?

To be fair, it is not as though Marion believes his heuristic philosophy could ever be without a standpoint; he never claims that philosophy could ever “interpret” without mediation. Yet, Marion continues to appeal to a basis in “fact” in order to legitimate his interpretation of the tradition (CP, 260). And as Smith so nicely puts it, “The fact of mediation keeps us from immediately enforcing our meditation.”¹¹² I contend that a more radical interpretation of factual life lends itself to an equally radical interpretation of Christian philosophy as hermeneutic of the Christian worldview and such an interpretation provides a more satisfactory step back from onto-theology than that proposed by either Heidegger or Marion.

*Christian philosophy beyond scholasticism*¹¹³

Marion’s critique of so-called hermeneutical Christian philosophy presupposes what Reformed philosopher James H. Olthuis calls the “reason/faith dualism.”¹¹⁴ I propose that we interpret hermeneutical philosophy more radically than Marion has done. After all, hasn’t Heidegger already shown us that interpretation never entails “throwing a ‘signification’” over a “naked thing” merely subsisting as though originally “present-at-hand”? (BT, 150/190-191, modified) If it is the case that interpretation runs all the way down to the foundations of factual life, why should we buy Marion’s commitment to a universal, homogenous “reason” neutrally available to all? (After all, he seems to presuppose that his phenomenological observations would be clearly evident to any disinterested philosophical observer!) Why not assent, rather, to the radically perspectival nature of reason disclosed in the *Daseinsanalytik*? Why not trace the origin of the assertion back to the ecstatic-temporal horizon of human be-ing? This conclusion disrupts the normalizing authority of traditional frameworks and concepts because it dislodges the idea of a timeless referent or a supratemporal, purely eschatological horizon unifying time and history.

Pushing beyond even Heidegger’s conclusions, however, the notion of Christian philosophy I am proposing involves a rejection of the idea that there is an arena of transparent rationality, an autonomous “question of Being” (or question of “givenness”), or a sphere of pure, transcendental inquiry extricated of dogmatic commitments or

¹¹² “How to Avoid Not Speaking: Attestations,” 227.

¹¹³ My subtitle is an allusion to John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).

¹¹⁴ James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking ‘with’ Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, edited by James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 278-279.

worldview.¹¹⁵ In short, I am rejecting the “scholastic” notion that reason is faith’s propaedeutic and as such, is wholly autonomous from the “order” of faith.¹¹⁶ I take Marion’s critique of Heidegger seriously, but seek to move beyond it in a significant way. For, Marion’s own scholasticism bars him from diagnosing the reason/faith dualism at the root of Heidegger’s dogmatic commitment to the question of Being. Both thinkers stand in the onto-theological legacy that bases philosophy in hyperbolic doubt, even though they reject the “metaphysical” thesis that such questioning could ever ground itself in some indubitable truth. Olthuis observes in his critique of Derrida on this score, however, that hyperbolic questioning is itself an interpretive decision fraught with uncertainty. There is no intrinsic principle directing these thinkers to it. As such, they too “remain on the threshold” of onto-theology. He remarks:

For, when all is said and done, if one tarries silent on the threshold because metaphysical claims to certainty and warrants for power are illusions to be overcome, have we really overcome them? To presume that we need to give up on any sense of a founded or grounded decision because the modernist tradition confuses/conflates giving logical reasons and grounding seems questionable.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 278-279. I acknowledge my debt to James H. Olthuis for this line of inquiry. Olthuis treats Derrida’s emphasis on “undecidability” and the *khôra*. He argues that Derrida’s emphases open the way to “a new post-secular discourse about faith and God”. Moreover, Olthuis stresses the priority of the question of whether or not to love over ontological questioning (“to be or not to be?”). This sounds strikingly similar to Marion’s retrieval of charity as the most anterior or “authentic” instance of subjectivity. However, unlike Marion, Olthuis does not construct a secular philosophy of love. His insistence on the gift and the call comes directly from his Christian confession, his “interpretation” and worldview. Olthuis does not stress an anonymous call or a reason that “remains on the threshold” of faith. Olthuis does not insist on the possibility of a subject without faith defined in the broad sense of dogmatic commitments. See James H. Olthuis, “Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love,” in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997), 236, 242.

¹¹⁶ Smith identifies the Scholastic legacy in the thought of both Heidegger and Marion. Despite their differences, these philosophers actually take a quite similar approach to the relationship of faith and philosophy. Philosophical questioning is never mixed with faith. It is perambulatory; it shows the way to faith. See James K. A. Smith, “The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and Philosophy in Early Heidegger,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14:1 (January 1997): 72-73. “Liberating religion from theology,” 21-22.

¹¹⁷ James H. Olthuis, “Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love,” in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997), 243. Echoing Olthuis on this crucial point, Smith argues that there is a sort of dogmatism in young Heidegger’s decision to interpret the condition of intersubjectivity as necessary violence – fallenness into inauthenticity – rather than “as networks for connection that are as crucial to human life as the oxygen we breathe.” Hence, for Smith and Olthuis, relationality, tradition, and shared beliefs are elements of the authentic, rather than the inauthentic, self. Correspondingly, the loneliness of Descartes’ stove-heated room where he dreamed up the isolated, autonomous ego is an onto-theological fantasy that runs “against the human grain” (citing above noted work by James H. Olthuis). A remnant of the Cartesian ego remains in Heidegger’s category of care. See James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations of a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 101-102. For a genealogical account of the historically contingent principle of the care of the

This is not to refute Heidegger and Derrida's keenest insight into the undecidability of reason. It is to draw the most radical conclusion from their observation in suggesting that escaping from the grip of onto-theology entails owning up to one's own interpretive decisions.¹¹⁸

The first thing that "Christian philosophers" like Olthuis and Smith like to remind us of is the radically hermeneutical nature of human be-ing. That is, they adopt one of the most crucial philosophical insights in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger – that philosophy is never without pre-philosophical or pre-theoretical commitments.¹¹⁹ To philosophize is not only to have already interpreted the world in a context of relations; it is to have already *committed* oneself to a fundamental interpretation. Here, I am anticipating the most obvious objection to the project of rooting a distinctly *Christian* philosophy in this more broadly "postmodern" observation: Fundamental commitment does not necessarily entail belief in God (faith), but only the condition of always having fundamental commitments is quite different from the particular commitment of believing in God. Christian philosophers will no doubt hold certain beliefs whose content many in the broader philosophical community will not adopt. Faith in God is certainly not *necessary* to doing philosophy, as though church membership were a prerequisite to thinking critically.

But there is a significant sense in which the terms "faith" and "commitment" can be thought to converge. Indeed, Smith observes that it is only "Because of certain twists and turns in the history of Western philosophy (and Christianity) 'faith' has been confined to largely 'institutional' commitments and reduced to something like 'propositional assent to' some doctrine." He proposes that we bracket the content of faith and consider its formal meaning as fundamental (that is, pre-theoretical) trust or commitment.¹²⁰ Smith gives us a sort of formal indication of faith. He does not reject faith's content or attempt to uniformly ascribe a single *faith-content* to each and every individual. He simply indicates that faith represents a "grounding commitment (which is not itself grounded)".¹²¹ Grounding commitments, I argue, are the basic components of worldview. They provide narrative basis for an account of the human being's place in the world as well as interpretive lenses for one's access to given states of affairs.

John D. Caputo supplies a useful illustration of how this role of faith in philosophizing works. He compares the philosophical approaches of Socrates and Kierkegaard. Each of these thinkers radically questioned the reigning assumptions of the

self, see Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982, translated by Graham Burchell, edited by Frédéric Gros, et al (New York: Picador, 2005).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 244.

¹¹⁹ James K. A. Smith, "The Art of Christian Atheism: Faith and Philosophy in Early Heidegger," *Faith and Philosophy* 14:1 (January 1997): 76-77.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹²¹ Ibid.

day and exposed the unreason at the foundation of many of them. However, each philosopher was driven by a different set of commitments. Kierkegaard believed that the wisdom philosophy seeks can only be found in Christ. Socrates was committed to the ideal political life of the Greek city-state. Arguably, neither thinker sought to replace his founding mythology with some ideal of pure reason. Both pursued the life of questioning as a means of better understanding the ultimate source of wisdom in which he already invested his faith. Their philosophical questioning itself, then, was already directed by the pre-theoretical commitments that grounded it.¹²² I would add to Caputo's summary that philosophy's positive responses to its own questions are also conditioned by pre-theoretical commitments. Plato is just as much a "believer" as Socrates and Kierkegaard in this respect.¹²³

This radical definition of faith makes it quite similar to the notion of worldview. Worldview is a grounding commitment that cannot be rationally demonstrated. It is the pre-theoretical ground of all rational inquiry. It is something of an *existential* condition of factual life, which Heidegger himself describes in *Basic Problems* (BPP, 12/9).¹²⁴ But rather than seeing in worldview something deficient and therefore something to be avoiding in philosophizing, Heidegger could have chosen to interpret philosophy differently, perhaps in a manner more consistent the hermeneutical structure of factual life (17-18/13).¹²⁵ In other words, it is not the case that Heidegger's "radical hermeneutics" forces us dogmatically to ascribe to the notion that philosophy consists of radical, groundless questioning. If not all philosophers are *Christian* philosophers, neither are all philosophers necessarily Kantians or postmodern deconstructionists. Philosophy is not an airtight onto-theological system, but neither is it necessarily an endless confrontation with the *nihil*. Worldview can indeed be considered as something that guides inquiry by leading philosophers to select what they think are issues of fundamental importance, for example, or by formulating particular problems of importance. The Christian worldview (or worldviews) will guide Christian philosophizing as an instrument for serving the community and tradition from which it springs. In other words, theology is no longer the only theoretical discipline bolstered by

¹²² John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 8-9.

¹²³ Lyotard observes even how Plato must give an account of the ultimate reality grounding his philosophical views in the form of a narrative, both in Socrates' allegory of the cave and in the dialogue form itself. Philosophy is always, sometimes despite itself, brought back to its foundation in this "other, narrative, kind of knowledge." *The Postmodern Condition*, 29.

¹²⁴ James H. Olthuis, "Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love," in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997), 243-244.

¹²⁵ Heidegger recognized that the purpose of philosophizing is not solely to form a worldview, but this is not at all to say that philosophy cannot follow *from* a worldview (BPP, 11-12/9). Though, admittedly, my textual evidence is weak, Heidegger appears to be claiming both that philosophy neither forms nor follows from worldview.

a commitment to worldview. Christian philosophy will – must – also assume a worldview.

Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) drew similar conclusions with regard to the relationship between faith and reason. He argued that philosophy belongs to the “theoretical attitude of thought,” which meant to him that it is part of a positive movement that “requires a theoretical synthesis between the logical aspect of our thought and the non-logical experiential aspects which we have set in opposition to it and which constitute its field of research.”¹²⁶ Philosophy itself thus cannot take its own starting point from within the theoretical attitude of thought. Although its purpose is to indicate the interrelationship of “aspects” of our pre-theoretical experience, it is derived from this grounding experience itself. Concepts function for Dooyeweerd much in the way that the formal indication does for the young Heidegger. They refer to aspects of the unity of experience that cannot, without onto-theological violence, be reduced to a *theoretical* unity.

As in Heidegger, these aspects of experience are for Dooyeweerd never objectively given; although, they are irreducible tendencies of experience that Dooyeweerd calls “modes”. The modal aspects of experience comprise a coherent state of affairs that limit possible experiences. This is an important qualification of factual life, since here reality is no longer solely an existential projection.¹²⁷ Dooyeweerd solves the problem in Heidegger (critiqued by Marion) of the *utter* groundlessness of interpretations, which Dooyeweerd calls the problem of “subjectivism.” But it will be objected that the structure of theoretical truth cannot be dependent on our subjective insight. My answer is that it is not *dependent* on this insight in the sense of being *determined* by it or *subjected* to it. But without my subjective insight into theoretical truth, its structure will remain hidden from my cognitive selfhood.¹²⁸

For Dooyeweerd as for Heidegger, theoretical “truth” itself remains bound to the subjective insight of a perceiver, and, as in Heidegger, it is not the most originary or primordial mode of knowing. However, this does not mean that the object of theoretical thought is wholly subjectively determined, as though it were merely the constituted object of a transcendental ego or a projection onto the “screen of Being”. Dooyeweerd acknowledges that our interpretive possibilities are always restricted by an a priori horizon of givens which are, nonetheless, only accessed through the mediation of our pre-theoretical commitments. What I believe about what is given will ultimately shape how I receive it.

¹²⁶ Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Theoretical Thought* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1965), 37.

¹²⁷ See note 41.

¹²⁸ Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Volume II: *The General Theory of the Modal Spheres*, translated by David H. Freeman and H. De Jongste (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij H. J. Paris / Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1955), 577-578. I must also acknowledge my debt to James K. A. Smith for his interpretation of Dooyeweerd’s theory of truth. See James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, 172-174.

Dooyeweerd almost prefigures postmodern thought with another one of his key insights. This is his notion that theoretical thought is rooted in *pre-theoretical* “basic-motives”. These basic-motives (or ground-motives) are positive starting points that motivate one’s interpretive response to the shared horizon of human experience. They are substantial commitments in that they “say” something about the root meaning of human experience. Dooyeweerd’s two theses establish the radically interpretive or hermeneutical nature of philosophy without leaving philosophy open to the distinct, onto-theological danger of subjectivism. This logically entails two essential things for any potential Christian philosophy.¹²⁹ For one, because theory itself is an interpretation of the “temporal order of our experience”, there are no neutral transcendental-ontological structures available to a naked eye of reason.¹³⁰ Contra Marion, hermeneutic Christian philosophy is not an interpretive reception of a fundamental ontology; it is theoretical reflection on experience that begins with Christian confession as its *pre-theoretical* starting point. In other words, interpretation begins with worldview, not commentary. Theory is the outworking of a particular way of interpreting experience that begins at the level of belief and confession, tradition, and praxis.¹³¹ This levels the playing field between different traditions in philosophy, since every tradition is thought to begin with a particular *mythos*, a particular confession of belief about the nature of things.¹³² Secondly, *philosophical* concepts belong to the “theoretical attitude of thought”, which means that they may articulate worldview, but they can never ground worldview.¹³³ Granted, concepts work themselves into the collective psyche of a tradition; or in Heidegger’s language, one may not “confess” without the fore-having, fore-conception, and for-sight of an inherited context of meanings. But this is a long way from the claim that basic concepts inherit universal *normative* value once they arise through the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 138.

¹³¹ See James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking ‘with’ Radical Orthodoxy,” Afterword in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, edited by James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 282-283.

¹³² Pushing this argument beyond Dooyeweerd, we can also observe that there is a lot of room for difference within the vast domain of “Christian philosophy”. Heidegger had already recognized this with respect to his phenomenology of religious life. The differences between, say, a Roman Catholic philosophy and a Baptist philosophy must be respected. Heidegger teaches us that, even within Christianity, different traditions place different emphases on the relative importance of certain doctrines, teachings, liturgies, etc. In each case, philosophy is rooted in the confession and basic concerns of its respective tradition. As Smith notes, philosophy will develop its own research projects according to its own beliefs about the basic nature of reality and knowledge, and it will develop and supply concepts for use in theology. This model counters Marion’s violent retrieval of philosophy under conceptual norms. James K. A. Smith’s approach to the philosophy-theology relation is largely Dooyeweerdian as in “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11:2 (2003): 238-239, 242-243.

¹³³ James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking ‘with’ Radical Orthodoxy,” 282-283.

interpretative work of one particular tradition. Concepts are “windows” of experience, and as Olthuis reminds us:

There is no one window for all, one metapoint from which to sit in judgment and declare one to be the truth. Provisionality, tentativeness, and humility need to be marks of the theological/philosophical task. Any kind of totalizing discourse with its pretense of control and comprehensiveness is as unbecoming as it is impossible.

There is unnecessary violence in the assertion that one’s discourse emanates from an absolute source and that places it structurally beyond revision.

Hence a more robustly hermeneutical Christian philosophy unabashedly “confesses” its dogmatic starting points (in the dual sense of disclosing these starting points to both itself and to the broader philosophical community). Because factual life is interpretation all the way down, dogmatic basic-motives or pre-theoretical starting points are unavoidable. It is not a matter of *whether* one will bring these core commitments into philosophizing; rather, it is a matter of *what* core commitments one will bring. The Christian worldview will thus lead Christian philosophers to adopt the conceptual frameworks and guiding questions that suit their respective communities.¹³⁴ For example, the a-theistic liberal account of human be-ing suits communities of liberal philosophers but is antithetical to the Christian worldview. Though Christian philosophers need not all agree on one philosophical model of the self or even on the exact nature of the theistic framework from which to begin philosophizing, there will be widespread agreement on the particular nature of human be-ing as ontologically dependent upon God.¹³⁵

Contra Marion, hermeneutical Christian philosophy does not lose all capacity to critique ontological and epistemological norms belonging to other philosophical traditions. Christian philosophers may critique as well as learn from and be corrected by other philosophers in the broader philosophical community.¹³⁶ As Merold Westphal

¹³⁴ James K. A. Smith, “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” 243.

¹³⁵ A more specific example of this is the difference between the Reformed and Radical Orthodoxy traditions. While both traditions agree on the doctrine that the material order is created and therefore dependant upon God, their respective ontological frameworks articulate this belief differently. Radical Orthodoxy opts for a “participatory ontology” that “suspends” immanent materiality from a transcendent origin in which it participates analogically. The Reformed tradition prefers a more “covenantal” approach to the incarnation in place of RO’s Neoplatonism. See James H. Olthuis, “A Radical Ontology of Love: Thinking ‘with’ Radical Orthodoxy,” 279-281.

¹³⁶ James K. A. Smith, “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” 243. See also Janet Catherina Wesselius, “Points of Convergence Between Dooyeweerdian and Feminist Views of the Philosophic Self,” in *Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*, edited by James H. Olthuis (New York: Fordham UP, 1997), 54-68. Wesselius draws an important parallel between, broadly, what “feminist” and “Dooyeweerdian” (Christian) critiques of philosophy’s transcendental ego can respectively contribute to the ongoing philosophical discussion. Though there are crucial differences that separate feminism from Christian philosophy, even to the point that an analogy between the two may be unfruitful, yet neither “tendency” to philosophize should be denied its epistemic right to its own grounding assumptions. I extend

reminds any potential Christian philosopher, epistemic rights to one's grounding assumptions do not necessarily give one the right to be unreflectively conservative.¹³⁷ There must be room for feminist philosophy, for example, to critique the reigning patriarchal paradigms so prominent in the Christian tradition and it is up to Christian philosophers not only to take these objections seriously but also to be willing to amend their own views about the fundamental nature of reality.¹³⁸ Only, there must be the initial recognition by all parties involved that basic differences in pre-theoretical starting points are ultimately a matter of the incommensurability of distinct worldviews and not of competing rationalities. Conceptual frameworks are adopted in order to give theoretical accounts of the basic meaning of our experiences. For this reason they are of *instrumental* value. They may be wholly inadequate to the nature of one tradition's pre-theoretical views, and in that case, they no longer serve any legitimate purpose for that tradition. There is no ultimate philosophical justification for privileging one "version" of the myth of the self above another, though there may still be existential or pragmatic grounds for comparing different worldviews.¹³⁹

What follows from this is that a more radically hermeneutical view of philosophy in general would give up on the task of disclosing a universal phenomenon of history and of overcoming metaphysics. The most radical implications of Heidegger's genealogy of the onto-theological tradition are that even the "truth" of ontological claims as such is historically contingent.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the most radical conclusion we could draw from this is that no inception of questioning in the history of philosophy, neither the Parmenidean question of Being nor the Socratic question of the Good, determines (as if from necessity)

my thanks to Dana Hollander and to Diane Enns for pointing out the problematic nature of any deeper analogy between Christian philosophy and feminism.

¹³⁷ Merold Westphal, "Taking Plantinga Seriously: Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 16:2 (April 1999): 176.

¹³⁸ For example, I as a Christian philosopher am highly critical of the ontological dualism that is commonly taken for granted in some highly conservative evangelical denominations, especially where it translates to the subordination of women – where women are associated with the passive/affective "bodily" component of the person and men are associated with disembodied spirituality, rationality, soul, etc. Many Christian philosophers say the same thing. This critical self-reflection in the Christian community may not have come about were it not for feminist philosophers drawing the attention of the philosophical community at large to the way in which traditional ontological paradigms contribute to and perpetuate concrete, historical violence toward women.

¹³⁹ For example, Smith challenges what he identifies as the myth of violence in philosophy. Since relationships and difference need not be construed as necessary violence, there is nothing intrinsically compelling in even Heidegger or Derrida's belief that the condition of intersubjectivity is necessarily rooted in violent encounters with the other. Likewise, feminist philosophers have attributed this myth about intersubjectivity to patriarchal worldviews. Feminist philosophers, for example, may have existential grounds for preferring over a worldview that affirms violence and domination a worldview that affirms peace and unity. *The Fall of Interpretation*, 103-104.

¹⁴⁰ I am indebted for this observation to Iain D. Thompson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: UP, 2005), 9-11.

the ultimate meaning of metaphysics. On this account, the best “step back” from onto-theology consists not in the resolute call to thinking the essence of metaphysics, nor the abandonment of thought to the Wholly other, but in a self-consciously hermeneutical approach to the nature of the self that leaves open the possibility of a plethora of different interpretations. If to the core of onto-theology belongs the program of an autonomous rationality, then a step out will largely consist in a more radical hermeneutical approach to factual life that acknowledges the role of played by worldview in philosophizing.

Any resulting articulation of the relationship of philosophy to theology will not thus downplay the role of beliefs in these respective disciplines. As Merold Westphal argues, the point is not to “construe finitism to be a constraint on *what* may be said,” as though philosophy compelled one to “provide unsituated warrant for this or that...notion.”¹⁴¹ This is still to buy the myth of presuppositionless philosophical starting points, or at least that the “orthodoxy” of the philosophical mainstream supplies the best possible point of departure. My critique of Marion also reminds us that Christian philosophy can easily devolve into a program that sets the agenda for all of philosophy. This is when it transgresses its hermeneutical boundaries and crosses into the domain of onto-theology. There is a difference between Christian philosophers serving their respective faith communities whilst maintaining a healthy dialogue with other philosophers and these same philosophers setting the agenda for philosophy as a whole. The latter approach usually presupposes the elements of the onto-theological paradigm I critiqued in the first two chapters of this work, namely, the notion of a central operative agent for whom everything is reduced to presence, a priori conceptual frameworks, universal assertions as to the essential truth of or about Being, etc.

The clue in Marion’s heuristic of charity is the privilege it according to one particular theological tradition. It is a matter of fact in the history of philosophy that our concepts of the Wholly other belong to one lineage, one tradition. This is not *a* tradition in philosophy; it is *the* tradition! As Smith wittily retorts, it is as though God has shown up once and for all to reveal that he (always he!) prefers Neoplatonism to Thomism.¹⁴² If Christian philosophy is to avoid this sort of hubris it must step back from the reductive interpretations of metaphysics that so easily find themselves landing in the very onto-theological errors that they are intended to destroy. This is where Heidegger’s account of the formal indication is useful. Christian philosophy as a hermeneutic account of experience springs from that very experience itself. It is an indication of the meaning of one’s encounter with the Other rather than a demonstration of this encounter.¹⁴³ The indication itself is a highly mediated account of the world. The indication points to the way in which one fundamentally views the Other. It shows the way in which one understands one’s own “world” of concrete meanings. Christian philosophy thus does not refer back to an unmediated origin of all experience. The ultimate referent of its concepts,

¹⁴¹ Merold Westphal, “Nietzsche as a Theological Resource,” 221.

¹⁴² James K. A. Smith, “How to Avoid not Speaking: Attestations,” 223.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 229.

frameworks, and meanings is the context-embedded “witness” of particular individuals and communities. Smith’s conclusion with regard to theology applies equally to Christian philosophy: While language is a door to meaning, “Such is not a pure perspective, or the ‘true’ perspective, or God’s perspective, but a meaningful perspective, which, if nothing else, is a helpful perspective.”¹⁴⁴

Smith is, in fact, very close to the Dooyeweerdian perspective on the relationship of philosophy to theology. While for Dooyeweerd, philosophical inquiry supplies insight into the temporal unity of the different “aspects” of factual life, this insight itself is tempered by the distinct witness of the philosopher.¹⁴⁵ Since philosophy itself is grounded in the specific *pre-theoretical* faith commitments that spring from the worldview of the philosopher, this means that the theoretical sciences are similarly grounded “from the bottom up,” so to speak. “Dogmatic theology,” as Dooyeweerd calls it, is no exception. It is a positive science and so it belongs to the theoretical attitude of thought.¹⁴⁶ As such, its object “can never be the full or integral reality” because it results “from a theoretical abstraction.”¹⁴⁷ Theology does not operate as the door to existential relationship to the divine or God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures, etc.; rather, it reflects on the meaning of revelation for the purposes of building and edifying the community of faith.¹⁴⁸ The object of this theology does not require fundamental ontological

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 228.

¹⁴⁵ Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 132. For Dooyeweerd, as for Heidegger, theoretical reflection is characterized essentially as an attitude of thought. This means that it is not a modification or reduction of content but of the *mode* of perceiving. Dooyeweerd articulates that the theoretical attitude “originates only in our intention to conceive the non-logical aspects of our experience by means of an analytical dissociation whereby they are set apart.” Furthermore, he claims that these non-logical aspects are opposed to the “logical aspect of our thought and to each other in order to conceive them in a logical concept.” Theoretical thought yields concepts that indicate the content of our experiences, but it does so in a manner that creates “logical discontinuity” between the aspects. Theoretical reflection can never achieve a fundamental synthesis that reflects the ultimate coherence of the various aspects of experience. Ibid., 11-12. See also James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 175-176n99.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴⁸ James K. A. Smith, “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” 238. Smith has argued, however, that this does not mean that the “existential encounter” that I speak of is without another type of theology. He argues that we must draw a crucial distinction between theology as a theoretical discipline, which encompasses tasks such as biblical exegesis, from theology as the content of *pretheoretical* creedal confession. This latter form of theology is intimately intertwined with Christian worldview. Philosophy, according to Smith, is sandwiched between the two modes of theology. It is more primordial than theoretical theology, since it supplies its concepts and basic problems, but (at least in the case of Christian philosophy) it derives its fundamental orientation from *pretheoretical* theology. However, Smith’s model is not without problems to be worked out in further projects. For one, it would seem that complex theological doctrines, like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity for example, are the fruit of theoretical reflection. The concept of the Holy Trinity was certainly not available to the earliest Christians. Hence, it is hard to imagine that theology can be split into two autonomous fields without a certain degree of confusion as to the nature of their

clarification, though its methodology does, since it calls on the fundamental problems of ontology and epistemology.

It is thus left to philosophy to perform the task of working out these fundamental questions that concern the coherence of the “temporal order of experiential aspects.”¹⁴⁹ These “experiential aspects” in Dooyeweerd roughly correspond to what Heidegger means by the regions of factual life that give rise to distinct “ontic” sciences.¹⁵⁰ Hence, these aspects of experience are conceived in theoretical thought but are never *reduced* to the abstract objects it represents. Because philosophy is shaped by worldview, Dooyeweerd cannot but admit the opposite of Heidegger’s “square circle” thesis. He even observes that, “if the possibility of a Christian philosophy is denied, one should also deny the possibility of a Christian theology in the sense of a science of the biblical doctrine.”¹⁵¹ In this sense Christian philosophy is made necessary to its respective theological tradition. Moreover, as Smith observes, this entails that the broad category “Christian philosophy” cannot encompass all theological traditions. Rather, we should speak of Catholic philosophy and Reformed philosophy, etc.¹⁵² Dooyeweerd overlooks the forced ecumenism in his own thought. He believes that there is only one possible – and essential – worldview defined as the “biblical viewpoint”.¹⁵³ It is enough to point to the different theological emphases motivating Dooyeweerd and Marion to show that this cannot be the case. To Dooyeweerd, the “Word-revelation” is the exclusive site of the individual’s encounter with God; for Marion, Word-revelation happens as part of a communal

relationship. How is it that theoretical reflection can affect worldview in this way without being able to critique worldview? Does this mean that worldview is subject to revision and change on the basis of theoretical findings? For the purposes of this study, I will hold my critique of Smith in abeyance and treat theology only in the former sense as a theoretical science. James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 177-178.

¹⁴⁹ My reading of Dooyeweerd is influenced by Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 157.

¹⁵⁰ Instead of the distinct regions of meaning arising solely from Dasein’s Being, these regions or “aspects” belong to the phenomenon of a cosmic order of time that consists of a series of analogically interrelated but irreducible “modalities” of experience. This does not annul the “subjective” quality of truth in Dooyeweerd. On the contrary, truth still “happens” through the mediation of a perceiving subject. The difference from Heidegger is that there is in Dooyeweerd an a priori order of experience that weighs against the perceiver thereby limiting its interpretive possibilities. This is not opposed to Heidegger’s notion of factual life. For, even there, there is a sense in which Dasein cannot “interpret” itself in such a manner that defies logic or physics, for example. Dasein cannot comport itself in such a manner that $2+2=5$ or that an automobile weighs a kilogram; or at least it cannot do so without running into serious difficulties within its “world”. I acknowledge my debt for this observation of the relationship of Dooyeweerd’s thought to Heidegger’s to James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, 172-175. See also Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 8-12.

¹⁵¹ James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, 142.

¹⁵² James K. A. Smith, “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” 239-240.

¹⁵³ Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 113.

encounter in the Eucharist. There is a different emphasis between these philosophers on the role of the church in revelation. One philosopher argues from a “Reformed” worldview, the other, from a “Catholic” one.¹⁵⁴ Thus, a homogenous “Christian philosophy” may be an inappropriate “fit” for the distinct worldview of any one particular Christian tradition, though it may denote a “family” of interpretive tendencies in philosophy. Here I am formally indicating the possibility of hermeneutical Christian philosophy radically springing from the worldview and interpretive tradition to which it belongs.¹⁵⁵

In sum, I have not claimed here to propose the only possible step back from onto-theology. I have, rather, attempted to broach a solution to the concrete problems created by onto-theology’s commitment to the autonomy of theoretical thought. The central problem of this study concerns the relationship between philosophy and theology “after” onto-theology (so to speak). Heidegger’s emphasis on factual life gives occasion for a meditation on the possibility of a robustly Christian philosophy that evades onto-theological fallacies whilst informing theology. *Hermeneutical* Christian philosophy may approach factual life without (especially) the presupposition of the autonomy and neutrality of theoretical thought that both Heidegger and Marion seem to share.

Conclusions: On the idol and the icon as hermeneutic categories

I will conclude this chapter with a remark about Marion’s categories of the “idol” and “icon” in *God Without Being*.¹⁵⁶ The conceptual idol, we will recall from Chapter 1, is for Marion an intentional source of violence against the given. In conceptual idolatry, the *duality* of invisible/visible is translated to a *dualism* that “consists in dividing the invisible into one part that is reduced to the visible and one part that is obfuscated as *invisable*” (GWB, 28-30/17-18, italics are mine). In other words, the conceptual idol

¹⁵⁴ James K. A. Smith, “Advice to Pentecostal Philosophers,” 239-240. Smith discusses this in the context of Pentecostal bible scholars mistakenly adopting broadly “evangelical” conceptual frameworks and assumptions “that are incommensurate with the commitments of a Pentecostal worldview (240).” Most Christian traditions will adopt certain core orthodoxies of the historical church (the Nicene Creed, for example). However different emphases may be placed on different aspects of the Scriptures and different strains of interpretive development in the history of Christianity. Dooyeweerd speaks as though there were but one true “biblical” perspective that has dropped from the heavens into the church pews. As if one way of reading the Scriptures or one hermeneutical framework gives us God’s point of view! This is to ignore the historically contingent nature of truth and the narratives that ground it. Orthodoxy itself is not something *immediately* transmitted from the throne of God, which is *not* to say that revelation does not play a part in theological interpretation or the formation of doctrine. Rather, this critical appropriation of Dooyeweerd opens the door to thinking the possibility that revelation may occur differently in different traditions. It stresses the contingent social, cultural, historical, and linguistic conditions that make interpretation and worldview possible.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ In later works such as *In Excess* (French edition, 2001) Marion elaborates on these categories as types of “saturated phenomena”.

reduces the phenomenon to something that can be made wholly present for a constituting subject. It fixes the intentional gaze on something that flashes into presence like the spectacle of the divine; only the gaze does not realize that it is reflecting its own light back upon itself on the “invisible mirror” of the idolatrous concept (20-21/11-12). This is the god of onto-theology cast in the image and likeness of the intentional perceiver. It fixes a cosmic order of completely graspable things around it like a transmitter returning its signal to sender (21/12). “The idol returns the gaze to itself, indicating to it how many beings, before the idol, it has transpierced” (21/12, modified). Elements of any phenomenon that cannot be made present are passed over by the idolatrous intention as pure absence (*invisible*). The phenomenon as a whole is thus excluded from view, forced not to show itself as it is given but only as what can give an account of itself under the idolatrous schema of sufficient reason. The phenomenon is reduced to a travesty of itself under the imperial rule of onto-theology.

For Marion the idol and icon differ only in their “mode of signaling” (GWB, 17/8). They are different ways of intending the use of concepts. The iconic mode of signaling transmits the intentional gaze beyond the concept towards the inconceivable. It allows the face of the other to manifest in the order of the visible in order to “summon” our gazes “to its depth” (GWB, 31/19). Marion observes that the icon always plays the cursory role of an indicator in order to “provoke vision” by pointing beyond itself to the unseen other. This invisible, “even presented by the icon,” thus retains its essential otherness; it “always remains invisible” (29/17). The icon reveals the counter-intentionality of the Wholly other “transpiercing” the gaze of the subject. “The essential in the icon—the intention that envisages—comes to it from elsewhere, or comes to it as that elsewhere whose invisible strangeness saturates the visibility of the face with meaning” (33/21).

In light of the conclusions I have drawn in this study I would like to suggest an alternative reading of Marion’s categories. This is an attempt to read Marion differently, even to read Marion against himself, as Caputo might say.¹⁵⁷ I hope to have made it clear that any presupposition of full presence or exhaustive givenness is an arbitrary assumption. Marion’s reversal of the priority of intuition over intention allows him to ground access to the given in the sheer possibility of a counter-force arriving upon and constituting the subject as its witness. But Marion’s deferral to this purely *formal* arrival of the given does not upset the onto-theological presupposition that experience can be traced back to “absolute presence.”¹⁵⁸

But is not this purely formal possibility of excess already the product of an interpretive decision to regard the phenomenon as something exhaustively given? Caputo observes that Husserl – who inspired Heidegger on this score – interprets the givenness of the phenomenon differently, as “a function of its structural withdrawal or absence.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993).

¹⁵⁸ John D. Caputo, “Derrida and Marion: Two Husserlian Revolutions,” in *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*, edited by Jeffrey Bloechl (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003), 130.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Marion's phenomenology, at least on this point, is inspired by Descartes more so than by Husserl. His project is to attempt to discern an indubitable starting point that will secure the absolute certainty of and pre-hermeneutical access to the "given". But Marion does not give us indubitable access to givenness so much as his highly mediated version of the absolute. What follows is a relativization of the categories of the icon and idol. These are not indubitable saturated phenomena clearly evident to the disinterested phenomenological inquirer. Rather, these form a theoretical framework in metaphysics and epistemology that is itself already the result of pre-theoretical interpretive decisions.

Marion's work is not antithetical to this conclusion. At least in *God Without Being* the "content" of the icon and similarly that for the idol is mediated by faith.¹⁶⁰ Faith, at least Catholic faith, has the eyes to witness the counter-intentionality of Christ. But the iconic "mode" of pointing beyond itself to the hidden depths of experience is very close to Heidegger's formal indication. The formal indication is, in a sense, a broadened version of Marion's icon that does not limit the field of possible experience within the confines the conceptual resources of one tradition.¹⁶¹ Dominique Janicaud's remarks are appropriate:

When we read, "Listen, Israel, Jahweh our God, Jahweh alone," we no longer doubt the nature of the call, nor that of the promised givenness; as for the response, it depends on each of us. But who introduces 'imprecision, indecision, nay confusion,' if not the philosopher who means to transform references of another order, as Pascal would have put it, into an a priori instance and general schemes?¹⁶²

Of course by "references of another order" Janicaud means of a theological order. But could this instead entail references of the order of pre-theoretical experience as a whole? Belief in the distinct nature of the call as the voice of God is conditioned by a Christian (or Jewish, or Islamic) worldview. One's encounter with and response to the call of the wholly other is intricately bound up with the inexpressible interiority of factual life; but this does not mean that one may not commit oneself to an interpretation of one's own encounter with the wholly other.¹⁶³ It certainly does not mean that philosophy must refrain from naming this wholly other out of the fear of onto-theology. Philosophers need not retreat into the transcendental formalism of "general schemes" in order to respect differences of worldview.

¹⁶⁰ James K. A. Smith, "Liberating religion from theology."

¹⁶¹ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 92-94 and "Liberating religion from theology," 24-27.

¹⁶² Dominique Janicaud, "The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology," Part I, translated by Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn"* (New York: Fordham UP, 2000), 63-64, citing Deuteronomy 6:4 and *Réduction et donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1989. *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998.

¹⁶³ I extend my thanks to Diane Enns for pressing me to clarify this point.

Hence, Marion's conceptual modalities are what I call "hermeneutic categories". They supply a framework for interpreting phenomena within the broader context of a worldview. In other words, they are useful ways for the participatory ontology of the Catholic Church to affirm the commonality of the divine origin of human societies.¹⁶⁴ However, the frame of reference and criteria grounding Marion's modes of conceptualization are not necessarily relevant to other traditions, cultures and worldviews.

By this relativization of the importance of conceptual frameworks I aim to allow distinct voices to be heard without the danger of onto-theological domination or exclusion. I wish to open the door to a distinctly confessional Christian philosophy whilst limiting the power of anyone's worldview or orthodoxy to drown out the voices of others. In a sense this project as a whole "confesses" that philosophy is always at least partially blind like the proverbially sightless men perceiving aspects of the elephant. Their sightlessness prevents immediate access to the whole. It leaves them in the condition of undecidability (Olthuis). But this condition also enables the men to learn from one another since it grants absolute certainty to no one. Christian philosophy will thus assert its autonomy from the mainstream, but it will do so humbly, without the cultural arrogance of an imperial force (Smith). Marion has not dared to argue that one's experience of *this* determinate call (Deuteronomy 6:4) may in fact provide the starting point of *confessional*, if not distinctly Christian, philosophy. In the wake of onto-theology, only the hermeneutical decision remains – and one finds even before philosophizing that one has already decided.

¹⁶⁴ As is recognized by James K. A. Smith, "The Spirit, Religions, and the World as Sacrament: A Response to Amos Yong's Pneumatological Assist," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15:2 251-261.

Conclusion

In this study I have tried to articulate a framework for approaching the question of the relationship of philosophy and theology in the context of Heidegger and Marion's critique of onto-theology. I have argued that Heidegger's account of factual life provides philosophical resources for treating religious experience without, as Marion fears, collapsing God into the concept of Being. My alternative retrieval of factual life also preserves the space between and relative autonomy of both philosophy and theology as distinct theoretical disciplines. Each discipline is derived from pre-theoretical commitments that are themselves the function of what Heidegger would call an *existentiell* interpretation of the world, a worldview.

In my view, the best way to avoid the pitfalls of onto-theology is not to seek to circumscribe metaphysics as an "essence" in order critically to transcend it. For we have seen that the residual traces of onto-theology found in Heidegger and Marion can be attributed to this mutually shared assumption about the absolute autonomy of metaphysics. I submit that the young Heidegger's account of facticity need not be taken in this totalizing direction. The "step back" from onto-theology need not be a step into some inner essence of metaphysics as though there were one single path to follow. A better framework recognizes the role that pre-theoretical commitments play in all philosophizing. I do not wish to single out an indisputable essence of philosophy so much as to open the door to a plurality of possible ways of tracing the contours of factual life. With the formal indication Heidegger shows us how this is possible in a non-reductivist manner. He also indicates how a phenomenological analysis of factual life can be employed in the service of particular believing communities as a way of articulating the meaning of their respective religious experiences from the basis of the experiences themselves.

Pushing Heidegger even further, I have argued that the pre-theoretical commitments of the believing community under investigation form a necessary starting point for the theoretical work of philosophy. A Christian philosophy will begin its investigation of ontology, epistemology, ethics, etc. from the standpoint of Christian beliefs about the fundamental nature of reality. Hence, for example, Christian philosophers may be inclined to give an account of ultimate reality from the standpoint of a participatory ontological framework because they are directed by their pre-theoretical commitment to the Christian doctrine of creation. Christian philosophy will spring from closely related worldviews sharing core orthodoxy. This does not mean that all Christian philosophers will agree on all points, just as not all liberal philosophers agree with one another on, say, the proper role of state intervention for the protection of individual autonomy. Both "camps" of philosophy are, however, committed to certain beliefs about the nature of reality, of the individual, of society, etc.

The sort of fundamental interpretation that steers the course of theoretical inquiry is, of course, fraught with undecidability. Hence, Christian philosophers are not the only ones haunted by this hermeneutical condition. However, though the truth of pre-theoretical beliefs is unverifiable from a purely rational standpoint, the pragmatic value of these beliefs may be tested against the "grain" of reality. Though interpretation is

ultimately the name of the game, interpretations must hold up against the basic empirical states of affairs of human experience, as Dooyeweerd teaches us. Heidegger's derivation of "transcendental-ontological" structures from basic human tendencies (i.e., guilt) is one example of the sort of interpretative maneuvering that issues from a worldview. There is no universally warranted ontological criterion that verifies Heidegger's interpretation of guilt over, say, Kierkegaard or Kant's. Interpretation (perspective) goes all the way down. Smith aptly summarizes this very point by insisting that even Nietzsche's Zarathustra must be haunted with undecidability – perhaps even by the thought that Abraham is right, for "both the religious and the tragic responses are construals: interpretations of factual life."¹⁶⁵

My effort to work out the respective fields and tasks of philosophy and theology is also funded thus by an interpretive decision. Ultimately, I think that the topic of Christian philosophy is neither a mere perambulatory to faith (Marion) nor a square circle (Heidegger). Rather, I submit that it is the process of giving a theoretical account of the unity and coherence of human life starting from the specific commitments of belief that belong to a "Christian" worldview. In more "postmodern" terms this means that a Christian philosophy grounds itself in the metaphors and mythic narratives of the historical Church. There will be, of course, much difference under this broad banner. And I think that a radically hermeneutical approach to phenomenology of religion will embrace rather than repress these differences.

Under this model of phenomenology of religion, theology will follow suit with philosophy. Theology will not fallaciously assume that its discourse about the absolute is itself absolute and so deserves absolute allegiance.¹⁶⁶ This is because theology steps into its role as another type of hermeneutic. Theology defines the human relationship to God as its object or field of investigation. Philosophy helps it along the way by clarifying matters of fundamental metaphysical and epistemological importance and supplying concepts. Then philosophy steps out of the way and lets theology work in its own relative sphere of autonomy (though it remains in dialogue with theology). Theology neither circumvents philosophy nor is it forced to import alien philosophical assumptions because (ideally) the philosophy that undergirds it is rooted in the same "confession" or worldview. A theologian will not turn to a dogmatic atheist for ontological frameworks or for a systematic account of the relationship of theology to other theoretical disciplines. Neither is the theoretical account of reality submitted by a dogmatic atheist somehow "Christian philosophy" (though the Christian philosopher may very well *believe* that all philosophical insight participates to some degree of intensity in revelation). What makes philosophy "Christian" is not its theoretical content per se, but the pre-theoretical confession underlying its frameworks of articulation.

Could it be that neither Heidegger nor Marion manages to evade the full implications of his critique of onto-theology? I submit that the scholastic framework tying together philosophy and theology is the culprit. The assumption informing both

¹⁶⁵ James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, 161.

¹⁶⁶ Merold Westphal, "Nietzsche as a Theological Resource," 216.

Heidegger and Marion is that reason's findings are universal and autonomous within its own sphere. A radical hermeneutics of facticity allows one to be critical even of this commitment to the "purity" of theoretical thought, even if the criticism takes the form of a sort of hermeneutical suspicion.¹⁶⁷ It does not necessarily question the content of philosophy so much as the interests that underlie any and every definition of its field. In a sense, this is to retain something of the spirit of Heidegger's critique of onto-theology as a close examination of the conceptual apparatuses that usher the absolute into philosophy. When the absolute begins to cloud the minds of philosophers (and theologians!) as to the open-ended and contingent nature of what they have to say, then there is perhaps a form of onto-theology lurking behind the curtain. I submit that my hermeneutic model of Christian philosophy is less susceptible to this critique than is Marion's scholasticism. As Westphal articulates, there is no constraint on *what* is said in philosophy; Christian philosophy has the green light to go ahead and work out the metaphysical, epistemological, and political significance of its own categories of creation, participation, sin, redemption, etc. The constraint is placed on *how* philosophers will ultimately treat these categories. There is a certain demand against assuming that one's own categories afford one an ultimate perspective on the way the world really is.¹⁶⁸

This brings us back to the parable of the blind men and the elephant that opened this study. I end with a question: must every man (or woman, child, etc.) confess the same in order to understand the point of view of the other? I think that Heidegger provides us with clues to help resolve this difficulty, for, since there is no possibility of understanding without the finite conditions of knowing, already a touchstone of commonality is given each of us who understand something. There must be a horizon for the exchange of stories, indeed an exchange of encounters with each other, in order for there to be any meaningful relations at all. Each person encounters something "absolute" in her own life by virtue simply of the radical singularity of her own experiences. Smith calls this singularity a "secret". In essence, factual life is something of a secret that can only be indicated to others through testimony.¹⁶⁹ Every "horizon" belonging to what the Heidegger during his period at Freiburg called the shared world (*Mitwelt*) of factual life is radically singular insofar as its "content" is irreducible to any universal (PI, 94/70-71).¹⁷⁰ A shared world is not a shared horizon, neither the "transcendental" horizon of the ideal of pure reason, nor the hegemonic indifference of Marion's gift. Though, as

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 220-221.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. I acknowledge my debt to Merold Westphal for this observation. The demand is not only ethical; it is also metaphysical. Nihilism is the final result of the arrogant belief that one's own perspective is the absolute one.

¹⁶⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology*, 82-92.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die Phänomenologische Forschung*, GA 61. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985), *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 94/70-71.

Heidegger argues, the relational character of the “world” in factual life makes it impossible to distinguish in any absolute sense one’s own world from the shared world of understandings, it does not necessarily follow that factual life participates in a universally (and formally) shared horizon indicated by either philosophy or theology.¹⁷¹

However, my affirmation of the deep hermeneutical roots of human being does not necessarily entail the collapse of philosophical dialogue. While there is certainly no possibility of grounding every experience in an ultimate reality or referring it back to a unifying “beyond”, neither does this “hermeneutical” condition of the incommensurability of experience warrant the claim that distinct, individual understandings of reality are *wholly* incommensurate, rendering all communication arbitrary.¹⁷² Philosophy cannot ultimately arbitrate the truth of testimonial and confession, but neither is it useless, for it is a tool that seeks clarification of the mutual world that we inhabit. Ultimately, philosophy cannot arbitrate between worldviews, but neither is it without power to examine the ramifications of particular interpretations in regard to their historical outworking.¹⁷³ Thus, for example, Dooyeweerd shares much in common with “postmodern” critiques of philosophy, especially concerning their mutual commitment to exposing the inner antinomies of modern metaphysics. The spirit of this critique is, I think, the same as that motivating Marion’s critique of conceptual idolatry. Marion indicates the inner nihilism of “modern” claims to the autonomy of philosophy (though, as I have argued, not radically enough).

In short, I have argued for the release of concepts from the close-gripped control of any philosophical or theological discourse that would seek to regulate other discourses. In line with Marion, I submit that the end of onto-theology is an opportunity for dialogue, even for a rejuvenated philosophy of religion. I conclude that this rejuvenation must follow in the wake of the decline of totalizing philosophical or theological discourses.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 94-95/70-71.

¹⁷² As Smith rightly argues, even though truth is subjective, this does not mean that there is no a priori horizon limiting the possibilities of individual experience, neither does it mean that in interpretation, “anything goes”. Subjective truth is not the equivalent of a crude relativism that ignores the “internal antinomies” that bad interpretations inevitably lead to. Hence, we have sufficient ground in this study to reject the interpretation of philosophy as an absolutely autonomous science. In this, Smith is also influenced by Herman Dooyeweerd’s broadly Augustinian approach to interpreting philosophy. See *The Fall of Interpretation*, 216n67-68.

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