

THE QUESTION OF GOD
PHENOMENOLOGY, HERMENEUTICS & REVELATION

THE QUESTION OF GOD:
PHENOMENOLOGY, HERMENEUTICS, AND REVELATION
IN JEAN-LUC MARION AND PAUL RICOEUR

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the thought of Jean-Luc Marion in light of his treatment of divine revelation and in connection to the hermeneutic phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur. It argues, first, that Marion's thought bears within itself significant ambiguities that are determined by the legacies of the key concepts which organize his work: 'givenness' (*donation*) and saturation. Secondly, it also argues that even if a way can be found to resolve these ambiguities the resultant proposal does not meet the criticism raised by Paul Ricoeur in reference to phenomenologies of religion that remain determined by a 'Husserlian idealism.' As a result, the dissertation offers a study of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of revelation in an effort to displace Marion's account and offer an alternative proposal. Specifically, it treats the connection of Ricoeur's proposed transformation of phenomenology through hermeneutics, the idea of a hermeneutics of testimony that is generated as a result of that transformation, and Ricoeur's notion of revelation as being articulated in reference to the 'world of the text.' By focusing on the notion of 'anteriority' throughout the analysis, the dissertation argues that not only does Marion's work remain limited by its formal commitments to pure apparition, but it fails to access the sort of radical anteriority that it seeks. This is so because it remains tied to a philosophy of consciousness which is blocked from accessing the pre-reflective level of belonging that is made accessible by Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology. By making this argument, the dissertation provides a critical analysis of Marion's work from the perspective of divine revelation and, furthermore, brings that work into conversation with Paul Ricoeur. This important engagement between Ricoeur and Marion has not been adequately addressed in the current secondary literature and this dissertation fills that gap.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Works of Jean-Luc Marion

- BG** *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. / *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. Paris: PUF, 1997.
- GWB** *God Without Being*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. / *Dieu sans l'être*. 2^e édition. Paris: Quadrige / PUF, 2002.
- ID** *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Forham University Press, 2001. / *L'idol. et la distance: cinq études*. Paris: Grasset, 1977.
- IE** *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. / *De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés*. Paris: PUF, 2001.
- VR** *The Visible and the Revealed*. Trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner and others. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. / *Le visible et le révélé*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2005.

Works of Paul Ricoeur

- CI** *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Ed. Don Ihde. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974. / *Le conflit des interprétations: Essais d'herméneutique*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1969.
- EBI** *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. Lewis S. Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- FS** *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Ed. Mark I. Wallace. Trans. David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

TA *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II.* Trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991. / *Du text à l'action: Essais d'herméneutique II.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986.

Other

PT *Phenomenology and Theology.* Trans. Jeffrey Kosky and Thomas Carlson. In *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2000. / *Phénoménologie et théologie.* Ed. Jean-Françoise Courtine. Paris: Criterion, 1992.

INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF GOD

There remains nonetheless something that cannot be prescribed—something that remains forever an open question, which cannot be classified away as settled, which asks for its case to be pleaded without cease—the *causa Dei*, as a matter of fact. The question of God has the characteristic feature of always making a comeback, of being incessantly reborn from all attempts to put it to death, in theory as well as in fact.

—Jean-Luc Marion, “The Impossible for Man—God,” p. 24.

For Jean-Luc Marion and Paul Ricoeur the question of God is an open and urgent question. Indeed, each of them have worked diligently to open a space for the emergence of a discourse that is attuned to a *theo*-logic that both confounds the disciplinary certainties of theology and philosophy and opens new modes of human understanding. What is at stake for both of them is the recovery of a mode of thinking that has been passed over by what Marion calls ‘metaphysics,’ the philosophical systems of the tradition that close access to all thought and appearances that exceed their particular view of the world.¹ The recovery of this passed over mode of what Ricoeur calls ‘biblical thinking,’² leads not only to a new engagement with the great philosophical themes of transcendence, possibility, and the ‘divine’ itself, but it opens philosophy, as phenomenology, to a consideration of its assumptions concerning phenomenality and, therefore, the figures of

¹ Marion writes: “This was one of the most glaring limits of classical metaphysics from Spinoza to Nietzsche: namely, to have the pretense to forbid phenomenality to what claimed it” (BG, p. 5/10). For a further discussion of the mechanism of this exclusion see Chapter 1.

² See André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

human selfhood constituted by these assumptions.³ In other words, for both Ricoeur and Marion, the ‘question of God’ ultimately pertains to the question of divine revelation. As phenomenologists they are fundamentally concerned with that mode of thinking that has sought to address the claims of Jewish and Christian revelation, not only in terms of its content but, even more so, its form. Thus, for them, to think along with the question of God is to ask about the conditions for the possibility of God’s appearance in the world of human experience and history. Furthermore, it is to ask about the relationship between appearance, experience, and history, in general, and the very specific appearances, experiences, and historical community that arise as a response to the claim that the divine has been and is revealed.

In this dissertation I examine how each thinker seeks to reopen the ‘question of God’ in reference to an analysis of the conditions of possibility of divine revelation. I show that they share in common a commitment to thinking revelation in concepts which focus on the connection between a particular form of divine revelation and general modes of phenomenality, along with the structures of experience that are correlative with those modes and which constitute the human self. I also show that they speak from within the same philosophical tradition, that of phenomenology. However, my key argument is that

³ By stating the matter in these terms I intend, from the opening sentences of this dissertation, to take my leave from the debate that continues to be discussed in the secondary literature over whether Marion is a ‘theologian’ or a ‘philosopher.’ Given the intentions of both Marion and Ricoeur, as I have just described them, it is clear that such a neat classification does not apply. Professionally, of course, they have identified themselves strictly as philosophers. In that sense I am happy to read them as such. It is precisely *as* philosophers, however, that they engage the theological traditions of Judaism and Christianity in order to think along with these traditions and thereby interrupt the assumptions of modern philosophical discourse just as they would of modern theological discourse. My arguments here will be focused on what they are focused on: confronting the question of God in whatever form it happens to present itself.

while they share these philosophical commitments, they differ very significantly in their understanding of divine revelation. In fact, I argue that while Jean-Luc Marion's account brings to light crucial issues that must be addressed in relation to an understanding of revelation—namely the issue of the horizon and its corresponding subjective figure—it remains bound to a philosophy of consciousness which cannot access the summons whose anteriority is proper to divine revelation because his thought remains entangled in the very subjectivity that it inverts. This critical perspective on Marion does not mean, however, that he receives only a brief treatment. On the contrary, three of the four chapters to follow are dedicated to an analysis of his work. As a key representative of the *nouvelle phénoménologie*, and as one whose work embodies and inspires the 'radical phenomenology' emerging in France and the United States, Marion's project has been offered and taken as an opportunity to rethink completely the notion of revelation in both the philosophy of religion and theology. Its programmatic status requires that it be given its due, especially in a context in which it will be criticized. Beyond its programmatic status, however, there is another important reason for a detailed analysis of Marion's account of revelation: while it has culminated in a phenomenological treatment, it did not begin there. Marion's engagement with the 'question of God' and its connection to the theme of revelation goes back as far as his first constructive book, *The Idol and Distance*, and is taken up in an ongoing fashion throughout his subsequent works.⁴ In fact, it is in these earlier works that the crucial concepts are developed and first employed and I argue that these concepts—such as the notions of 'distance' and 'givenness'—remain crucial to

⁴ See Marion, ID, pp. 1-4/15-19. I discuss this material in Chapter 1.

an assessment of his phenomenological account of revelation and his ability to remain attuned to the question of God. However, before taking up a study of this early work, I approach Marion's thought, in this Introduction, through some essays written around the time that it changes from its "theologically aspirated"⁵ phase to its explicitly phenomenological one. The benefit of this is to locate, at the outset, the key themes that emerge in his theological work but get articulated explicitly in his phenomenological treatment of the issues. Once this is in place, I turn, finally, to a chapter on Paul Ricoeur's understanding of revelation. I offer this chapter as a critique of Marion and I characterize this critique as a 'hermeneutical intervention' that seeks to 'displace' Marion's pure phenomenology of revelation with Ricoeur's hermeneutical alternative. What makes this an 'intervention' is my critical focus on the precise notion that Marion takes to be fundamental to his phenomenology of revelation: the determination of 'revelation' in terms of a type of phenomenality whose summoning and formative power lies in a nonsubjective, but pure, form of anteriority and, thus, his development, on the basis of that phenomenology, of a figure of subjectivity that corresponds to the divine call. Finally, the goal of this intervention is to 'displace' Marion's thought in light of Ricoeur's. By this I mean that I want to bring to light a fundamentally different approach that Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology makes available. This notion of

⁵ Cyril O'Regan writes: "In speaking of 'theologically aspirated' works I mean to mark that portion of Marion's work in which discourses of the Christian tradition are read to mark an impossible opening beyond the regime of the self and the regime of metaphysics." For details regarding this judicious terminology see O'Regan's, "Jean-Luc Marion: Crossing Hegel," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 95-150 (p. 99).

displacement will come up again and receive further treatment as the argument progresses.

In the remainder of this Introduction I accomplish three things: first, I discuss an important essay by Jean-Luc Marion in which he connects the question of revelation with the tasks of phenomenology. In doing so, he points toward his phenomenological treatment of revelation in terms of givenness and saturated phenomena (Chapter 3) and also back to his ‘theological’ treatment of revelation in its positive (Chapter 2) and negative (Chapter 1) modes. Second, I place this essay in the context of a seminar in which both Marion and Ricoeur presented papers on the question of the relationship of phenomenology to religious phenomena. The goal here is to highlight the perspective from which Marion’s thought about revelation emerges, measure the stakes of this perspective in relation to the guiding questions of the seminar, and gesture toward the points of difference that will set Ricoeur’s work apart from that of Marion. Third and finally, I briefly discuss the essay that Ricoeur presented at the seminar and introduce the account of revelation that will be employed to ‘displace’ that of Marion.

Jean-Luc Marion and the Question of Revelation

In an essay from 1992, entitled “The Possible and Revelation,” Marion draws together the identification of revelation as the essence of religion with the task of transforming the philosophy of religion through phenomenology. He argues, however, that the use of phenomenology as method suitable for treating religious phenomena cannot be taken for granted. In fact he imposes a “double requirement” to ensure the legitimacy of the

convergence: on the one hand, what is needed is the justification of “religion to phenomenology as a possible phenomenon” and, on the other hand, the justification of “phenomenology to religion as a suitable method.”⁶ According to Marion, then, we have to establish, on the one hand, that there is something essential about ‘religion’ that brings it into phenomenology’s view and, on the other hand, that there is something unique about phenomenology that suits it to the study of this essential aspect of religion. In order to fulfill this double requirement, Marion argues that what is at stake is a “concept of revelation.”⁷ Religion, he claims, “attains its highest figure only when it becomes established by and as a revelation, where an authority that is transcendent to experience nevertheless manifests itself experientially.”⁸ The nature of this experiential manifestation is important. Even though revelation occurs “effectively beyond (or outside of) the conditions of possibility of experience . . . [r]evelation takes its strength of provocation from what it speaks universally, yet without this word being able to ground itself in reason within the limits of the world.”⁹ In other words, religion becomes phenomenal

⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Possible and Revelation,” / “Le possible et la révélation,” in VR, p. 1/13. See the English ‘Note on the Origin of the Texts’ (p. xiii) for the full bibliographical information on this essay.

⁷ Marion, VR, p. 2/14.

⁸ Marion, VR, p. 2/14. James K. A. Smith worries about Marion’s singularizing of the religious phenomenon in reference to other forms of religious enactments and (nontheistic) forms of manifestation. He suggests, in fact, that Marion’s ‘religious phenomenon’ is a very ‘theological phenomenon.’ Smith’s concerns are certainly worth keeping in mind, particularly for scholars whose work in the philosophy of religion is not focused on Judaism or Christianity. He connects this theologization with Marion’s appeal to ‘impossibility.’ However, because his reading of Marion’s “The Saturated Phenomenon” is not supported by a reading of “The Possible and Revelation” (which, in 1999, would be quite understandable, given the difficulty of attaining this essay which was made more widely available only with the publication of *The Visible and the Revealed* in 2005) he tends to miss the nuance of Marion’s use of the notion of ‘impossibility.’ See 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: 17-33, 1999.

⁹ Marion, VR, p. 2/14.

through revelation and, what is more, this phenomenality claims a universality that is not reducible to the universality of reason. What is crucial for Marion here is that not only is religion in its highest figure a religion of revelation, but such revelation relates, precisely through its phenomenal status, to the rational as such. This coming together of phenomenality and rationality decisively marks the path that an analysis of religion must take through metaphysics and into phenomenology.

For religion in modernity, the coordinates of such a path have been determined by metaphysics. Indeed, for Marion, any understanding of revealed religion must take up the question of the relation of revelation to metaphysics, precisely because of the claims made by metaphysics concerning that which is allowed to appear according to its standard of rationality. He explains: “Understood as metaphysics, philosophy is accomplished by continually (from Descartes to Hegel) radicalizing the implications of the principle of sufficient reason: all that is (being, *étant*) exists to the extent to which a *causa* (actuality) *sive ratio* (concept) gives an explanation either for its existence, for its nonexistence, or for its exemption from any cause.”¹⁰ From the definition of revelation given above it is clear to see what this metaphysical condition means for religion. In strictly phenomenal terms, religion is forced by metaphysics to either renounce revelation or renounce appearing according to the canons of reason. As Marion points out, the demand for this renunciation was softened by two metaphysical strategies, equally devastating for religion in its true essence. On the one hand, religion could submit its claims to metaphysical rationality, thereby accepting the authorization of revelation from the metaphysical

¹⁰ Marion, VR, p. 2/14.

principles allowed by the principle of sufficient reason. As an example of this, Marion identifies the relation of religion to Kant's categorical imperative.¹¹ On the other hand, as with Hegel, the concept of revelation could be put to work in support of reason itself, such that the manifestation of Spirit would be nothing other than the self-manifestation of the rationality of the real. In either case, Marion says, religion must "renounce its specificity."¹²

Such a renunciation, according to Marion, is the root of the aporias, confusions, and betrayals of what has come to be called the 'philosophy of religion'. At the root of the problem, we learn, was an earlier renunciation of the challenge posed to religion by metaphysics. This challenge is to think "the possible possibility of impossibility" and, therefore, to consider that "possibility cannot be limited to what sufficient reason ensures."¹³ For Marion, revelation as the religious phenomenon *par excellence* appears in relation to the principle of sufficient reason as an impossible phenomenon. This, however, must be its positive claim because it is precisely as impossible, as the 'possible possibility of impossibility,' that the religious phenomenon suggests that "possibility cannot be restricted to the actuality that produces the cause" but, following Heidegger's suggestion, that "*possibility* stands higher than actuality."¹⁴ To explore the revealed phenomenon in

¹¹ Marion, VR, p. 3/15.

¹² Marion, VR, p. 3/16.

¹³ Marion, VR, p. 4/16.

¹⁴ Marion, VR, p. 4/17. In "The Saturated Phenomenon," Marion's essay given at the seminar to be discussed next, he writes: "When does it become impossible to speak of a phenomenon, and according to what criteria of phenomenality? Yet the possibility of the phenomenon (and therefore the possibility of declaring a phenomenon impossible, that is, invisible) in turn could not be determined without also establishing the terms of possibility taken by itself. By subjecting the phenomenon to the jurisdiction of possibility, philosophy in fact brings its own definition of naked possibility fully to light. . . . Or better, the

this way, however, a mode of thinking must become operative that can think the appearance of a phenomenon without appeal to the principle of sufficient reason, that is, one that recognizes phenomena “without the preliminary condition of a *causa sive ratio*, but in the way as and insofar as they are given.”¹⁵ For Marion, phenomenology is such a mode of thinking and, therefore, it is for phenomenology to rethink not only phenomenality in general but, and most especially, the case of a phenomenal revelation.

The recognition of the impossibility of the religious phenomenon brings to light the conditions of the possibility of impossibility in metaphysics. It also points the way to a recognition of a mode of appearance not determined in advance by an “anterior authority,”¹⁶ but determined instead by the phenomenon’s self-givenness. For this notion Marion turns first to Edmund Husserl’s breakthrough discovery of the ‘principle of all principles’ in which everything that gives itself to intuition must be accorded the right of an appearance solely according to the extent to which consciousness is affected. This turn to the lived experiences of consciousness reopens access to phenomena marked with impossibility by understanding them in terms of their appearance to consciousness and not in terms of an objective rationality which assigns to them a reason and thus allows them to appear in the world of objects determined by causality. As a result, Marion argues, “[b]y thus lifting the prohibition of sufficient reason, phenomenology liberates possibility and hence opens the field possibly even to phenomena marked by

rational scope of a philosophy that is measured by the extent of what it renders possible is also assessed by the range of what it renders visible, thus, according to the possibility of phenomenality within it” (VR, p. 19/36).

¹⁵ Marion, VR, p. 4/17.

¹⁶ Marion, VR, p. 5/18.

impossibility.”¹⁷ The importance of Husserl’s thought comes from the fact that he had “restored any intuited given inasmuch as intuited to the phenomenon and hence had legitimated the validity of religious lived experience inasmuch as it is given intuitively.”¹⁸

According to Marion, phenomenological access to the impossible phenomenon is further opened by Martin Heidegger’s account of how that which is given to consciousness can be given precisely as that which ‘indicates’ the appearance of something that never appears.¹⁹ Indeed, Heidegger’s turn to Being—which is never disclosed as such but remains hidden in beings as their nothing—as the proper subject matter of phenomenology allows us to see that phenomenology must concern itself “with what does not manifest itself” but, rather, announces itself through the “indication” of something that is manifest. As a result, “Heidegger integrates into phenomenality all that shows itself (*sich zeigt*) only by indication (*Anzeige*), inasmuch as the ‘showing itself’ is still accomplished ‘from itself’—and hence he legitimates the possibility of a phenomenology of the unapparent in general.”²⁰

On the other side of metaphysics, with a victory won over the principle of sufficient reason, it seems that phenomenology is perfectly suited to take up the challenge of thinking revelation in its ‘impossible’ phenomenality. Marion suggests, in fact, that if “one maintains the provisional definition of revelation introduced above—to know an instance transcendent to experience that nevertheless is manifested experientially—then one must admit that [revelation] is inscribed among phenomena, hence in the experience

¹⁷ Marion, VR, p. 5/19.

¹⁸ Marion, VR, p. 7/21.

¹⁹ Marion, VR, p. 6/20.

²⁰ Marion, VR, p. 7/21.

(Husserl) of an intentional object that would be invisible and indirect, hence transcendent to experience (Heidegger).”²¹ That is, the twofold phenomenological ‘breakthrough’ achieved by Husserl and Heidegger is perfectly suited to the very phenomenality of the revealed phenomenon. In fact, he goes on: “The so-called religious lived experiences of consciousness give intuitively, but by indication, intentional objects that are directly invisible: religion becomes manifest and revelation phenomenal. What philosophy of religion tends to close, phenomenology of religion could open.”²² It all comes together: religion achieves its highest figure in revelation—the presence in experience of that which transcends experience—and therefore finds itself perfectly suited to phenomenology. Likewise, under the guidance of Husserl and Heidegger, phenomenology operates as a mode of thinking no longer restricted by the principle of sufficient reason and, therefore, one that is open to the kind of phenomenal appearance that is proper to a revealed phenomenon. The double requirement is fulfilled. The question that remains now, however, is whether phenomenology, even in the broadened version articulated by Husserl and Heidegger, is really up to the task of seeing revealed phenomena. Somewhat surprisingly, Marion has his doubts about this. He is concerned, particularly, that with phenomenology’s own liberation of the phenomenon from metaphysics it will, in turn, impose new conditions of its own, conditions which, for being more subtle, will be all the more likely to block revelation. These conditions will take the form of phenomenological presuppositions which might “merely reverse the metaphysical prohibitions regarding revelation, in such a way that, despite or because of

²¹ Marion, VR, p. 7/21-22.

²² Marion, VR, p. 7/22.

its broadening of givenness, phenomenology would equally forbid the possibility of revelation by assigning to it a determined possibility.”²³

To take up this challenge, Marion first turns his critical eye to the very center of phenomenological method: the reduction. He points out how the phenomenological reduction is, in fact, carried out in reference to the lived-experiences (*Erlebnis*) of a subject, an *I*, insofar as the “givenness of phenomena” in intuition “presupposes the point of reference that accommodates their givenness.”²⁴ The result is that as “broadened as this givenness may appear, it nevertheless only allows things to appear to an *I* . . . since [the *I*] always precedes the phenomena as their condition of possibility regarding lived experiences.”²⁵ In “The Saturated Phenomenon,” Marion shows how this precedence of the *I* is located at the very centre of Husserl’s ‘principle of all principles’²⁶ insofar as the principle states that “intuition gives what appears only by giving it ‘to us’.” He continues:

Transcendental or not, the phenomenological *I* remains the beneficiary, and therefore the witness and even the judge, of the given appearance. It falls to the *I* to measure what does and does not give itself intuitively, within what limits, according to what horizon, following what intention, essence, and signification. Even if it shows itself on the basis of itself, the phenomenon can do so only by allowing itself to be led back, and therefore reduced, to the *I*.²⁷

²³ Marion, VR, p. 8/22-23.

²⁴ Marion, VR, pp. 8-9/23.

²⁵ Marion, VR, pp. 8-9/23.

²⁶ Husserl’s definition of the principle of all principles, which Marion quotes frequently, posits that “*every originarily giving intuition [Anschauung] is a source of right [Rechtsquelle] for cognition*, that everything that offers itself to us originarily in ‘intuition’ [“*Intuition*”] is to be taken quite simply as it gives itself out to be, but also only within the limits in which it is given there.” The quotation from Husserl is from his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 3:74. See Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” VR, p. 21/39.

²⁷ Marion, VR, pp. 23-24/42.

Finally, it is not only Husserl's phenomenology that maintains the primordial function of the *I*. Even in Heidegger's work, Marion argues, where the *I* becomes *Dasein*, there is "an analogy to lived experiences in the *Stimmungen* [moods of attunement], which give rise to *Dasein* as the fact of being-in-the-world."²⁸ As a result, "nothing is constituted as a phenomenon that does not allow itself to be led back to *Dasein*, affected by diverse *Stimmungen* from the beings of its world."²⁹ According to Marion, such a reduction to the *I*, wherever it is found, blocks the power of the revealed phenomenon's imposition, in which the subject is so overpowered by what shows itself that it finds itself experiencing only "the powerlessness to experience whatever it might be that one experiences."³⁰ In an analysis of Bultmann's theology of revelation, Marion argues that any account of revelation that is confined, through the reduction, to the lived experiences of revelation themselves will be closed to "the revealed revealing itself."³¹ On the other hand, he suggests, "if thought claims to remain open to Revelation as such, it must be liberated from its immanence in the *I* (or in *Dasein*)."³²

In this essay on revelation, Marion speaks to that liberation of the *I*. Granting, for a moment, that the intentionality of the *I* is constitutive of the world of experience, he nevertheless asks by what authority the *I* itself is constituted.³³ He suggests that the status of the *I* is phenomenologically uncertain and, by association, the subject's constituting authority, which is the "very ground of the reduction," is not, in fact, well grounded. This

²⁸ Marion, VR, p. 8/23.

²⁹ Marion, VR, p. 8/23.

³⁰ Marion, VR, p. 9/24.

³¹ Marion, VR, p. 10/25.

³² Marion, VR, p. 10/25.

³³ Marion, VR, p. 13/30.

is reinforced, he suggests, by the numerous phenomenological accounts in which the *I* is displaced from its position of priority. All of this adds up, for him, to what he calls a single paradox: on the one hand, “one of the instances that restrict phenomenology’s acceptance of the full possibility of revelation . . . does not offer any certain phenomenological guarantee.”³⁴ That is, what “phenomenology opposes to revelation—the *I* as origin—is perhaps not phenomenologically legitimate.”³⁵ On the other hand, therefore, he wonders if it would not be “suitable to reverse the relation and the dependence” such that “maybe the *I* can only attain its proper phenomenological possibility from a givenness that cannot be constituted, cannot be objectified and is prior to it—maybe even from a revelation.”³⁶

From the recognition of the connection of the *I* to the reduction, to a hypothesis concerning a renewed phenomenological figure of subjectivity, Marion diagnoses a phenomenological blockage to the reception of revelation and proposes a manner of addressing it. What is crucial in the consideration of this first condition is the manner in which the subject, defined by the intentional gaze through which it constitutes phenomena as objects, presides over an anterior intentionality whose constituting power stands in judgement over the appearance of phenomena. Even within the broadened phenomenal domain opened by Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, the constituting anteriority of the *I* marks its position of authority over the appearance of the world. For revelation to occur, particularly a revelation which would, precisely, put the *I* into

³⁴ Marion, VR, p. 14/31.

³⁵ Marion, VR, p. 14/31.

³⁶ Marion, VR, p. 14/31.

question, phenomenology's commitment to the constituting *I* must be corrected and transformed. Essential in this correction and transformation, is the realization that the constitutive subjectivity that is enacted as *I* maintains an essential relation to the important phenomenological notion of the horizon.

The second condition imposed by phenomenology in even its broadened form pertains to what phenomenology calls the horizon. In fact, it is with the notion of the horizon that the full implications of the subjective anteriority of the gaze take shape: phenomenologically, the horizon is always the horizon of and for the conscious *I*. In "The Saturated Phenomenon," Marion shows how the concept of horizon emerges from within Husserl's 'principle of all principles.' Discussing the limitations of the 'principle' in regard to its understanding of the relationship between intuition and givenness, Marion notes that, "any intuition, in order to give within certain factual 'bounds,' must first be inscribed by right within the limit (*Grenze*) of a horizon."³⁷ This means that for Husserl the "irrepressible novelty of the flux of consciousness remains by right always comprehended within a horizon" or, as Marion says, a "delimitation" that is there before any particular experience is possible. This, precisely, is why I just suggested that the horizon *of* consciousness is a horizon *for* consciousness. This horizon not only contains but constitutes experience as its condition of possibility. Finally, with reference to the pure presence of the subject's 'now', Marion explicitly joins the *I* to the horizon: "[T]he originary primacy of the *I* maintains an essential relation with the placement of any phenomenon within the limits of a horizon." He continues, quoting Husserl: "Indeed,

³⁷ Marion, VR, p. 22/41.

‘every *now* of a lived-experience has a horizon of lived-experiences—which also have precisely the originary form of the ‘now,’ and which as such produce *an originary horizon* [Originaritätshorizont] *of the pure I*, its total originary *now* of consciousness.’”³⁸

Of particular importance for the question of revelation, however, is Heidegger’s employment of the notion of horizon. Returning to “The Possible and Revelation,” Marion shows that it is Heidegger’s ontologizing of the horizon in terms of the question of Being that produces such an important consequence for God’s disclosure in the world of phenomena. He states: “By establishing the unconditional [anteriority] of ontological difference over any other question, Heidegger always includes God within it: as one among beings, even if the highest, God [receives his] ontic appearance [only] by the opening arranged by Being itself, the truth of Being precedes the light of the being-God.”³⁹ For Marion this means that God cannot be revealed “except by entering into a . . . ‘space of manifestation,’ which is measured by the dimensions of Being and not those of God.” He concludes: “Container [Écrin] of any being, Being plays, in the case of God, the function of a screen [écran]. It precedes the very initiative of revealing, it fixes the frame of revelation, and it imposes the conditions of reception on the revealed gift.”⁴⁰ At its deepest level, then, phenomenology remains blocked from accessing revelation by its commitments to the *I* and its assumption of the *a priori* and ontological status of the horizon.

³⁸ Marion, VR, p. 24/42.

³⁹ Marion, VR, p. 10/26. I have modified the translation to bring to light the notion of anteriority (*l’antériorité inconditionnée*) and the manner in which, in light of the anterior horizon of Being, God receives his ontic appearance (*Dieu ne reçoit son apparition ontique que de l’ouverture ménagée par l’être même*).

⁴⁰ Marion, VR, p. 11/27.

Now, in the case of the *I*, Marion initiated an alternative mode of thinking by undermining the subject's place in the constitution of phenomena and suggested, instead, a rediscovery of the *I* in relation to revelation. Likewise, the horizon must be transformed. Given the way in which the horizon blocks revelation by determining the conditions of its appearance in advance—conditions emerging, for Husserl, from the conditions of the subject's consciousness and, for Heidegger, from the frame of Being itself—the question that remains pertains to the phenomenological status of the horizon in relation to revelation. This question remains precisely because, like the *I*, Marion recognizes that one cannot do away with the horizon but must see it transformed by an alignment with revealed phenomena. It seems, Marion says, that we are caught in a bind: on the one hand, if the horizon is admitted, the possibility of revelation is denied, while, on the other hand, if the horizon is abolished no phenomenology is possible as nothing would present itself as a phenomenon to a gaze.⁴¹ What must be thought, therefore, is an appearance of revelation on a horizon such that that appearance challenges precisely “any a priori condition imposed on its possibility.”⁴² It is here that the crucial concept of *saturation* emerges for the first time. Marion writes:

Without a doubt, a horizon remains acquired and all visibility takes place within the measure of its scope—revelation can allow itself to be refracted on the horizon of Being, of the other, of the body's flesh, etc. Yet what is thus revealed fulfills at this point the dimensions and the possibilities that this frame imparts to it, so that the resulting phenomenon damages itself. The strength and the scope of what allows itself to be presented can enter the limits of the phenomenological horizon only by disrupting it: each line of the phenomenon interferes with all the others, as

⁴¹ Marion, VR, p. 15/32.

⁴² Marion, VR, p. 15/32-33.

if they crossed or reflected each other or interacted within their respective frames.⁴³

What is crucial here is the excessive appearance of that which remains inscribed within a horizon and, precisely in that inscription, disallows the horizon from determining the appearance. This disruption occurs, for Marion, in terms of the relation between intuition and intentionality. Under the circumstances in which the horizon measures the appearance of the phenomenon, the horizon functions as the place in which an adequation between intentionality and intuition must take place. As I indicated in reference to Husserl's understanding of horizon and its connection to the *I* of consciousness, as intentional consciousness establishes its 'now' it places limits on everything that appears within that now. That is, all intuited appearance, to be recognized as such, must be taken up within an intentional horizon. In the case of the saturated phenomenon, however, "instead of common phenomenality striving to make intuition adequate to intention . . . revelation gives objects where intuition surpasses the intentional aim. Under the regime of revelation, intuition offers neither as much nor less than but *infinitely more* than intention, hence than the significations elaborated by the *I*."⁴⁴

Concerning the notion of horizon, particularly as I use the term in relation to Marion's concepts of distance and givenness, an important distinction needs to be made. This distinction emerges from an ambiguity in Marion's own treatment of the idea. On the one hand, as we have just seen, the notion of saturation is required because the

⁴³ Marion, VR, pp. 15-16/33.

⁴⁴ Marion, VR, p. 16/33. In "The Saturated Phenomenon" Marion develops this general notion of saturation by developing an account of four modes of saturated phenomena. He develops this further in *Being Given* and dedicates individual studies to each of the modes in *In Excess*. I examine this in detail in Chapter Three.

‘problem of the horizon’ is the problem of a perceptual a priori structure functioning to determine, measure, and only then permit the appearance of certain phenomena. When this is the case, what is required is an account of a mode of appearance that saturates this perceptual a priori structure, determined as it is by concepts and significations, with intuition. According to this Husserlian notion of horizon, the task is not to articulate the logic of a particular kind of horizon—that of Being, the Other, the flesh, or, for that matter, givenness—but to posit a phenomenality whose apparition intuitively exceeds all intentional adequation. For Heidegger, however, the matter is different. Insofar as horizon relates to ontology and, therefore, to a displacement of Husserlian epistemology, the ‘problem of horizon’ is much wider than merely describing maximal intuitive appearance. As I show, it is the problem of accounting for the conditions for the possibility of appearance. In this sense, as with all phenomenology that moves beyond purely epistemological categories, the question of the horizon is an ontological question. It is crucial to note this distinction from the start because it is central to my discussion of Marion. I show, in fact, that in relation to Heidegger and, thus, ontologically, Marion advances a powerful account of givenness that functions as a horizontal concept.⁴⁵ It is in reference to this account that I am most interested in his work. On the other hand, in relation to Husserl’s epistemology, Marion provides an account of saturation that sits uneasily with his ontological arguments. In what follows, when I refer to horizon I am

⁴⁵ I realize, of course, how strange it is to speak of ontology in relation to Marion’s thought, characterized as it is by continual references to doing “without” Being. However, as I show, Marion is intensely interested in Being, so much so, in fact, that one can read the concept of givenness itself as his attempt to displace Heidegger’s ontology with another. On the other hand, it is entirely possible to read Marion’s phenomenological work on a completely epistemological level. Such a reading, however, rises neither to the level of his early work nor to the seriousness of the questions he considers.

referring to its ontological meaning. When I refer to Marion's Husserlian use of the term, I will call it a perceptual horizon.

According to Marion, access to divine revelation is achieved outside of metaphysics and with a phenomenology transformed in reference to its two key concepts: the *I* and the horizon. This transformation pertains exactly to the manner in which a mode of subjective anteriority is realigned with the appearance of phenomena within a horizon on and through which they give themselves. For Marion, this horizon is identified in terms of givenness (*donation*), a notion that is itself an articulation of the logic of distance. In the development of this phenomenology of givenness two questions are crucial. First, how does the horizon of Being, which is to be displaced by that of givenness, relate to divine revelation? What, precisely, is the manner of its determination and delimitation of God's self-disclosure? At stake in this important question is the diagnosis of the *problem* of Being in relation to revelation. Now, Marion does not initially arrive at this problem through a reading of Husserl and Heidegger but, rather, through an assessment of the theological problem of idolatry. I discuss this in Chapter 1. The second question pertains to the positive transformation of the horizon and the *I* in reference to divine revelation. As previously, this transformation is not thought for the first time in Marion's phenomenological work. As I explore in Chapter 2, it is in his account of the theological notion of distance that he first develops the idea of the displacement of the horizon of Being by that of givenness. Once this argument is in place, and the connection of distance to givenness has been secured, I turn, in Chapter 3, to an analysis of Marion's phenomenology of revelation. Here I examine his phenomenology givenness, his account

of saturation, particularly as it relates to the phenomenon of revelation, and, finally, the account of *l'adonné* as the figure of selfhood that is given shape by it. My argument is that Marion's notion of distance continues to organize his phenomenological account of givenness as the horizon that displaces Being and that this horizon figures the self as *l'adonné*.⁴⁶ I show, however, that this sits uneasily with his actual phenomenology of revelation because his concept of saturation is too little informed by the logic of distance because it is determined by an inversion of the Kantian metaphysical subjectivity that it seeks to overthrow.

The Seminar

The essay that I have been discussing records Marion's thought on the issue of divine revelation around the time of his move from a philosophical analysis dedicated to theological themes to a direct phenomenological mode of investigation.⁴⁷ In the process

⁴⁶ In the English translation of *Étant donné*, Jeffrey Kosky translates *l'adonné* as "the gifted." For Christina Gschwandtner, this is an inadequate translation. She writes: "*Adonné*, however, means to be 'devoted,' 'given over to,' or even 'addicted.' ('Gifted' works neither as a translation of the French term nor as a description of Marion's use of it.)" See Christina Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 213.

⁴⁷ In keeping with my decision to read Marion as a 'philosopher' attuned to the *theo*-logic that emerges from a rigorous confrontation with the question of God, I have just designated what is often taken as his 'theology' in other terms. On this, I am happy to claim the company of David Tracy who, not a little playfully, characterizes Marion's work from this period "not as theology but as a phenomenology of theological language in the Dionysian tradition." See his "Jean-Luc Marion: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Theology" in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 60. This does not mean, however, that my reading is in league with Marion's self-assessment. He sees his move from the earlier work to his phenomenological studies as a positive and productive advance. He expresses this well at the beginning of *Being Given* when he looks back on his work in *God Without Being*. In his Preface to the American Translation of *Being Given* he writes: "But *Étant donné*—at least it seems to me in retrospect—resumes questions left in suspense by a previous book, *Dieu sans l'être*. . . . The critical portion of [*God Without Being*] was accomplished within the field of philosophy, but I could not, at that time, glimpse its constructive side (access to charity) except

of my discussion I have referred to Marion's essay entitled "The Saturated Phenomenon." This essay appeared in a volume dedicated to a series of papers that were originally given in May of 1992 at the *École normale supérieure*. These papers represented the culmination of a two-year seminar conducted at the *Centre de recherches phénoménologiques et herméneutiques—Archives Husserl de Paris* dedicated to the theme of the phenomenology and hermeneutics of religion.⁴⁸ Among the other three contributors was Paul Ricoeur. By discussing Marion's work in relation to the themes and questions operative in the seminar, I can place in clearer relief what is at stake for Marion in a phenomenological account of revelation. By doing so I am also able to introduce the important differences between his approach and that of Ricoeur.

Thanks to the Introduction to this volume of essays, provided by Jean-François Courtine, the organizer of the seminar and editor of the volume, we have access to an account of the guiding themes of the seminar. According to him, "what in general appeared interesting or worthy of question to the researchers at the Center . . . was to lead phenomenology to its limit or to confront it with limit phenomena, ones able to serve as touchstones for assessing the pertinence and the rigor of phenomenology's fundamental

through recourse to theology (hence the second part, 'Hors-texte'). What was lacking was a nonmetaphysical method of philosophy—phenomenology, but a phenomenology thoroughly secured. . . . *Etant donné*, with the inventory of saturated phenomena, completes, in the particular case of the phenomenon of Revelation, a sketch of what *Dieu sans l'être* bluntly intended through direct recourse to theology" (BG, p. x). While not needing to designate him as a 'theologian,' I do argue that his phenomenology is better to the extent that it remains connected to the insights discovered in his 'theological' work. I explore this in Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ See *Phénoménologie et théologie*, edited by Jean-Françoise Courtine (Paris: Criterion, 1992), translated by Jeffrey Kosky and Thomas Carlson as *Phenomenology and Theology*, published in a volume entitled *Phenomenology and the 'Theological Turn': The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

principles and the methodic procedures that constitute it.”⁴⁹ While in years past these limit questions were focused on themes related to the work of art, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and even the melancholic, the particular limit case here is the religious phenomenon. Given that the issue is one of limit-phenomena, however, it is necessary to pose the guiding question, as Courtine does, in a twofold manner. For what is at stake is not only phenomenology’s own internal identity determined in relation to a self-reflective interrogation, but that identity insofar as it is determined in relation to a certain set of phenomena whose uniqueness necessitates that one ask, at first, if such an encounter with these phenomena is possible for phenomenology. Thus, to ask what phenomenology can learn from religious phenomena already requires that one thematize whether and how phenomenology can “treat religion.”⁵⁰ Here we see, exactly, Marion’s concern and we are reminded of the double requirement that he institutes to address it. Spending rather less time on this concern than Marion, but with this issue duly noted, and by assuming the point of engagement to be through ‘religious experience,’ Courtine proceeds to formulate the guiding phenomenological question: “Is there, in religious experience, a specific form of phenomenality, of appearance or epiphanic arising, that can affect phenomenology itself in its project, its aim, its fundamental concepts, indeed its very method?”⁵¹ Now, for Courtine, the aim and fundamental concepts of phenomenology are decided in reference to Husserl and, particularly, Husserl’s definition of ‘phenomenon’ according to the a priori correlation between appearing and that which appears, which Husserl proposes in

⁴⁹ Courtine, PT, p. 122.

⁵⁰ Courtine, PT, p. 122. See also Ricoeur’s essay in this volume, p. 127.

⁵¹ Courtine, PT, p. 122.

his *Crisis of the European Sciences*. With this delimitation of the phenomenological project, Courtine specifies his question to ask if religious phenomena might be able to “determine a ‘manner’ of appearing that can put into question or crisis this correlational a priori”⁵² posited by Husserl. While for him this makes the guiding question more rigorous, I would argue that it unnecessarily limits the question’s scope. This is the case for two reasons. In the first place, it is Marion himself who adopts Husserl’s definition of the phenomenon precisely in order to advance his account of givenness.⁵³ Secondly, to limit the aim and fundamental concepts of phenomenology to this Husserlian definition overlooks the importance of Heidegger’s thought and, in particular, the idea (picked up extensively by Marion) of the phenomenon showing itself in and through itself. If, however, one avoids this narrowing of the question and allows it to stand as originally stated, what is truly important in Courtine’s remarks comes to the fore. According to him, if religious experience does indeed give rise to a form of phenomenality that challenges phenomenology by forcing it to adjust or even transform its fundamental concepts and basic aims, this means that a ‘phenomenology of religion’ is not merely “an ontic, regional science toward which one would be free to ‘turn’ or not” but, rather, the new face of phenomenology itself insofar as it continually seeks its own possibilities for a more and more rigorous description of “the how of the appearing of a thing.”⁵⁴ What I

⁵² Courtine, PT, p. 123.

⁵³ See, for example, Marion, RG, pp. 31-35/52-57.

⁵⁴ Courtine, PT, p. 123. This is taken from Courtine’s quotation from Husserl’s *Krisis*. The reference to the ‘turn’ is to the debate, initiated by Dominique Janicaud’s claim that French phenomenology had made a ‘turn’ to theology and has been, therefore, corrupted by themes and concerns not properly phenomenological. The book by Janicaud that stands at the centre of this debate, entitled *The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology*, is translated by Bernard G. Prusak in the same volume that contains the collection of essays edited by Courtine. For a very fair and nuanced account of Janicaud’s position in

have suggested so far, and what I show in greater detail in Chapter 3, is that Marion's work, in "The Possible and Revelation" and "The Saturated Phenomenon," as well as in his most developed account in *Being Given* and *In Excess*, exemplifies perfectly the aspirations of the seminar. For him, what is at stake in thinking through revelation and, therefore, attuning his phenomenology to the 'question of God,' is a deepening and broadening of phenomenology itself. What is crucial, however, is that this deepening and broadening is to be carried out in a very particular manner and according to the canons of a pure phenomenology of apparition, a phenomenology of givenness.

The nature of what I have just called this pure phenomenology of apparition comes to light when Courtine responds to a possible objection. He realizes that an appeal to 'religious experience' is bound to meet the question of the concrete identity of that experience. So, to the question of "to what experience do you refer?", he responds: "[T]o the experience (plural, multiform, essentially heterogeneous, no doubt theological and atheological) of the divine, of the passage of the god . . . indeed to the 'aesthetic,' 'cultural' experiences or to prayer, even praise—however extraordinary (indeed fantastic, phantasmagoric) these experiences might be, *seen here only with regard to their possibility.*"⁵⁵ Now, it is the final clause of the last sentence that highlights the seminar's—and Marion's—commitment to a phenomenology of apparition. It is also this commitment that will provoke the confrontation with Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of revelation. According to Jeffrey Kosky, who has contributed a

respect to Marion see Merald Westphal's "Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60 (2006), pp. 117-137 (pp. 125-131).

⁵⁵ Courtine, PT, p. 124 (emphasis added).

Translator's Preface to the English translation of Courtine's volume, the phenomenological engagement with religious phenomena that is described by Courtine and practiced by the seminar is directed to a "possible religion, never a historically actual religion." That is, what is of interest here is "religion considered as a possibility, purely as possible." He continues: "The possibility of religion would be subject to phenomenological description, but for the description of actual religion one would follow Ricoeur and have recourse to a textual hermeneutic."⁵⁶ Contrary to Kosky's reading, I argue that Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics does not propose itself as a partner to the pure phenomenology of a pure religion but, rather, as its fundamental critique. The issue here is not to divide up the world of appearance into purely possible appearances and actual appearances and use phenomenology to describe one and hermeneutics the other. On the contrary, Ricoeur's claim is that religious phenomena challenge phenomenology to consider its hermeneutic origin and destiny precisely as actual phenomena encountered in temporally and textually mediated forms. Thus, not only does Ricoeur challenge the assumptions at work in regards to phenomenality and what can be said about it, he challenges as well the very object with which phenomenology engages: not the experiences of the divine "seen here only with regard to their possibility" but concrete, particular experiences of the divine whose textual mediation is not an accidental feature of their identity but, rather, fundamental to their actuality as religious. This is crucial to my critique of Marion's phenomenology of revelation.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Kosky, "Translator's Preface," PT, pp. 118-119.

With this fundamental contrast brought to light, the difference between Ricoeur and Marion starts to take shape. Where Marion posits a transformation of phenomenology that assumes the guiding questions of the seminar and, in fact, becomes its paradigmatic representative, Ricoeur suggests a fundamentally different approach that is based on the hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology itself. In this encounter one could say that precisely as Marion turns to a ‘purified’ and ‘radicalized’ phenomenology of apparition, Ricoeur calls into question precisely this kind of phenomenology and seeks a hermeneutical approach attuned to the particularities of the traditions under investigation. The result of this difference between them is instructive. Because they share the phenomenological tradition, their significant differences point not only to a crisis in phenomenology—what form will it have to take in order to describe divine revelation?—but also to a crisis for thought that seeks to take up the question of God in terms of revelation—*what* is being described when one thinks about the appearance of the divine? By taking a position in respect to phenomenology, each of them charts out what they take to be central to attempts to think divine revelation and, therefore, the ‘question of God.’ However, the way of thinking operative here moves not only in one direction. In the midst of this phenomenological debate a ‘theological’ decision is also at stake. For Marion, a pure phenomenology *as* a phenomenology of givenness is necessary to understand divine revelation itself because revelation pertains to the lived experiences of consciousness. In contrast, by subverting the guiding questions of consciousness, lived-experience (*Erlebnis*), and purified modes of phenomenal apparition, Ricoeur moves directly to a discussion of the hermeneutic core of the problem. Such a move is made,

however, not for the ‘weak’ reason that, obviously, Christian revelation is textually mediated but, rather, for the ‘strong’ reason that Christian revelation is, for him, first and foremost about an attested ‘world’ into which human agents are called to participate. Such participation is possible, finally, only because Christian revelation is always already constituted in a testimony that does not emerge from the subjective perspective of an *I* but, rather, from a source that is manifested in the historical witness of others. This means that revelation is always already a determinate and particular revelation and is not reducible to phenomenal structures and universal modes of consciousness. Just as, for Marion, we must turn to a phenomenology of givenness in order to account for ‘what happens’ in divine revelation, so, for Ricoeur, is the essence of revelation to be discovered in the essence of Christianity itself: in the testimony to an event that lives in the event of that testimony. With this we see not only why the question of revelation is to be handled so differently by each of them but also why it is necessary to sketch the rationale of a hermeneutic response to Marion’s phenomenology. To fail to do so would result in either a hermeneutic assertion posited in reference to a phenomenological argument or an attempt to couple the two approaches in the manner of Jeffrey Kosky.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ On the matter of a hermeneutic assertion posited in reference to a phenomenological argument, this is precisely what Marion accuses Jean Greisch and Jean Grondin of doing. Referring to their hermeneutic criticisms of his work, to be discussed in Chapter Four, he writes: “The debate does not concern the necessity of a hermeneutic, out of the question at least since Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, but its phenomenological legitimacies, which assure some saturated phenomena better than others” IE, p. 33, n. 3/39, n. 1.

Ricoeur: Experience and Language in Religious Discourse

Having set up the contrast between Marion and Ricoeur in terms of their interaction with the guiding issues of the 1992 seminar, I move now to a discussion of Ricoeur's essay presented at that seminar.⁵⁸ Though it does not speak to Ricoeur's understanding of revelation in its entirety, the essay provides a perfect entry into the hermeneutic intervention to be staged in Chapter 4. The manner in which he shares the concerns of the seminar to attune rigorous phenomenological thought to the exigencies of revelation but, for that very reason, disputes the guiding questions posited by the seminar, is fully evident here. In what follows, I describe Ricoeur's arguments, paying particular attention to the key ideas that will 'displace' Marion's own account of revelation.

From the very beginning of the essay, Ricoeur makes it clear that a new mode of questioning is necessary in the phenomenology of religion. He writes:

The most serious difficulties [that confront a phenomenology of religion] are not those that could be associated with the theme of intentionality, on the pretext that intentionality would forever be a tributary of representation, therefore of objectivization, therefore of the subject's claim to mastery over the meaning of its experience. Feelings and dispositions that can be called 'religious' do indeed exist, and they can transgress the sway of representation and, in this sense, mark the subject's being overthrown from its ascendancy in the realm of meaning.⁵⁹

As indirect as it may be, Ricoeur's list of things that are *not* the issue is precise. In fact, he flags all the issues that Marion's thought constantly worries over: the privilege of intentional modes of consciousness; an understanding of knowledge in which 'subjective' experience is related to 'objects' of the world; and finally the dominance of the 'subject'

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, "Experience and Language in Religious Discourse," PT, pp. 127-146.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, PT, p. 127.

in the constitution of phenomenal appearance. Thus, while Marion defends a phenomenology of givenness in order to sideline modes of consciousness determined by an intentional transcendence, fearing the victory of representational models of appearance and the ‘subject’ to whom they hand lordship, Ricoeur simply acknowledges that these concerns have already been addressed. In fact, not only have they been addressed but a discourse concerning ‘religious’ phenomena with their corresponding affective modes and dispositions has been identified and developed. He even provides a list of those who have already contributed to this task, including Barth, Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Tillich and Rosenzweig.⁶⁰ To this list, I suspect, Ricoeur would be happy to add Marion’s name, for Marion’s project shares the concerns described here and, perhaps, pushes these concerns harder than anyone else. In many ways, then, these thinkers have accounted for “absolute feelings, ab-solute, in the sense of detached from the relation by which the subject would preserve its mastery over the object called religious, over the meaning of this presumed object.”⁶¹ According to Ricoeur, then, we have in the work of various phenomenologists of religion a basic typology of ‘religious’ experiences and a description of their common disposition in prayer which is available to phenomenology in terms of the structure of call and response. However, Ricoeur recognizes an ambiguity even here in what can be taken for granted as a phenomenological accomplishment: he argues that the structure of call and response still has to be distinguished from the relation of “question/response” as a result of “the equivocality clinging to the term *response* common

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, PT, pp. 127-128.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, PT, p. 128.

to both pairs or correlative terms.”⁶² This distinction is essential if the call/response structure is to maintain the anteriority that is constitutive of religious experience, for if the question/response structure indicates a prior “field of common understanding,” the call/response structure points to the creation of this field “through obedience, on the level of absolute feeling, and through invocation, on the level of the disposition of prayer.”⁶³

From the beginning of his essay we see that he not only takes for granted what the seminar found it necessary to bring to light, but that he proposes a challenge to the very core of that way of thinking by interrogating the call/response structure of religious experience. As one moves into the remainder of the essay, it is crucial to see how this challenge already points to the radical insufficiency of these past (and present) phenomenologies of religion. That is, if the phenomenologies that describe religious experience in terms of the call/response structure must face the critical task of distinguishing that structure from another, it is because, from the start, these phenomenologies face a different crisis. Having arisen in relation to lived-experiences of consciousness, and having defined the coordinates of their description in connection with the philosophies of consciousness suited to an analysis of lived-experience (*Erlebnis*), these descriptive modes allow religious experience to be left at its most immediate level of description. As such, the descriptions remain formal and abstract, as the critical need for a distinction between the two structures indicates. Thus, for Ricoeur, the “biggest difficulty according to which a phenomenology of religion must be assessed . . . concerns the status of *immediacy* that could be claimed by the dispositions and feelings allied with

⁶² Ricoeur, PT, p. 128.

⁶³ Ricoeur, PT, p. 128.

the call-and-response structure in a religious order.”⁶⁴ Such immediacy, however, is not overcome simply by appeal to language.⁶⁵ On the contrary, one must push all the way through to “a *cultural* and *historical* mediation” of the religious phenomenon.⁶⁶ This is so, in fact, because the linguistic mediation of experience, taken for granted by Ricoeur, is always already included within the “grand edifices of speech and writing that have structured the memory of events, words, and personalities.”⁶⁷ As a result, religion “is like a language itself, which is realized only in different tongues” and this, for Ricoeur, means that any phenomenology of religion must “run the gauntlet of a hermeneutic and more precisely of a *textual* or *scriptural* hermeneutic.”⁶⁸ The negative implication of this lies in the claim that “one cannot locate anywhere the universality of the religious phenomenon. This state of affairs is easy to observe: the fundamental feelings and dispositions evoked above are nowhere visible in their naked immediacy, but are always already interpreted

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, PT, p. 129.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur writes: “If it were only a matter of taking into account the linguistic mediation without which feelings and dispositions, left in silence, would remain unformed, the difficulty would be minor, and not much of a rebuttal would be required. It has been a long time now since phenomenology stopped considering language as an ‘unproductive’ layer superimposed on the properly eidetic layer of lived experiences, be they feelings or dispositions” (PT, p. 129).

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, PT, p. 130 (emphasis in original). In an article in which he tries to bring together Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology with the notion of counter-intentionality in Marion, Merald Westphal disagrees with Ricoeur’s assessment of questions that ought to be pressing for the phenomenology of religion. For Westphal, when it is a question of thinking transcendence, the problem is not to think according to a detour through cultures and texts but, rather, to take up, once again, the limitations of representational and objectifying thought. Though Ricoeur’s formulations of the matter may lead one to believe that phenomenological hermeneutics focuses on ‘culture’ and ‘texts’ while a phenomenology like that of Marion’s focuses on the limitations of intentional and representative modes of thinking, this is clearly not the case. In fact, as I show in Chapter 4, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical transformation of phenomenology better accomplishes a critique of intentional and representational modes of thinking because it shows how experience and selfhood are constituted in the externalization of consciousness in the world of culture, history, and text. See Merald Westphal, “Vision and Voice,” p. 121.

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, PT, p. 130.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, PT, p. 130.

according to the canonic rules of reading and writing.”⁶⁹ In relation to the structure of call/response, and the phenomenologies, like that of Marion, which depend on it, Ricoeur adds: “We cannot even be sure that the universal character of the structure call/response can be attested independently of the different historical actualizations in which this structure is incarnated.”⁷⁰ The interrogation of the call/response structure brings all thinking of divine revelation face to face with the hermeneutical challenge: to think religious experience in the concrete texts and cultures in which it takes shape.

Despite this obvious displacement of the phenomenology proposed by Marion, Ricoeur shares with him a common concern to articulate a notion of subjectivity that reflects the experience of a self responsive to divine revelation. Not surprisingly, for Ricoeur this figure emerges not from the forms of consciousness provoked by phenomenal givenness, but rather from an encounter with the textual or scriptural structure of the witness itself. In order to introduce this argument, which in Chapter 4 is joined to Ricoeur’s proposal for a hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology, I now discuss the two central ideas that emerge in the essay: first, the hermeneutic structure of Christian revelation thought in terms of testimony or proclamation and, second, the way in which the textual form of the witness manifests a “polyphony of the call” that corresponds to a “polycentric” self.⁷¹

Given what Ricoeur has said about the gauntlet of a textual or scriptural hermeneutics, he must turn directly to the particular tradition under examination. When

⁶⁹ Ricoeur, PT, p. 130.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, PT, p. 130.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, PT, pp. 143-144.

he turns to the Jewish and Christian scriptures he finds three hermeneutic circles that are constitutive of Jewish and Christian faith. The first circle, descriptive of the relationship between “the living word and the scriptural trace,” is inscribed within a second circle. This one articulates the relation between “on the one hand, the pair Word-Scripture and, on the other, the ecclesial community that draws its identity from the acknowledgement of these Scriptures and the Word that is supposed to have founded them.”⁷² These two circles, in turn, are inscribed within the third circle that operates “at the level of each individual believer” by calling into play, on the one hand, the preaching which confronts the believer and, on the other hand, the believer’s own interpretation of this preaching by which he “lay[s] hold of this meaning and understand[s] himself through it.”⁷³ In each of the three circles, Ricoeur shows, in levels of intensification, the manner in which Jewish and Christian revelation is constituted in terms of testimony and its appropriation in self-understanding. In the first circle, the faith of Christianity is founded on “a word received as the Word of God” but this word “is nowhere accessible outside the writings considered to be holy.”⁷⁴ This is indeed a nonfoundational founding for “the Word cannot attest to its foundational function without recourse to the Scriptures . . . but Scripture would not be counted as manifestation unless it is deemed the trace left by the Word that founds it.”⁷⁵ Rather than being a vicious circle, this one points to the manner in which Christianity is founded not by a principle but, rather, by a testimony whose traces remain as Scripture. This notion of testimony draws us into the next circle for here, in the circle that marks the

⁷² Ricoeur, PT, p. 133.

⁷³ Ricoeur, PT, p. 135.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, PT, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, PT, p. 132.

relation between scripture and the ecclesial community, we see that which mediates the relation between Word and scripture: the community of witnesses. To speak of a community of witnesses is not only to speak of the Apostles, because the foundation of scripture concerns not just its origins but its continual investment as an authoritative text. Thus the community of witnesses or, perhaps better, the community of testimony, is always already an “interpreting and confessing community.”⁷⁶ Finally, the structure of testimony pointed to here is only possible because of the structures of attestation and self-understanding at work within the interpreting being herself. It is in the third and widest circle that this becomes most clearly evident. Ricoeur argues that

adherence to a religious confession bears a unique character. In the first place, it is, for the majority, an issue of an accident of birth, for others, of the risks of a conversion. Along the way, the contingency is transformed into a rational choice and culminates finally in a sort of destiny, leaving its stamp on the global comprehension of others, oneself, and the world, beneath the sign of the reception of the Word of an Other, gathered in its historical and mediated traces by long chains of interpretations.⁷⁷

To listen to preaching, as Ricoeur will say elsewhere,⁷⁸ is to find oneself summoned by the word of an Other, a word whose authority to summon is not grounded in any other foundation than the hearing of it, and to lay hold of this word as a word directed to and for me such that it summons me, in its contingency, to make of it my destiny by making it my own. Thus, Ricoeur argues, is “repeated, on the miniature scale of the believing soul,

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, PT, p. 133.

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, PT, p. 135.

⁷⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Naming God,” FS, pp.217-218.

the circle that the Scriptures and the confessing communities together sketch on the level of world history.”⁷⁹

According to this way of thinking, Christian revelation is always already constituted in a testimony that does not emerge from the subjective perspective of an *I*, even an inverted or saturated one. It emerges from a source that is manifested in the witness of others. This means that revelation is always already ‘founded’ on a determinate and particular attestation and appropriation and is, therefore, not reducible to phenomenal structures and universal modes of consciousness. For Ricoeur, divine revelation arises in the testimony to an event that lives in the event of that testimony. Because this is the case, one who looks for the figure of selfhood that corresponds to this mode of appearance will not look to structures of consciousness but to the structure of the form in and through which this revelation is attested. In fact, Ricoeur’s argument is that there is a direct relation between the “internal configuration” of the textual witness and its “effect of refiguring the self.”⁸⁰ In fact, Ricoeur identifies a correspondence between the modes of discourse proper to the Hebrew Scriptures and the structure of call/response that has been previously identified. In contrast to the previous manner of thinking this structure, however, Ricoeur suggests that rather than an abstract and immediate subject who responds to an equally empty and formal call, what we have here is a polycentric self summoned by a polyphonic call determined by the testimony of Scriptural trace. This polyphonic call, determined by the “plural naming of God” attested in the various modes of Scriptural discourse, puts into play a summons to a subject who is not unitary but,

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, PT, p. 135.

⁸⁰ Ricoeur, PT, p. 138.

rather, constituted in the dialectic or, one could say, the ‘conflict’ of interpretations. He argues that to the God who is named in narration and imperative corresponds the identity of Israel as a people “grounded in the security and stability of a tradition.”⁸¹ Prophecy, in turn, “confronts this identity with the hazards of a strange and hostile history” producing, in dialectical tension with a Torah-identity, “an essentially threatened identity.”⁸² The third form of testimony, that of wisdom, draws the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, as it relates to the particular people Israel, into a dialectic of the particular and the universal.⁸³ Ricoeur concludes:

It is in this way that the triad of the call—Torah, Prophets, Wisdom—is answered, on the side of the self, by the triadic rhythm of a grounded identity, a fragmented identity, and an identity at once singularized and universalized. This reciprocity between the triad of the call and that of the response is the concrete figure which, in the tradition of the Jewish then Christian Scriptures, is worn by the hermeneutic circle constitutive of the *historically incarnated* religious consciousness.⁸⁴

We see now why Ricoeur demands the hermeneutic displacement of a phenomenology of revelation: access to an historically incarnated subject requires it.

Not all has been said here, however. In Chapter 4 I locate this hermeneutic understanding of Jewish and Christian revelation in relation to two issues that are not discussed in this essay. The first—Ricoeur’s argument for a hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology—has already been mentioned. The second issue relates directly to where I just left off. To say that the internal configuration of textual testimony is effective in refiguring the self means that we must be able to speak of the move from the internal

⁸¹ Ricoeur, PT, p. 144-145.

⁸² Ricoeur, PT, p. 145.

⁸³ Ricoeur, PT, p. 145.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur, PT, p. 145 (emphasis added).

configuration of the text to the self, the agent whose being is in the world. This move is precisely the move from the 'sense' of a text to its 'referent.' For Ricoeur, the key idea related to the text's referent is the idea of the 'world of the text'. It is here, with this notion, that Ricoeur's understanding of revelation most decisively displaces that of Marion because it is here that we see a more radical form of anteriority emerge through a different account of what constitutes the horizon of revelation and, therefore, of religious experience.

For Ricoeur the problem that confronts a phenomenology of religion is the reduction of religious experience to the immediacy of consciousness. Such immediacy, however, has haunted past phenomenological descriptions of religious experience because, in seeking to advance a universal structure of religious experience, they have allied themselves with philosophies of consciousness that have failed to pass through a cultural and historical mediation, even if they allowed themselves to be tested by a linguistic one. In my analysis of Marion's phenomenology of revelation, I argue that, at its best, it emerges in the context of a phenomenological thinking that attempts to displace the horizon of Being with that of givenness, itself understood in reference to the logic of distance. My hermeneutic critique of Marion's endeavor can now also be signaled. Even at its best, the horizon of givenness remains a horizon determined by a philosophy of consciousness. Ricoeur's account of revelation displaces that of Marion in the same manner that Marion sought to displace that of Heidegger: by challenging the very coordinates of the horizon which, as a concept, gives expression to the conditions of possibility for appearance in general. To overcome the idolatrous fold of Being, Marion

proposed the horizon of givenness. However, that proposal remains structured by the assumptions of a philosophy of consciousness. The displacement effected by Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology, displaces precisely that philosophy of consciousness in reference to a hermeneutics of testimony. Finally, this displacement is required not only on phenomenological grounds but on 'theological' grounds as well: as a form of life, Christianity lives from the revelation of a God who appears not only to affect consciousness but to transform history.

Finally, a word on my use of secondary literature. As is often the case with the early development of secondary literature dedicated to a writer, such as Jean-Luc Marion, who continues to develop his own project, there are only a few book-length studies of his thought and many of the articles are either dated, heavily determined by summaries of the arguments, or both. While I draw on many of these articles, I want to point out here the main studies of Marion's thought. At the moment there are three. Robyn Horner published *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press) in 2001. She followed that up with *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate) in 2005. Horner's treatment of Marion is reflective of the influence of John Caputo and, quite frequently, she assesses Marion in terms of the debate between Derrida and Marion (as does Caputo). At times this limits her reading of Marion by imposing on him questions generated not only by this debate but by Caputo's particular reading of it.⁸⁵ In relation to the way in which the

⁸⁵ For Caputo's writings on Marion see, for example: "Apostle's of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*

debate between Marion and Derrida has influenced readings of Marion's work, I would also mention Thomas Carlson's interpretation of Marion. While he has not produced a book-length study, Carlson's interpretation of Marion has been significant both because he was a very early reader of Marion and also because of his insightful Translator's Preface to *The Idol and Distance*.⁸⁶ More recently Christina M. Gschwandtner published *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). This is by far the most up-to-date and thorough treatment of Marion's entire body of work. What makes Gschwandtner's treatment particularly useful is her recognition of the lack of attention given to Marion's Descartes scholarship and her filling of that lack. The importance of this contribution does come at a price, however: if, in other treatments of Marion's work, his studies of Descartes are ignored, here, in Gschwandtner's treatment, appeals to Marion's Cartesian studies become the trump card that is played again and again. I agree with her that much can be learned about Marion's theological and phenomenological studies by considering them in light of his studies of Descartes and Descartes' late medieval context. On the other hand, Marion's 'theological' and phenomenological work does stand on its own and it is tendentious to locate its meaning and its 'point' in reference to hidden themes that become apparent only in reference to another body of work (the Descartes studies). For example, at one point she

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), Ch.8; "Derrida and Marion: Two Husserlian Revolutions," in *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 119-132. This final article has been updated and developed in "The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology: Two Possibilities for Religion in Recent Continental Philosophy," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), pp. 67-93.

⁸⁶ Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

argues: “I would contend that Marion’s work in theology especially, but possibly even his phenomenology, constitute attempts to recover a language for the divine that would escape univocity, namely an attempt to recover a new version of analogy employing a modified version of the language of the divine names.”⁸⁷ While she recognizes that Marion has *never* explicitly construed his project in these terms, she maintains that this is so merely because of the confusion surrounding theories of analogy. I think this to be unlikely. Whether in interviews or prefaces to new work, Marion is quite explicit about contextualizing and looking back on his work and yet he has never (at least to my knowledge) brought this up, not even in response to his Radical Orthodox critics for whom doctrines of analogy are so important. Furthermore, in considering the relation of Marion’s Descartes studies to his theological work, it is also important to remember that *The Idol and Distance* (1977) and *God Without Being* (1982) appear along with Marion’s key books on Descartes, which took shape from 1975 to 1986. Gschwandtner’s privileging of Marion’s Descartes studies is a welcome and important corrective to the scholarly literature on Marion but it is overplayed in its execution.⁸⁸ The other feature of Gschwandtner’s book that makes it so indispensable is the thoroughness with which she addresses the secondary literature on Marion. She is particularly good at discerning trends in the criticisms that have been advanced by theologians and philosophers writing in

⁸⁷ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 128-129.

⁸⁸ Granting Gschwandtner’s claims, I do not draw on Marion’s Descartes scholarship in this dissertation. While this is mainly a matter of scope, I do believe that Marion’s ‘theological’ and phenomenological projects can, and should, be read on their own, at least in reference to the issues I’m pursuing.

English, French and German.⁸⁹ Finally, and most recently, Shane Mackinlay has published *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). This book is useful for assessing not only Marion's (saturated) phenomenon of revelation, but also the possibility of a hermeneutic response.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ She has also published three articles in which she expresses the criticisms that she holds back in the book. Two of them are dedicated to an analysis and criticism of Marion's reading of Levinas: "Ethics, Eros, or Caritas? Levinas and Marion on Individuation of the Other," *Philosophy Today* 49:1 (2005), pp. 70-87 and "The Neighbor and the Infinite: Marion and Levinas on the encounter between self, human other, and God," *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007), pp. 231-249. She also dedicates an article to the relationship between philosophy and theology in Marion, arguing that for him philosophy is primarily apologetical and in service to a "superior" theology. See "A New 'Apologia': The Relationship between Theology and Philosophy in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion," *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005), pp. 299-313.

⁹⁰ My engagement with the secondary literature on Paul Ricoeur will be very selective, focusing on essays and book chapters which discuss his hermeneutic intervention in phenomenology and his account of divine revelation.

CHAPTER 1 FROM THE IDOL TO THE ICON

“It does not suffice to go beyond an idol in order to withdraw oneself from idolatry.”
—Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, p. 38

1.1. Introduction

According to Marion, in order to address the ‘question of God’ and, therefore, think with and according to divine revelation, we must be able to access the appearance of that revelation on its own terms. As I have suggested in the Introduction, for him this is achieved most perfectly in a phenomenology of givenness and its account of the saturated phenomenon. I also indicated in the Introduction, however, that this insight was not initially gained in an explicitly phenomenological study but rather comes to light in Marion’s treatment of the concepts used by Christians to account for divine revelation. Here, in Chapter 1, I investigate his account of the forms of anteriority that block access to divine revelation and the horizon of Being that they presuppose.

At the heart of Marion’s early approach to the question of revelation are his notions of the idol and the icon. Not only have these ideas become popular for philosophers and theologians who have borrowed them from his work, they remain central throughout many of his most important books and essays. In *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance*, however, Marion develops his account of the idol and the icon for the precise purpose of scrutinizing the conditions for the possibility of attaining an understanding of divine revelation. In this chapter I argue that by approaching the manner in which the philosophical tradition has taken up the question of God through a

phenomenological account of the idol, Marion is able to sketch a phenomenological genealogy of conceptual discourses concerning divine revelation that reveal, at their very heart, an anterior gaze whose source is the ‘subject’ of an experience in and by which God’s appearance is measured. To reveal this subjective anteriority and its manifestation according to the logic of Being is the goal of Marion’s critical analysis. To bring this goal to light is the task of this chapter.

1.2. The Idol and the Concept

At the heart of Marion’s intervention into metaphysically and ontologically determined modes of thought concerning divine revelation lies his attempt to understand how the concept of Being has become the “insurmountable” category for thinking God. The purpose of his phenomenological genealogy is to bring to light the emergence of this insurmountability by tracking the relations between a certain mode of apprehension (the intentional-aim-become-dominating-gaze) and a certain mode of divine visibility (the idol). Historically, the priority of Being has played on two fronts: in the history of metaphysics and, with Heidegger, in a postmetaphysical ontology of the difference between Being and beings. In this section I examine Marion’s phenomenology of the idol and the relation of this phenomenology to conceptual thought. In section 2 I extend this to a discussion of the insurmountability of Being in metaphysically determined attempts to think God. Section 3 addresses the insurmountability of Being in Heidegger’s postmetaphysical thought. Finally, in section 4, I turn to a discussion of the icon and,

particularly, the manner in which it inverts the logic of the idol. This discussion will serve as a transition into the following chapter.

For Marion, any attempt to reopen the question of God must reckon with the way this question has been posed—and, indeed, closed—according to a thinking of divine revelation that is idolatrous. In what follows I examine Marion’s account of such idolatrous thinking in order to bring out what is at stake in surpassing it. On two occasions Marion specifies the idolatrous nature of a ‘concept’ of God. I reproduce them here:

The concept consigns to a sign what at first the mind grasps with it (*concipere, capere*); but such a grasp is measured not so much by the amplitude of the divine as by the scope of a *capacitas*, which can fix the divine in a specific concept only at the moment when a conception of the divine fills it, hence appeases, stops, and freezes it. When a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names ‘God,’ this concept functions exactly as an idol. It gives itself to be seen, but thus all the better conceals itself as the mirror where thought, invisibly, has its forward point fixed, so that the *invisible* finds itself, with an aim suspended by the fixed concept, disqualified and abandoned; thought freezes, and the idolatrous concept of ‘God’ appears, where, more than God, thought judges itself.¹

The concept, when it knows the divine in its hold, and hence names ‘God,’ defines it. It defines it, and therefore also measures it to the dimension of its hold. Thus the concept on its part can take up again the essential characteristics of the ‘aesthetic’ idol: because it apprehends the divine on the basis of *Dasein*, it measures the divine as a function of it; the limits of the divine experience of *Dasein* provoke a reflection that turns it away from aiming at, and beyond, the invisible, and allows it to freeze the divine in a concept, an invisible mirror.²

¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 16/26.

² Marion, *GWB*, p. 29/44.

In order to make sense of Marion's important connection between the idol and the concept, it is necessary to unpack the arguments made in these two quotations by making clear the 'essential characteristics' of the idol.

In *God Without Being*, Marion's phenomenology of the idol serves to provide a phenomenological genealogy of the concepts that have been used to name God. The mode of appearance that is captured in his description of the idol is one of four modes that can be identified in Marion's work at the time of this book. Along with the mode of appearance of common objects in the world, which I discuss presently in relation to the idol, Marion describes two other modes: that of the icon and that of boredom.³ In order to understand what an idol is—and therefore how concepts can be idolatrous—it is helpful to contrast the experience of an idol to that of common objects in the world. In *God Without Being* Marion states that, “[b]efore the idol [comes along], the gaze transparently transpierced the visible. To be exact the gaze did not see the visible, since it did not cease to transpierce it—to transpierce it piercingly. In each visible spectacle, the gaze found nothing that might stop it; the gaze's fiery eyes consumed the visible so that each time the gaze saw nothing.”⁴ On its own, this description is not entirely clear. However, when seen in the light of Marion's description of common, everyday experience in *The Crossing of the Visible*, the description becomes crucial to understanding the unique mode of appearance that is an idol. According to his description, at the heart of perception is intentionality or, what he calls in this book on aesthetics, perspective. Thanks to the work of perspective, the unorganized and unruly visibility disclosed in perception is seen

³ For his discussion of boredom and the corresponding notions of vanity and melancholy, see *GWB*, Ch.4.

⁴ Marion, *GWB*, p. 11/20.

through and, in this seeing-through or ‘transpiercing,’ the world is seen and objects are experienced. Marion writes:

In effect, in perspective my gaze invisibly traverses the visible, in such a way that, without undergoing any addition to the real, it becomes that much *more* visible: the auditorium that houses us today would not appear habitable to me, and strictly speaking would not be so, if, while crossing a certain invisible emptiness, my gaze was not rendered vast. For it is my gaze, opened up by perspective, that separates these colored surfaces to be seen and made out as walls, that raises this other clear surface to see there and make out a ceiling, that finally levels out this darker surface in order to recognize the unfolding of a ground where I can put my feet. . . . A quotidian Samson, the gaze of perspective separates the visible by the equal power of the invisible, in a way that renders it for us vast, inhabitable, organized. Perspective’s gaze bores through the visible in order to establish there the invisible distance that renders it aimed at [*visible*] and first, simply, visible. . . . Our gaze reaches a world—exercises its being-in-the-world—because perspective, in the sense of the invisible organizing the visible, has in itself the ability to see through the visible, therefore in terms of the invisible.⁵

What happens, then, when the idol appears? Marion continues, in *God Without Being*:

“For the first (and last) time, the gaze no longer rushes through the spectacle stage without stopping, but forms a stage in the spectacle; it is fixed in it and, far from passing beyond, remains facing what becomes for it a spectacle to *re*-spect.”⁶ In relation to the idol, the gaze is fascinated and therefore halted in the ‘mere’ appearance of the thing. What is seen is not an object—this uniquely chiseled chunk of stone, this cut and painted piece of wood—but, rather, the appearance of the divine itself *in the appearing* of the thing. In the idol, one does not see the thing but, rather, its appearing. Instead of “outflanking the visible, of not seeing it and rendering it invisible, the gaze discovers

⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing the Visible*, trans. James K.A. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 3-4. For the original, see: *La croisée du visible* (Paris: PUF, 1996), pp. 14-15.

⁶ Marion, *GWB*, p. 11/20.

itself as outflanked, contained, held back by the visible.”⁷ How does this happen? How do we pass from the experience of common objects of the world to an experience of an idol?

In answering these questions it is easy to think that what is crucial is the actual nature of the idolatrous thing. That is, we assume that the difference between a common object of the world and an idol is in the nature of the object. For Marion, however, this is precisely not the case.⁸ It is the gaze that makes the idol. He states: “The idol depends on the gaze that it satisfies, since if the gaze did not desire to satisfy itself in the idol, the idol would have no dignity for it.”⁹ While it is true that the idol “fascinates and captivates the gaze precisely because everything in it must expose itself to the gaze” such fascination arises from the gaze itself insofar as it first draws the object into the “domain of the gaze” itself.¹⁰ Just as the gaze, when it was guided by the organizing power of perspective, ‘saw’ objects precisely by seeing through their visible appearing, so, in the case of the idol, does the gaze now see something else: the appearing of the divine. But how or indeed why, we may continue to ask, does it see in this appearing—the divine? In *The Idol and Distance*, Marion explains: “In the cases of life and death, of peace and war, of love and drunkenness, of spirit and beauty, we indisputably experience the irrepressible and panic capital of the divine, and we decipher or divine therein faces that we model in order that we might fix so many gods in them. These gods, therefore, conform first to us, or,

⁷ Marion, *GWB*, p. 11-12/21.

⁸ Though he does admit that only certain objects can claim the status of an idol. He writes: “The only works that can pretend to the contradictory status of idol and/or icon are those that art has so worked that they no longer restrict their visibility to themselves . . . but, as such and by thus remaining absolutely immanent in themselves, that they signal indissolubly toward another, still undetermined term” (*GWB*, p. 8/17).

⁹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 10/18.

¹⁰ Marion, *GWB*, p. 10/19.

less summarily, to the modalities of our multiform perception of the divine.”¹¹ In such limit-experiences as Marion points to here, the gaze is led by an intention that is, properly speaking, ‘religious’ and, as such, seeks to grasp the divine. In these situations wherein the divine intention strives to capture the presence of God in the midst of an unthematized experience of the divine, “the gaze strains itself to see the divine, to see it by taking it up into the field of the gazeable.” He continues: “The more powerfully the aim is deployed, the longer it sustains itself, the richer, more extensive, and more sumptuous will appear the idol on which it will stop its gaze.”¹² The gaze constitutes the idol because it precedes the idol just as much as the particularity of the idol proceeds from the scope of the aim of the gaze.¹³ What is crucial to this first defining moment of the idol is the way the object functions as the *topos*, the site, upon which the gaze returns to itself. This is crucial because what is at stake with the idol is not the nature of the idolatrous object but the kind of intentionality at work in the constitution of the idol. As we pass from the material, aesthetic idol to the concept it is this intentionality that remains definitive.

We come back to where we began: the difference between the idol and a common object of experience is captured in the difference between a gaze that sees-through and one that is stopped—frozen. Having been stopped by an anterior aim which invests the idol with a luminosity sufficient to fascinate and fill the gaze, the idol now functions as a

¹¹ Marion, ID, p. 6/21.

¹² Marion, GWB, p. 11/19.

¹³ Marion, ID, p. 5/20-21. See also GWB, p. 26/39-40: “The idol shows what it sees. It shows that which, indeed, occupies the field of the visible, with neither deceit nor illusion, but which indissolubly invests it only on the basis of vision itself. The idol supplies vision with the image of what it sees. The idol produces (itself) in actuality (as) that at which vision intentionally aims. It freezes in a figure that which vision aims at in a glance.”

rebound station for the gaze. That is, the gaze stops in the idol only insofar as it returns to itself. It is for this reason that Marion employs the image of the mirror: “The idol thus acts as a mirror, not as a portrait: a mirror that reflects the gaze’s image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim. The idol, as a function of the gaze, reflects the gaze’s scope.”¹⁴ The true nature of this mirror is not known to the one gazing into it, however, precisely because of the manner in which it fascinates: thinking that we see the beauty of a god in the luminous brilliance of formed marble, we who look are dazzled insofar as the idol “shines immediately with a brilliance by definition equal (at least) to what this gaze can see.”¹⁵ We are, therefore, ravished even if we are not (entirely) duped.¹⁶ But we are not duped or deceived, according to Marion, because the idol does show us something of the divine. Just as he sought to debunk the idea that what makes an idol is the object itself—and, therefore, as he disallows a critique of the deceitfulness of the idol on the basis of the idol’s material limitations—so does he wish to sideline a critique of the idol that sees it as emerging within a purely solipsistic experience. As we saw earlier, one accounts for the plurality of idols according to the

¹⁴ Marion, *GWB*, p. 12/21.

¹⁵ Marion, *GWB*, p. 12/21.

¹⁶ The distinction between being ‘ravished’ and being ‘duped’ is an important one because it points to the fundamental issue of anteriority that is at stake in the idol. For example, Bruce Ellis Benson’s discussion of this feature of the idol sides with the way in which the idol deceives us or, as he says, lies to us. While his analogy with Nietzsche’s understanding of the lie-that-is-known-to-be-a-lie is interesting, I believe Benson mistakes Marion’s point. In the idol, Benson claims, “we see exactly what we want to see: ourselves” but, for Marion, the gaze does not see itself but, rather, the measure of the God that corresponds to its highest aim. The idol is a mirror of the gaze, Marion has just told us, and *not* a portrait. Marion’s discussion of the anterior gaze that is constitutive of the idol depends on this distinction: if ‘idol’ signifies only the fabrication of the human imagination, its logic will not point to the unique manifestation of divinity—actually and authentically the divinity—according to the anterior coordinates established by *Dasein*. Or, to put it otherwise, the problem here is not with ‘deception’ but with ‘reception’. See Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 190-191.

strength of the gaze that constitutes them. This is because the idol always measures the *scope* of the gaze—this is what Marion calls the “mirror function” of the idol—even though it does not allow that scope to become known because it *saturates* the gaze and blinds it to itself—this is what Marion calls the “spectacle function.”¹⁷ What is being measured here, however, is not the scope of what the gaze can create or imagine but what it can bear of a “true and genuine experience of the divine.”¹⁸ As authentic as it is, the idol is to be seen beyond the categories of deceit and illusion precisely as its genuine limit is understood: “as an experience of the divine, starting in this way with the one who aims at it, in view of the reflex in which, through the idolatrous figure, this aim masks and marks its defection with regard to the invisible, the idol always must be read on the basis of the one whose experience of the divine takes shape there.”¹⁹ Marion continues:

In a word, the divine is figured in the idol only indirectly, reflected according to the experience of it that is fixed by the human authority—the divine, actually experienced, is figured, however, only in the measure of the human authority that puts itself, as much as it can, to the test. In the idol, the divine function of *Dasein* is thus betrayed and calibrated.²⁰

Just as we saw the anterior, constituting power of the gaze in relation to an object-become-idol, so, once again, the theme of anteriority is sounded. The idol discloses an experience of God but only insofar as that experience (of God) emerges from the (anterior) conditions for the possibility of human experience itself: *before* God arrives, and in order that God may arrive, human experience organizes the space or the site of the

¹⁷ Marion, *GWB*, p. 12/21.

¹⁸ Marion, *GWB*, p. 27/42.

¹⁹ Marion, *GWB*, pp. 27-28/42.

²⁰ Marion, *GWB*, p. 28/42.

arrival. It is here that Marion employs the metaphor of the *templum* in connection with the notion of ‘measure’ that featured prominently in both quotations concerning the conceptual idol. In my discussion of Marion’s alternative account of a divine anteriority in Chapter 2 this idea of the ‘site’ will be developed more explicitly. In conclusion, what we are dealing with in the case of an idolatrous appearance of the divine is always human experience (of the divine) and never the divine (itself and as such).

Finally, as the site of this experience, the idol hides as much as it shows. For the invisible mirror “not only [indicates] to the gaze how far its most distant aim extends, but even what its aim could not have in view.”²¹ Having captured the divine according to the measure of what it can see, the gaze and the intention behind it pushes on no further but, rather, “settles”. Marion continues: “If the idolatrous gaze exercises no criticism of its idol, this is because it no longer has the means to do so: its aim culminates in a position that the idol immediately occupies, and where every aim is exhausted.”²² It is not that the idolater knows that there is a beyond and chooses not to bother with it. On the contrary, the idol blocks from view that very possibility by presenting itself as the sole revelation of the divine. The idol marks, therefore, but secretly, a break between that which is visible and that which is invisible. Invisibility here, however, no longer refers to the non-visible spacing and organizing that rendered the visible actually visible, as we saw in the case of perspective. Neither does it refer to the invisible intention of an Other disclosed, for Marion, in the icon. In reference to the idol, the invisible becomes *invisible*: that

²¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 13/22.

²² Marion, *GWB*, p. 13/22.

which cannot be aimed at, that which is blocked from sight by the brilliance of the visibility of the idol.²³

These are the founding moments of the idol: (1) its constitution by a gaze governed by an anterior intention; (2) the manner in which the idol measures and hides the scope of that gaze and, therefore, (3) measures the scope of *Dasein*'s anterior experience of the divine precisely as it hides that which exceeds that experience. When we turn from Marion's phenomenological description of the aesthetic idol to his account of how concepts of God function idolatrously we see these three founding moments at play within the two quotations which introduced this section. There Marion states that "when a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names 'God,' this concept functions exactly as an idol." Having discussed each of the three founding moments of the idol, we now see how this works. As an idol, the concept "gives itself to be seen, but thus all the better conceals itself as the mirror where thought, invisibly, has its forward point fixed, so that the *invisible* finds itself, with an aim suspended by the fixed concept, disqualified and abandoned." Because of the intentionality at work in the formation of a concept of God, Marion is able to equate a concept used to name and define God with an idol, an 'invisible mirror'. Such an equation depends on the fundamental anteriority of the intention and its gaze. It is the work of the concept to grasp

²³ Marion, *GWB*, p. 13/23. Thus, for him, the axiom of the idol: "The more it misses, by default, the invisible, the more it can be remarked as visible" (*GWB*, p. 27/41). It should be noted here that the *invisible* is precisely not the divine invisibility of the iconic gaze (which is discussed in Ch. 2) but rather that which precludes its appearance. It is crucial that these terms not be confused, as does Oliver Davies in *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 152. Barring this oversight, along with the strange suggestion that "a commitment to the *visible* is coterminous with the idol," Davies offers an important estimate of Marion's theological work.

(*concipere, capere*) according to a measure that is defined not by what it seeks to grasp, or even receive, as *concipere* could also be translated, but by “the scope of a *capacitas*” determined by “the limits of the divine experience of *Dasein*” that are always already in place according to the conditions for the possibility of experience in general. Precisely in relation to this concept, then, ‘God’ appears fixed in a frozen figure and, what is more, thought is turned away from that which is beyond. As a result, as Marion states in *The Idol and Distance*, the concept “lacks the distance that identifies and authenticates the divine as such—as what does not belong to us but befalls us.”²⁴ It remains, now, to track the actual idolatrous functioning of concepts of God.

1.3. The Idol and Metaphysics

In both *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance*, Marion initially locates his discussion of a conceptual approach to God in relation to the ‘death of God’ philosophies that defended a rigorously conceptual atheism. In *God Without Being* he states that these philosophies presuppose “a determination of God that formulates him in a precise concept.”²⁵ He argues that once this determination is established, the strategy of this conceptual atheism unfolds: “It is on the basis of this concept that the critique exerts its polemic: if ‘God’ includes alienation in its concept . . . or a nimble figure of the will to power . . . , then it will—to the point of absolute disappearance—undergo the consequences of this concept.”²⁶ While Marion takes care to make clear the limited scope

²⁴ Marion, ID, pp. 7-8/24.

²⁵ Marion, GWB, p. 29/45.

²⁶ Marion, GWB, p. 29/45.

of this conceptual enterprise, he sees in this way of thinking the same authentic grasp of the divine that he identified and defended in relation to the aesthetic idol.²⁷ He writes: “This ‘God,’ that a concept suffices to express, nevertheless has nothing illusory about it. It clearly exposes what *Dasein*, at the moment of a particular epoch, experiences of the divine and approves as the definition of its ‘God’.”²⁸ Marion turns to these ‘death of God’ philosophies because they provide an example of something that has been at work in the history of philosophy. Indeed, the diagnosis of idolatry in Nietzsche and Feuerbach points back not only to Kant’s ‘moral God’—whose emergence can be traced not so much to the revelation of God himself as to the “religious authenticity of Kant’s practical philosophy”²⁹—but even to discourses of proof which function by proposing a concept (e.g., primary causality), which allows the formulation of a name (e.g., Unmoved Mover) that, in turn, is applied to God. Not even Thomas Aquinas escapes this logic.³⁰ It is, then, not just atheism that has equated God with a ‘concept of God.’ “Every proof,” Marion says, “can only lead to the concept” because apologetic theism and atheism share a “common presupposition”: “that the human *Dasein* might, conceptually, reach God, hence might construct conceptually something that it would take upon itself to name ‘God’.”³¹

²⁷ In both *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance* Marion launches a critique of this way of thinking that highlights its “regionalism” and its “irrelevance”. He develops this in more detail in ID, pp. 2-4/15-19.

²⁸ Marion, *GWB*, p. 30/45-46.

²⁹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 31/48.

³⁰ Marion, *GWB*, pp. 32-33/50-51.

³¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 33/51. Marion develops his account of how atheism and apologetics, or the discourse of proof, share a common commitment to the idolatrous logic of the concept in ID, pp. 9-13/24-28. In these pages he is explicit about the connection between a ‘concept of God’ and the act of ascribing a ‘name’ to

In light of this identification of both positive and negative discourses concerning God with a logic that is idolatrous, Marion finds himself confronted by a question: assuming that there is a way to think about God that is not, by definition, idolatrous, how is one to carve out a space that is not already covered by this universal equation between the ‘concept’ and the ‘idol’? Now, it just might be that *all* conceptual thought is doomed to idolatry. However, this is not Marion’s position. He does not give up *thinking* God in order to take refuge in irrationality or ‘mysticism’. As he reminds his English-speaking readers in the ‘Preface to the English Edition’ of *God Without Being*, the real “heart of the question” asks whether or not “the conceptual thought of God (conceptual, or rational, and not intuitive or ‘mystical’ in the vulgar sense) [can] be developed outside of the doctrine of Being?”³² Furthermore, he assumes that there is a way of thinking God that is not bound by the constraints of an idolatrous logic and he identifies this way of thinking in reference to the “Christian religion” which thinks God “starting from God alone, grasped to the extent that he inaugurates by himself the knowledge in which he yields himself—reveals himself.”³³ The difference, for Marion, comes down to where one starts: the logic of the idol begins with the concept and measures God to fit accordingly, while a genuine Christian thinking begins with God’s self-revelation and rethinks its thinking—and therefore its concepts—on that basis. It comes down, once again, to anteriority. In order to highlight this difference and come to a better understanding of the way of thinking in which the always already established concept measures God, it is necessary to

God. I explore this issue again later in this chapter in relation to the debate between Thomas and Dionysius regarding the theology of the divine names.

³² Marion, *GWB*, p. xxiv.

³³ Marion, *GWB*, p. 36/57.

ask how that thinking actually works. Or, as Marion himself asks: “in the name of what rigor does [such thinking] produce such a conceptual idol?”³⁴

In order to see how Marion believes this question is to be answered, it is necessary to discuss his understanding of Heidegger’s treatment of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics. Marion provides a discussion of this treatment in both *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance* and I draw on both in what follows.³⁵ For Marion, the ‘God’ who appears in the measure of a concept is, first of all, the supreme being of metaphysics. As such, this God who achieves his highest conceptual honors “in the figure of the *causa sui*, depends fundamentally on the very essence of metaphysics and, finally, on nothing other.”³⁶ Marion continues: “Moreover, this is why the supreme being, and with it an onto-theological constitution, remains the same where God, as Christian, disappears. . . . This, moreover, is why Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus did not await Christianity in order to put the onto-theological constitution into operation. The supreme being, whatever it may be, belongs to metaphysics and finds in it alone its rigor, its scope, and its limits.”³⁷ Marion is clear: “the conceptual idol has a site, metaphysics; a function, the theo-logy in onto-theology; and a definition, *causa sui*.”³⁸ As a result, conceptual idolatry does not emerge out of a theological discourse but, rather, from a philosophical one.³⁹ In fact, Marion quotes Heidegger’s affirmation that “the theological character of ontology does

³⁴ Marion, ID, p. 13/28.

³⁵ Marion also discusses this treatment in “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas A. Carlson, which has been reprinted in VR, pp. 49-65.

³⁶ Marion, ID, p. 16/31.

³⁷ Marion, ID, p. 16/31.

³⁸ Marion, GWB, p. 36/56.

³⁹ Marion, ID, p. 16/30.

not have to do with the fact that Greek metaphysics was later taken up and transformed by the ecclesial theology of Christianity. It has much rather to do with the manner in which being, from the beginning, is un-concealed (*entborgen*) as being.” How, then, is Being unconcealed as being? For Heidegger, the ontological difference between Being and beings is taken up by metaphysics in such a way that Being is understood according to beings. Forgetful of the thought of Being itself, metaphysics thinks about beings but, even in this forgetfulness, must nevertheless account for what gives beings their Being or, perhaps better to mark the forgetfulness at stake here, beingness. This beingness is thought according to time but, within the privilege accorded to being over Being, the mode of time that is itself privileged is the present. Beings *are* most perfectly insofar as they are most perfectly *present* to themselves. If such beingness is not to be located in Being—that which can never be reduced to a being or even reified in a concept—beings must participate in their beingness by being in relation to a being that *is* perfectly. This is the supreme being. Marion writes: “The supreme being in its turn delivers the most present figure of presence, which alone permits each—nonsupreme—being to remain already. The supreme being in this sense, exemplarily, grounds each being in its Being, since Being [or beingness] plays fully in it as presence.”⁴⁰ However, Heidegger notes that precisely as this supreme being is supreme in its exemplary perfection, it is dependent on the common beingness/Being that it grounds in all other beings. Marion continues: “But conversely, that supreme being itself finds its ground only in the present beingness in which Being is bound up and expressed. If Being did not announce itself in presence, the

⁴⁰ Marion, ID, p. 14/29.

supreme being would exercise no foundational decision concerning other beings.’⁴¹ The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics is grounded in the relation of mutual grounding between Being (forgetfully thought as beingness) and beings. The supreme being, who plays the theological role in the play of reciprocal grounding, is named God.

Pointing out the fundamental anteriority here of the metaphysical intention, Marion states:

The advent of something like ‘God’ in philosophy therefore arises less from God himself than from metaphysics, as destinal figure of the thought of Being. ‘God’ is determined starting from and to the profit of that of which metaphysics is capable, that which it can admit and support. This anterior instance, which determines the experience of the divine starting from a supposedly unavoidable condition, marks a primary characteristic of idoltry.⁴²

That God comes to be measured, philosophically, according to a concept and that that measurement itself is determined by the onto-theological emergence of philosophy as metaphysics leads to the specific concept in which ‘God’ achieves his highest honor: the *causa sui*. Marion’s ability to understand what is at stake in this concept as it relates to the idolatrous logic in which it finds support speaks for itself:

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, 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.⁴³

In the concept of the *causa sui* the figure of the ‘God’ of metaphysics is determined most concretely. Following the idolatrous logic at the root of the *theo*-logy born in

⁴¹ Marion, ID, p. 14/29.

⁴² Marion, GWB, p. 34/53.

⁴³ Marion, GWB, p. 35/54.

metaphysics, the divine comes to be known as *causa sui* precisely as an intimation of transcendence is simultaneously grasped and lost. This particular concept represents an authentic experience of the transcendence of God as that transcendence is thought within the terms established beforehand by the logic of metaphysics. Precisely in doing so, however, the concept functions as an invisible mirror where thought freezes and is, therefore, unable to look beyond. In a fitting manner, as much as the *causa sui* founds the foundation by absorbing that foundation within itself, so does it absorb the gaze of thought and, thus, preclude the possibility that thought might find something more or, indeed, other to think when it seeks to think God.

Thanks to Heidegger's analysis of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics, Marion articulates the 'rigor' that produces the conceptual idolatry of both discourses of proof and disproof. His account of the idolatrous logic at work in the concepts of 'God' that emerge from metaphysical thinking shows how 'God' comes to be identified with the supreme being within onto-theology and, therefore, how God is necessarily thought in reference to the thinking of Being. Insofar as a conceptual apparatus has been applied to God, the question of God's relation to Being is raised. In the first place, then, to think God 'without Being' is to think God as liberated from the first idolatry, that of metaphysics. To do this it will be necessary to confront the question of anteriority.

1.4. Being and the Idol

By drawing attention to the issue of anteriority throughout my analysis of Marion's account of the idol under both its material and conceptual forms, I am stressing its most significant characteristic: the always-already established conditions for the possibility of God's appearance (to thought). At the heart of this concern with anteriority comes Marion's critique of Heidegger's own attempt to open a space in which one can think God anew. For, as Marion makes clear, "[i]t does not suffice to go beyond an idol in order to withdraw oneself from idolatry."⁴⁴ Just as the idol is not constituted by the nature or essence of the material object itself, so the conceptual idol is not constituted by the particular content of the concept in which it takes form (the *causa sui*, for example). What is crucial is the anterior aim that establishes the conditions that allow any particular concept to become invested as the representation of the divine. As Marion deepens his investigation into the power of idolatry and extends his criticism to Nietzsche and, above all, to Heidegger, he shows how a phenomenology of the idol continues to disclose the logic of the idol at work also in postmetaphysical forms of thought.⁴⁵

Throughout Marion's analysis of metaphysics and its idolatrous logic, the work of Nietzsche remains crucially important. He calls Nietzsche not only the last metaphysician but also the best. Nietzsche is the best and the last because in his work Marion sees the onto-theologic of metaphysics reach its pinnacle precisely as it becomes most transparently evident in that accomplishment. Marion develops his account of Nietzsche

⁴⁴ Marion, *GWB*, p. 38/60.

⁴⁵ I say 'forms' of thought here in order at least to mention Marion's early criticism of both Levinas and Derrida who, he claims, fail to move beyond ontological difference insofar as they offer only either an inversion of it (Levinas) or a generalization (Derrida). See *ID*, pp. 215-233/264-281.

in *The Idol and Distance* and summarizes that account in *God Without Being*. According to that account, Nietzsche discloses the manner in which certain ideas or values come to be equated with God through his analysis of *Gottbildung*. Most importantly, what is shown here is how this “god-making instinct (*gottbildende*)”—wherein “one hypostasizes a state in a person, and affirms that that state, when it befalls us, is the effect produced by a person”—“is openly and fully at play: not only does it fall to that instinct to produce ‘God,’ but above all that instinct attests, by bringing its own play to light, that the ‘God’ thus encountered, since it is produced, remains an idol.”⁴⁶ Diagnosing the formative logic of idolatry, however, does not prevent Nietzsche himself from playing according to it. Marion argues, in fact, that no sooner is the idolatrous ‘moral God’ exposed, than Nietzsche’s ‘new gods’ arrive on the scene. These ‘new gods,’ however, “can never be rendered visible unless their apprehension is submitted to the will to power, which controls the horizon of all beings, as the beingness of beings.”⁴⁷ As Marion reads him, despite his rejection of the idols of Christianity and Platonism, Nietzsche succumbs to the same logic that he exposes so clearly. However, in falling prey to that logic, even while refusing the particular historical concepts that have emerged from it, he allows to be seen the logic itself and, therefore, the true source of the idolatry. What is so important about

⁴⁶ Marion, ID, p. 31/48. The quoted material inside the dashes is from Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* §135.

⁴⁷ Marion, *GWB*, p. 38/59. In *The Idol and Distance*, he writes: “The world arouses, as a state that the will to power organizes, a god as the center from which an affirmation can come to it. The god returns to the world the will to power that gives rise to it. To the will to power that values each being and assigns to it its place, the god returns the global justification of the whole of beings as a world—and hence as divine. . . . The god, affirming as a world the divine that gives rise to it, and therefore pronouncing in it the Eternal Return, there becomes a theological point of view: through it, the world becomes to itself its own supreme being. . . . The god clearly finds its place, therefore, in the onto-theological structure of a metaphysics still at work” (ID, pp. 72-73/92).

Nietzsche's thought, for Marion, is that it shows very clearly how, while all particular and familiar idols can be removed through a relentless critique, the logic of idolatry remains intact. And not only intact: with the familiar idols removed, the logic functions discretely and, therefore, works that much more powerfully behind the scenes. Such is the case, Marion argues, with Heidegger.

All of this is to say that if Nietzsche is the last metaphysician, he is not, for Marion, the last idolater. In fact, just like Nietzsche, Heidegger's thought unwittingly reinstatiates idolatry while further deepening our insight into its functioning. Indeed, Heidegger's thought brings to light even more clearly the fundamental issue— anteriority—by taking up the connection between Being and God in terms of the phenomenological notion of thought's 'horizon.' The anteriority at work in metaphysics emerges from the concept's role within a system of thought in which it is decided beforehand under what terms the idea of God is put into play. Marion's phenomenological description of the idol brings that anteriority to light and, by so doing, both allows the idols of metaphysics their authentic place in an account of particular experience of the divine and discloses their fundamental limitations. The anteriority of the experiencing subject is not, however, thematized by metaphysics itself and therefore a move 'beyond' metaphysics does not necessarily entail the disclosure of this more primordial issue of anteriority. This is why Nietzsche can, at once, disclose the idolatry of the 'moral God' and reinstatiates a new idolatry. The case is different with Heidegger. In Heidegger's thought, the anteriority of the experiencing subject is thematized by the phenomenological notion of 'horizon' that is articulated in the analytic of *Dasein*. As

Marion reads him, therefore, it is Heidegger who explicitly connects the appearance of an idol with the anterior conditions for the possibility of human experience that are brought to light in the analytic of *Dasein* and continues to subject all thinking about God to those conditions. In sum, as Marion moves from the ‘first idolatry,’ discernable in the onto-theological constitution of metaphysical thinking, through Nietzsche’s thought, in which the question of idolatry is deepened beyond the removal of particular idols, and finally to the ‘second idolatry’ of Heidegger, where the question of anteriority is raised explicitly and in terms of human experience and its conditions of possibility, he comes closer and closer to the heart of idolatry itself: the privileging of human intentionality and, therefore, ‘experience’ over the revelation of God in himself.

According to Marion, just as Nietzsche puts behind him the old gods of metaphysical thinking in order to await the ‘new gods’ of the future, so does Heidegger aim to think Being as such and, thus, to usher in a ‘new beginning’ for thinking. It is precisely this “‘new beginning’ that breaks with unthought ontological difference, hence with the *causa sui* of onto-theo-logy, [that] undertakes to conceive the ‘divine god,’ or at least does not close itself to this possibility.”⁴⁸ In order to show why Marion believes that Heidegger cannot, however, bring us any closer to the ‘divine god,’ it is necessary to take a close look at how he reads Heidegger in this case. He begins with reference to Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* (1946). I reproduce “the decisive declaration”:

Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word ‘God’ is to signify. . . . Being.

⁴⁸ Marion, *GWB*, p. 39/61.

In such nearness, if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurge of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew [*neu beginnen*]. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and God, comes to radiate only when Being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been illuminated and is experienced in its truth.⁴⁹

As Marion reads Heidegger's lecture, he observes "a strictly regulated superposition of conditions that imply each other and interweave with one another."⁵⁰ From these conditions Marion believes that only one conclusion is possible:

[T]he truth on 'God' could never come but from where truth itself issues, namely from Being as such, from its constellation and from its opening. The question of God must admit a preliminary, if only in the form of a preliminary question. In the beginning and in principle, there advenes neither God, nor a god, nor the *logos*, but the advent itself—Being, with an anteriority all the less shared in that it decides all the rest, since according to and starting from it there literally remain only beings, and nothing other than beings and the nothing.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Reproduced from Marion, *GWB*, pp. 39-40/61-62. See also n. 23 on *GWB*, pp. 207-208/62-63. I think it is important to note the strangeness of his use of these texts. I say texts because the later section of the quoted material (marked in *GWB* by a newly indented paragraph and with a – in the original French text) comes out of a different context in Heidegger's lecture than does the first, shorter, section. This conflation is made even more strange by the fact that, immediately preceding the material that makes up the shorter section of the quotation, Heidegger writes: "With the existential determination of the essence of the human being, therefore, nothing is decided about the 'existence of God' or his 'non-being,' no more than about the possibility or impossibility of gods. Thus it is not only rash but also an error in procedure to maintain that the interpretation of the essence of the human being from the relation of his essence to the truth of being is atheism. And what is more, this arbitrary classification betrays a lack of careful reading." Heidegger goes on to quote a section from his "On the essence of Ground" (1929) and then, in the context of this question, states the words reproduced by Marion regarding the holy, the divine, and God. See the English translation (by Frank A. Capuzzi) of the lecture in *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 239-276. The conflated quotation produced by Marion can be found on p. 267 and p. 258.

⁵⁰ Marion, *GWB*, p. 40/62.

⁵¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 41/65.

The question that remains, for Marion, is how to account for that anteriority in such a way that it remains true to an idolatrous experience, thereby retaining its authenticity even in the midst of its limitations.⁵² To do that, he must connect the anteriority that operates within the network of conditions to the intention of a subject's gaze. Such an intention is present and, in fact, plays a central role, in the analytic of *Dasein* proposed in *Being and Time* (1927). According to that work, phenomenological description must be atheistic: it must enact a suspension of the ontic existence or non-existence of God in order to describe the conditions for the possibility of experience.⁵³ For Marion, however, such a suspension, "implies theologically an instance anterior to 'God,' hence that point from which idolatry could dawn."⁵⁴ Drawing this insight from his reading of *Being and Time* together with his treatment of the "Letter on Humanism," he concludes: "*Dasein* precedes the question of 'God' in the very way that Being determines in advance, according to the gods, the divine, the holy, 'God,' his life and his death. 'God,' aimed at like every other being by *Dasein* in the mode of a placement in parentheses, submits to the first condition of possibility of an idolatry."⁵⁵ From the anterior aim that is rooted in *Dasein*'s world-

⁵² Marion hints at his concern to preserve in Heidegger an authentic discourse of the divine when he claims that, after all, the subject of Heidegger's reflections in the 'Letter on Humanism' "is the God the poet, not the revealed God" (GWB, p. 52/80).

⁵³ Marion, GWB, p. 42/67.

⁵⁴ Marion, GWB, p. 43/68.

⁵⁵ Marion, GWB, p. 43/68. He revisits this issue of the anteriority that is implicit in the analytic of *Dasein* in the context of a discussion of Heidegger's insistence that Being and God must not be confused. On the basis of this separation, Heidegger posits the difference between philosophy and theology. However, Marion argues, the separation of theology and philosophy is nothing less than the relativizing of theology (which deals with the ontic) by philosophy (which occupies itself with ontological questions). Given that philosophy, for Heidegger, must be pursued phenomenologically, the analytic of *Dasein* takes precedence over theology to such an extent that theology itself must be subject to a 'correction' from the 'neutral' standpoint of *Dasein*. Marion writes: "Theology distances itself from *Being* neither more nor less than it distinguishes itself, like the other ontic sciences, from *Dasein*. To be sure, it must not employ the word

opening gaze and that fixes God in a ‘dimension’ in which the truth of Being pre-empts the truth of God, it follows that a ‘first visible’ will appear and, with it, the invisible mirror that is the idol. In this invisible mirror God will disappear, being rendered *invisible* by the splendor of an idol which blocks the gaze from seeing anything other than it. In Heidegger, then, Marion finds the “thought that thinks Being” which “as such cannot and must not apprehend anything but beings, which offer the path, or rather the field of a meditation, of Being.” He continues: “Any access to something like ‘God,’ precisely because of the aim of Being as such, will have to determine him in advance as a being. The pre-comprehension of ‘God’ as being is self-evident to the point of exhausting in advance ‘God’ as a question.”⁵⁶ In the end, for Heidegger, God is a *being* and, as such, comes to inhabit the conceptual domain in which he finds his place in relation to *Dasein*’s gaze and the truth of Being in which it opens. This ‘dimension’ or ‘domain’ is characterized, most importantly, according to the space of appearance that is made available to God by the human subject, *Dasein*. God as a being is a being who is measured according to the co-ordinates of the world in which he comes to appear for and to *Dasein*.⁵⁷ Unlike onto-theology, and even unlike Nietzsche, Heidegger brings this to

Being but by default, not by excess: theology refers to something greater than itself, to the existential analytic of *Dasein*, and later, to the thought of *Seyn*” (GWB, p. 68/103).

⁵⁶ Marion, GWB, p. 43/68.

⁵⁷ Marion writes: “In other words, the proposition ‘God is a being’ itself appears as an idol, because it only returns the aim that, in advance, decides that every possible ‘God,’ present or absent, in one way or another, has to be. Which is formulated strictly by the sequence: ‘For the god also is—if he is—a being and stands as a being within Being and its coming to presence, which brings itself disclosingly to pass out of the worlding of the world.’” See GWB, p. 44/69 and n. 31 on p. 210/69 for the reference to the quoted material from Heidegger.

light such that any thought, according to Marion, that is not idolatrous will have to be different in its relation to this phenomenological anteriority.

So far I have shown how the anteriority of the subjective gaze and the horizon that it constitutes obeys a logic of idolatry. This horizon and its logic take shape in Marion's studies of theological concepts in *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*. By tracking the measuring and determining activity of *Dasein* in relation to God's appearance, Marion not only indicates his early awareness of the problems facing an account of divine revelation but shows how, thanks to Heidegger, it is a phenomenological awareness that brings the crucial issue of anteriority to light in the context of a discussion of idolatry. Marion also claims, however, that the idol is always to be understood in relation to the icon because the icon shows the inversion of the idol. Operating on the same plain, it takes up a phenomenal instance in which it is not the gaze that sets the horizon and constitutes the objects which appear within it but, rather, the summons of the icon provokes a gaze that is transformed in its confrontation with the icon. As I move toward Marion's discussion of the notion of distance, the notion in his early work that articulates the logic of a horizon established by the appearance of divine, it crucial that I first discuss the icon.

1.5. The Icon

For Marion, the icon marks the inversion of the idol because it reveals a counter-intentionality that summons the subject to see the visible in its truth as that which gives

the invisible to be contemplated.⁵⁸ This connection between an inverted intentionality and the appearance of the invisible is funded by a logic of appearance that Marion will define as distance.⁵⁹ He opens his discussion by saying that the “icon does not result from a vision but provokes one” insofar as it “summons sight in letting the visible . . . be saturated little by little with the invisible.”⁶⁰ In this case, the invisible is not the *invisible* of the idol, nor the invisible spacing made operative in perspective, but the arising into

⁵⁸ For Marion’s discussion of this reverse intentionality in relation to Levinas see his essay “The Intentionality of Love,” in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), pp. 71-101 / *Prolégomènes à la charité* 2^e édition (Paris: La Différence, 1986), pp. 89-120.

⁵⁹ The connection between the ‘icon’ and ‘distance’ is crucial in order to clarify and avoid the criticism in which the icon’s counter-intentional essence is written off as merely an inverted autonomous ego. For example, John Milbank worries that Marion, like Levinas and even the late Husserl, institutes a counter-intentionality that is really just a “projection of one’s own ego upon the other, an ego that would be once again an initial ‘I’, constituted first as the ground of intentional representation of objects.” See John Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 39. In response to Milbank’s critique of this “aporia of ‘reverse intentionality’,” Ruud Welten offers a corrective claim: “What is important is not just that the intentionality of the icon is oriented towards me instead of the reverse, but the consciousness of experiencing this as a gift that is given. The icon is the intentional gaze of the other in me. The icon approaches me, gives itself. The point is this gift to consciousness.” See Ruud Welten, “The Paradox of God’s Appearance: On Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God*, ed. Peter Jonkers and Ruud Welten (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), p. 193. By introducing my discussion of Marion’s account of divine anteriority with a treatment of the icon, and by developing the themes that emerge here in reference to Marion’s detailed discussion of distance in the work of Hölderlin and Dionysius the Areopagite (in which the metaphor of the gift exchange becomes central), I signal my assent to Welten’s account. On the other hand, the problem that Milbank identifies here remains connected to themes in my own Ricoeurian intervention. Marion’s counter-intentionality may not be guilty of a crass reverse-egoism but it may be guilty of a fundamental immediacy that renders it vacuous. It is worth paying attention to Milbank’s own counter-suggestion here. This immediacy would be overcome, he writes, if “the ‘I’ is first and foremost not defined over against objects, but constitutes a specific ‘character’, or a certain not completed, and not entirely predictable, but recognizable pattern of objectivity or ‘embodiment’ in the widest sense, including embodiment in language as specific ‘idiolect’. In that case ‘I’ am always as external to myself as others are to me, and the specific network of intersubjective connections in which I am interpellated is indeed prior to my abstract egoity, without this requiring any projection by an initial, autistic ego” (pp. 38-39). For another response to Milbank’s criticism, see Merald Westphal’s “The Importance of Overcoming Metaphysics for the Life of Faith,” *Modern Theology* 23:2 (April 2007), p. 271.

⁶⁰ Marion, *GWB*, p. 17/28.

visibility of the appearance. The icon shows the invisible without making it visible by allowing to be seen the coming to appearance of the visible itself. Such a disclosure, the event of the visible arising to visibility, summons the gaze because it refers the gaze not to the surface, where it sees its own reflection, but to the depth of the appearance. Marion writes:

Thus the icon shows, strictly speaking, nothing, not even in the mode of the productive *Einbildung*. It teaches the gaze, thus does not cease to correct it in order that it go back from visible to visible as far as the end of infinity, to find in infinity something new. The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible. . . . In this sense, the icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze.⁶¹

Here we see the first sign of an nonsubjective anteriority: while the idol is constituted by the gaze of the subject, the icon gives to appear a summons which is always ‘earlier’ than the subject insofar as the icon summons the subject to an appearance over which it does not preside.

That Marion is speaking of the icon, however, means that this summons to the invisible is not encountered in a generic appearance but, rather, in the particular intentionality of the face. The invisible becomes visible, therefore, as the intention of a gaze that is directed toward us. It is in this gaze that we meet the summons that precedes us and that opens our gaze to its depth. Marion states that the “icon opens in a face, where man’s sight envisages nothing, but goes back infinitely from the visible to the invisible by the grace of the visible itself.”⁶² What is important here, in contrast to the

⁶¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 18/29.

⁶² Marion, *GWB*, p. 19/31.

idol and in view of the anteriority opened by distance, is the manner in which this iconic summons engulfs the human being in a gaze, placing her in a relationship very different from the one established by the hidden identity of the *I* and its idol. In the icon, Marion says, “the gaze of man is lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages him” and this gaze, as an infinite gaze, summons man to “an origin without original,” “an origin itself infinite, which pours itself out or gives itself throughout the infinite depth of the icon.”⁶³ There is, in this new relation of distance, no ‘not-I’ to be determined in the reciprocating structures of the idol. On the contrary, the *I* is summoned into a relation with an Other who comes to it from ‘elsewhere’ and, thus, will not be measured by a gaze but will, instead, take its measure. Marion writes: “The icon recognizes no other measure than its own and infinite excessiveness [*démesure*]; . . . the icon accords in the visible only a face whose invisibility is given all the more to be envisaged that its revelation offers an abyss that the eyes of men never finish probing. It is, moreover, in this sense that the icon comes to us from elsewhere.”⁶⁴ Not only, then, do we see here an anterior instance that arises in the sense of a summons that precedes us but, even more importantly, this iconic summons ‘places’ us in a relationship with that which cannot be encompassed by us, cannot be drawn in and made our double. In contrast to the idolatrous relation where each pole of the relationship mirrors and, therefore, depends upon the other, the iconic summons locates us as one pole in a relationship determined by an absolute pole, by that which relates to us from beyond the relation itself.

⁶³ Marion, *GWB*, p. 20/33.

⁶⁴ Marion, *GWB*, p. 21/34.

1.6. Conclusion

For Marion, the icon holds out the promise of another path to thinking the question of God. However, to discover an anterior gaze in the figure of the icon, a very specific Christian category pertaining to a mode of artistic representation in the Orthodox churches, Marion must make clear the logic of appearance that it assumes. In other words, like the idol, the icon is not only representative of a particular religious object but, rather, indicates a mode of appearance that functions according to a particular logic. I have now shown how Marion's phenomenological treatment of the idol launches him into a treatment of the idolatrous logic operative in metaphysical and post-metaphysical thought. At the end of this trajectory he discovers Heidegger's account of Being. With this discovery not only does the logic of idolatry come into view most clearly (both by what Heidegger discloses but also by what he continues to hide) but it does so in terms of what phenomenology calls a horizon. In Chapter 2, I take up his treatment of the icon's relation to distance, a logic that operates not according to the collapsed and reciprocating difference of the idol but according to the horizon of the gift.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ I record, here, Graham Ward's criticisms of Marion in "The Beauty of God," in *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 35-65. On the one hand, Ward is mistaken to equate Marion's account of the idolatrous gaze with a Kantian dualism of the noumenal and the phenomenal (p. 40, n. 7). Furthermore, his claim that there is, in fact, no such thing as an idol rests on a misunderstanding of Marion's thought. The 'idol' does not mark a thing but a manner of appearing. In fact, Marion would agree with Ward that "no object is shut up within itself in such a way that the participating, co-operating gaze cannot open it up, enabling it to blossom." In fact, the gaze constituted by the icon, by the call, in the figure of *l'adonné* lends itself very nicely to this account of things. On the other hand, though, he is correct to say that "despite his reversal of the Husserlian emphasis, Marion's phenomenology, like Husserl's, remains a product of a Kantian heritage." I explore this issue at length in Chapter 3. For Ward's earlier critique of Marion, see "The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion," in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 229-239.

CHAPTER 2 DISTANCE AND DONATION

Can the conceptual thought of God (conceptual, or rational, and not intuitive or ‘mystical’ in the vulgar sense) be developed outside of the doctrine of Being (in the metaphysical sense, or even in the nonmetaphysical sense)? Does God give himself to be known according to the horizon of Being or according to a more radical horizon? . . . God gives Himself to be known insofar as he gives Himself—according to the horizon of the gift itself. The gift constitutes at once the mode and body of his revelation.

—Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, p. xxiv

2.1. Introduction

In Chapter One, I argued that at the root of Marion’s account of conceptual idolatry one finds the idea of an anterior gaze which measures the appearance of ‘God’ in experience and thought. Implicit in that argument is the idea that the relation that is established between the *I* and ‘God’ by this anterior bond, this horizon, is a relationship of difference in which the two poles of the relation depend upon one another for their identities. Not only is the identity of ‘God’ dependent upon the determinations advanced by the measure of the anterior gaze, but the *I* itself can only understand itself in relation to ‘God’ because this ‘God’ appears as the image of the *I*’s highest and most desired aims. However, for this mutual reflection of attributes to be operative it must be hidden from the view of the *I* and, therefore, the *I* must strictly identify itself as not-God and ‘God’ as not-*I*. This relationship of difference is very similar to the difference between Being and beings, according to Heidegger, where each is differentiated from the other even as each grounds the other’s place in the relation. According to this way of thinking, the difference between

the human *I* and God—a difference that must be definitive if God is to be God—is in fact no difference at all. Thus, the negative result of Marion’s diagnosis of idolatry is that if one is to account for divine revelation on its own terms one must find oneself placed in a place of thinking where it is not the appearance of ‘God’ that is in question but God. This means, for Marion, that our thinking about God’s revelation must be constituted by an instance that is anterior to the formerly anterior gaze which conditions the appearance of the idol. It is at this point that we can understand the relation of anteriority to the horizon: the notion of horizon names the logic operative in an expression of anteriority. Thus, the primacy of the *I* is figured on the horizon of Being, because Being, at least as Marion understands it, works precisely according to the reflexive logic of the fold in which phenomenality manifests according to a particular relation to the *I*. To speak of horizon here, and not only a particular perceptual structure proper to the *I*, recognizes that what is at stake is more than just a perceptual issue but, indeed, a construction of reality. Therefore, to diagnose a particular expression of anteriority as being idolatrous and to seek an instance that is anterior to it, thus ‘displacing’ the idolatry, is to seek a horizon of appearance in which the *I* is relocated and accounted for from a more primordial source. By putting the matter in terms of difference, Marion suggests that there must be the possibility of another kind of difference, one that operates according to a different horizontal logic, and therefore gives access to a different relation to God. As I began to show in his treatment of the icon, this other difference is called distance. The task of this chapter, following on the heels of my introduction of Marion’s discussion of the icon in the former chapter, is to bring to light this notion of distance.

In the very opening pages of *The Idol and Distance* Marion contextualizes the concept of distance by introducing it in terms of a surprising reversal: insofar as the relationship between philosophy and metaphysics culminates in a recognition of the ‘death of God,’ it shows the insufficiency that has plagued the Western philosophical tradition from the start. It has never been able to think the absence of God because it has remained trapped in a conceptual world in which God must be supremely present or not be at all. To think the absence of God—and therefore to think otherwise than idolatrously—is to recognize, Marion states, “that absence—when its place is directly delimited by a concept—pertains to what God says of Himself in his revelation through the Christ: namely, that it is from him that all paternity, in heaven and on earth, receives its name.”¹ Contrary to the idolatrous thinking that has determined both metaphysical and post-metaphysical modes of thought concerning ‘God,’ the logic of distance allows us to see in God’s absence the “face of his insistent and eternal fidelity” by suggesting that such absence is in fact a mode of divine revelation itself. To say this slightly differently, the absence at play here points to nothing less than a trinitarian paternity and, therefore, Marion argues that the relationship established in revelation—i.e., the distance between God and creation—is first and foremost enacted in the relationship between the Father and the Son. Marion writes: “Revealing himself as Father, God advances in his very withdrawal. For this reason, since Christ was son in the measure of such a *distance*, any ‘death of God,’ any ‘flight of the gods,’ finds both its truth and its overcoming in a desert

¹ Marion, ID, p. xxxv/9.

that grows only in the measure that the Son traverses it toward the Father.”² To take up distance in this directly theological mode of thought is to acknowledge it as a category pertaining to revelation and, thus, to develop it in reference to the phenomenological issues raised in the Introduction: the *I* whose anterior gaze establishes a horizon and demands that God’s appearance be measured according to it. Unlike Chapter 1, however, where the theologically informed discussion was concerned with how the *I* and the horizon of the gaze block access to God’s revelation and, therefore, access to a mode of thinking open to the question of God, the analyses here are focused on Marion’s account of God’s revelation in distance, a distance that displaces the *I* by opening a horizon whose coordinates are set by God’s own self-disclosure.

Before addressing Marion’s interpretation of the logic of distance it is worth taking a look at Robyn Horner’s analysis of the concept in her *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theological Introduction*. Horner tracks the emergence of the concept in Marion’s work from some of his earliest essays. Most helpfully, she provides a discussion of the sources of Marion’s use of the idea in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. In fact, she suggests that the “principal origin” is likely the theology of Balthasar, who understood distance according to four sets of relationships. First, there is a natural distance between God and creation. Already here we see that distance not only marks a separation or a difference, but a form of communion as well. Horner makes this clear when she points out the crucial relationship, for Balthasar, between distance and the *analogia entis*, which unites the created and the uncreated even while it excludes any possibility of confusion between the

² Marion, ID, p. xxxv/9-10.

two.³ Second, and still in reference to the relation of the human and the divine, natural distance is “deepened” (Balthasar’s term) by the unnatural distance that is the product of sin.⁴ For Balthasar, distance also, and more profoundly, describes an internal divine relationship which also takes two forms. First, distance is the “eternal intra-trinitarian distance of the Son from the Father, which actually forms the condition of possibility for the divine human” distance.⁵ Finally, as a result of the distance of sin, there is the distance “between the Son and the Father which is the result of Christ’s taking on human sinfulness.”⁶ As I show in reference to his discussion of Hölderlin, each of these moments are incorporated in Marion’s treatment of the concept.⁷ Following this genealogical discussion, Horner examines a number of Marion’s very early essays, written before *The Idol and Distance*, that provide a variety of uses of the concept that build largely on the notion of a human and divine relationship that preserves both separation and communion. This relationship is figured in terms of language and related particularly to the possibility of referring to the divine without determining the divine through the reference.⁸ My disagreement with Horner comes in her analysis of the use of the concept of distance in *The Idol and Distance*. She argues that “distance is not only the spacing in which the divine-human relationship occurs or that which maintains the absolute difference between God and humanity, but becomes identified with receptivity, participation, and with

³ Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 51-52.

⁴ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 52.

⁵ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 52.

⁶ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 52.

⁷ Horner also notes Levinas’ use of the concept of distance as a source of Marion’s own thinking (pp. 53-54). For an example of Levinas’ use of the term, see *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 35-40.

⁸ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 54-56.

Goodness respectively, here we find that distance ‘is’—in a very circumscribed sense—God.”⁹ I agree with her completely that distance marks a space in which the divine-human relationship occurs but, for this very reason, distance cannot be God, not even in a very circumscribed sense. I note this disagreement because it pertains to my argument that the concept of distance articulates the horizon opened by the trinitarian relations that are, in Christ’s Incarnation, refracted in the human sphere and, therefore, the theological condition for the possibility of divine revelation. To collapse the concept by identifying it with God, and to do so precisely in reference to a passage from *The Idol and Distance* which brings together so importantly the notions of anteriority, selfhood, and revelation, is to lose the very thing that Marion is attempting to articulate. The very thing, I might add, that will maintain a continuity between his early work and his explicitly phenomenological work: the fundamental importance of the notion of horizon.¹⁰ One last thing to say about Horner’s treatment: though she provides a discussion of the concept of distance that far surpasses in its detail any other in the secondary literature, she too fails to even mention the manner in which the concept is developed in reference to Hölderlin. By turning to such a discussion, however, I hope not only to make my case for distance as

⁹ Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 57.

¹⁰ This equation of distance and God seems to represent a change in Horner’s thought concerning distance. In her earlier book, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001) she locates the discussion of distance very much in relation to the concept of horizon. In fact, in an attempt to draw Marion’s account of the ‘call’ in *Reduction and Givenness* back into his theological work, she argues that Marion’s understanding of call develops his notion of distance. She writes that “distance forms what Marion names the ‘paternal horizon,’ which is non-objectifiable and unthinkable. In his early work . . . it is distance (the horizon of the father) that cuts across being (or, it could be said, the call of being). By the time of *God Without Being* (1982), it is God’s call that cuts across being according to the horizon of the gift. And, as we have seen, by the time of *Réduction et donation* (1989), it is the horizon of the call, a call that is undecidable but which could be the call of the Father, that exercises itself before the claim of being” (Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*, pp. 107-108).

a concept pertaining to the notion of horizon, but to fill a gap in the scholarly treatments of Marion's early work.¹¹

2.2. Figuring Distance: Hölderlin

In Chapter 1, I discussed Nietzsche's treatment of and relation to idolatry and its logic. For Marion, Nietzsche represents a thinker who stands on the border of metaphysics, showing its limits but remaining within its boundaries. In Nietzsche's case, we have a thinker who is profoundly aware of the poetic identity of human beings, the way in which they imaginatively construct their world, and the way in which that poetic identity and a reflexive account of it involves questions of worldhood and divinity. That Nietzsche finally remains tied to the logic of metaphysics means, for Marion, that he remains bound to an idolatrous logic in which there is "[e]ither absence, where man remains alone, without any other face of the divine than his own twilight idol, or else overabundant investment, where the divine renders itself present only by making itself pressing to the point of carrying man away—or, what amounts to the same thing, to the point of plunging him into darkness."¹² Standing next to him on the border of metaphysics, Hölderlin shares Nietzsche's awareness of the poetic nature of human beings and the corresponding

¹¹ The same omission of any treatment of Marion's study of Hölderlin can also be found in Gschwandtner's nearly exhaustive study of Marion's work. She notes the importance of Marion's study of Hölderlin but decides to focus on his treatment of Heidegger instead (Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 49). At the moment, I know of only one study of Marion that addresses his reading of Hölderlin and that is the essay by Cyril O'Regan, to which I referred earlier, entitled "Jean-Luc Marion: Crossing Hegel" in *Counter-Experiences*.

¹² Marion, ID, p. 79/106. For his intriguing reading of Nietzsche's own madness as a form of his being plunged into the divine darkness, see §§ 5 & 7 of ID.

relation to the divine.¹³ Unlike Nietzsche, however, Hölderlin escapes the logic of the idol, a logic that oscillates between absence and unmediated presence, “by risking to think an unthinkable paradox: the intimacy of man with the divine *grows* with the gap [*l'écart*] that distinguishes them, far from diminishing it.”¹⁴ For Marion, Hölderlin does not so much exceed metaphysics as offer a different place from which to think God by recognizing that the “withdrawal of the divine would perhaps constitute its ultimate form of revelation.”¹⁵ It is Hölderlin, then, who takes up Nietzsche’s question: who is this creature who measures himself against the divine, precisely as he measures out the world in which he lives?

That Nietzsche collapsed before the command to measure the world according to the divine *Yes* of Dionysus marks simultaneously his similarity to and his difference from Hölderlin. For insofar as Hölderlin is able to think according to distance, he still thinks according to measure even as he thinks measure differently. To put this otherwise, and in the language used in Chapter 1, the collapse of Nietzsche’s thought is bound to occur because he remained tied to the logic of idolatry and, therefore, to an anterior aim established within the reciprocating system of metaphysics. Here, in this system, the bearer of this aim (the metaphysician) is forced to take upon himself the task of

¹³ While Nietzsche’s ‘border position’ is clear, Hölderlin’s (and even more so that of Dionysius the Areopagite) is not. Given Marion’s very precise definition of ‘metaphysics’ through recourse to Heidegger’s notion of onto-theology, it is difficult to see in what sense Hölderlin or Dionysius could be metaphysical. At the beginning of *The Idol and Distance*, Marion discusses what he calls the ‘marches of metaphysics’: the image here is that of a troupe stationed on the border territory whose purpose is to defend metaphysics, not from external invaders, but from itself by bringing into view its onto-theological idolatry. This image suits Marion’s reading of Nietzsche very well. It does not, however, describe the way Hölderlin’s thought works for Marion.

¹⁴ Marion, ID, p. 80/107.

¹⁵ Marion, ID, p. 80/107.

constituting the very world in which he already finds himself and, therefore, can never encompass. In Nietzsche's thought, therefore, we recognize that at the heart of all human poetic activity by which a world is constituted there lies a fundamental relationship between poetic activity itself and the conditions for its possibility. In fact, from Kant to Nietzsche, we witness the development of this idea and its progressive subjective intensification. With Hölderlin, however, we discover a thinker who recognizes the link between *poesis* and its conditions of possibility, but who locates these conditions outside the human subject in its relation to the divine. According to such a relation, the subject receives its poetic nature as a gift and a task. Thus, the point of this section on Hölderlin is to show how, according to Marion, he advances a notion of distance at the heart of human *poesis* by grounding his account within a treatment of the human being's encounter with a God whose revelatory presence is constituted in a beneficent withdrawal. Through an account of this withdrawal we discover the nature of the anteriority figured in the iconic summons.

Marion's analysis of Hölderlin's writings is dense and textually rigorous. To follow it carefully it is best to follow some key terms that emerge as he reads the texts of Hölderlin's oeuvre. At the beginning of the reading are the notions of 'beauty' and 'purity'. With these notions Marion draws out Hölderlin's account of the iconic appearing of the world by and for the human poet. Not surprisingly, Hölderlin's vision of the human being as a poetic being is worked out in an aesthetic register. In the poem, 'In Lovely Blue,' Marion notes the contrast between the play of particular figures which merge into the horizon and the silhouette of the man who, "instead of merging with others or

vanishing in its apparition . . . manages, in the ‘calm,’ to distinguish itself.”¹⁶ The relation of the figure of man to both the horizon and the other figures on the horizon points to the unique manner in which human beings appear: that the human being does not merely appear as another figure who merges into the horizon, indicates that he, uniquely, *assumes* a figure. Unlike the figures which have their place on the horizon only to blend into it, the silhouette of the man stands out and, in that standing out, appears precisely in his apparition. Marion explains:

And yet Hölderlin does not simply express the distinction of the figure. He does not see the figure alone, but what in lovely blue the figure itself opens up, for another vision. He indicates, starting with the figure, that an image (*Bild*) of man becomes possible. This is not to say that man admits only an image, one figure among others, but that he has the property, or the possibility, of letting himself be given an image within a figure (*Bildsamkeit*). To be sure, within the openness of the window of the tower, there appears the figure of the silhouette that is delimited and set off by ‘calm life.’ But through that apparition there appears above all the fact that man *can* appear in and as an image. Within the sensible appearance of a silhouette the poet sees appear the mystery of the apparition of man: that man should be able to assume figure in an image, as one takes root (or not) in a soil.¹⁷

It is here that the relationship of ‘beauty’ and ‘purity’ becomes crucial. For the human being to appear *as* human being means that this being assumes an image by being an imaging being. As the silhouetted man appears in the opening of the window, the apparition of the world bathed in lovely blue is opened to his gaze and becomes, in that gaze, a world. What Hölderlin calls Nature gives the world in its ‘beautiful’ appearance in order that human being, in its ‘purity,’ fulfills that apparition by its poetic imaging.

Marion writes:

¹⁶ Marion, ID, pp. 82-83/110-111.

¹⁷ Marion, ID, p. 83/111.

More beautiful than the flowers that the sun adumbrates as much as every being is the act of language that would name it as such: the poetic art. . . . No splendor surpasses beauty other than the gesture that, otherwise, designates beauty: the gesture of art, more native, in its ‘native return,’ than the naturally born native. The assumption of figure that man provokes and in which he evokes himself adds nothing to nature—except the delay of the man who measures its beauty. Better: who is measured by it as beauty.¹⁸

What is crucial at this point is that in the work of purity, the work of imaging, that which is not given in Nature but is given by the poet comes into view: the very apparition of the appearing figure. Speaking here of the emergence “of the invisible into visibility,” Marion remains within the aesthetic register and explains:

Not only does the image invest the entire essence (*Wesen*) of the thing in the silhouette where the figure is detached, but it is outlined at the same time as the figure that does *not* precede it naturally. This coincidence of the figure and the image is known by the painter, who sees the thing establish itself in the visible all of a sudden.¹⁹

In this language of figure and image, visible and invisible, we see the phenomenality of the iconic summons in which we are encountered by the appearing of things, their givenness, their eventfulness. This is essential to establishing access to those experiences which are not experiences of objects but, rather, manifestations of that which precedes us and summons us. It is not by chance, then, that at precisely this moment, Marion’s reading of Hölderlin takes up the relation of the human poet to the gods.

For Marion, Hölderlin’s poetic being is ‘poetic’ precisely because he dwells in the poetic measure of the gods. Or, to use the language that emerges here in this transition to Hölderlin’s theology of apparition, to know the fear of the emergence of the invisible into

¹⁸ Marion, ID, p. 85/113.

¹⁹ Marion, ID, p. 86/114.

the visible is to be open to the “trial of the image” and, therefore, to find oneself in relation to the Celestials from whom the poet takes his image.²⁰ As Marion follows this theological turn, the notion of distance receives an explicit treatment, first in relation to the Celestials and then in relation to the God who is Father. For Hölderlin, the “Celestials and, through them, the Divinity surprise the expected purity of man and provide for it by their virtue and their joy,” where virtue and joy signal the “wealth” of the divine that “saves” appearances by pulling back to allow the very space of appearance to open.²¹ In this idea of pulling back or withdrawing Marion sees the beginnings of the notion of distance. He writes: “The Celestials remain at a distance, and thus can they *see* images. Their withdrawal alone receives the rise of the visible. Or rather, the visible receives the imprint and the homage of a rise (as one speaks of a rise of vigor) only through the reception saved by a withdrawal.”²² The metaphor at work here signals an alternative to the dichotomy found in the logic of the idol. In contrast to divine presence being thought either in terms of an absence subsidized by idols or an immediate and overwhelming presence that is crushing in its proximity, Hölderlin accounts for the poetic measure of human activity by understanding divinity itself as first and primordially exercising a withdrawal that establishes and preserves poetic measure. To speak of this withdrawal and the relationship that it constitutes is to speak of distance. Marion continues: “What Hölderlin means, moreover, by ‘saving’ registers the step back that opens up perspective, as the altitude of an aerial view allows figures and contours to appear that are missed by

²⁰ Marion, ID, p. 87/115. On the notion of ‘fear’ see ID, p. 86/115.

²¹ Marion, ID, p. 87/116.

²² Marion, ID, pp. 87-88/116.

the overly terrestrial gaze, in short, preserves the advent of the invisible image.”²³ What is crucial here is that the human being emerges from this divine withdrawal and, in so emerging, receives her status as poet. The poetic activity of human beings is, therefore, an imitation and doubling of the divine poetic withdrawal in distance. The poet first receives herself and, thus, in that reception becomes a poet in the image of the poetic divinity. These claims establish two equally important elements of Marion’s account of distance. First, the notion of distance pertains to human subjectivity and, second, that account of subjectivity must be developed in relation to theological claims about the nature of God or the gods. Marion gathers these elements together in the following important quotation:

Before saving a withdrawal, man must benefit from a withdrawal that allows him to take figure in an image. This is indeed why the gods withdraw: they withdraw before the man who becomes for them an image, just as man must withdraw in order that the invisibility of the world should become an image for him. The evidence of the gods, or of God (the text here is in the singular), coincides strictly with the withdrawal: the sky withdraws in order to offer, ‘in lovely blue,’ the background and the basis for any taking the image (as one speaks of taking the veil) of things. Far from erasing it, this withdrawal ensures his prior and unavoidable attentiveness.²⁴

Such imitation, however, is both a gift and a task. Given that human beings become poets by being delivered over to themselves in the saving withdrawal of the gods, they must take up this poetic gift and establish themselves in relation to its measure. For if a human being emerges as poet in the relationship between ‘beauty’ and ‘purity,’ it is only in the notion of ‘measure,’ by which Hölderlin signals the “imitation of one withdrawal by

²³ Marion, ID, p. 88/116.

²⁴ Marion, ID, p. 88/116-117.

another.”²⁵ If, as Marion has already indicated, the augmentation that is proper to poetic art is achieved in the act of language that names, then the “naming that respects withdrawal can alone inspect the image.”²⁶ In order to understand more fully this ‘naming that respects withdrawal’ we must follow the theological deepening that Marion tracks within Hölderlin’s poems.

With Nietzsche, Hölderlin finds himself at a theological crossroads. Each of them share the common vision in which no account of human poetics will be adequate that does not include within itself an account of the world-bestowing poet’s relation to the world-constituting divinity. In sharing that vision, however, both must confront the fundamental question: who is this divinity? Who are these gods? Who is God? Like Nietzsche, Hölderlin does not shrink from this question. He does, however, answer differently. In fact, as Marion shows, Hölderlin stages a narration of the encounter between human beings and the gods that allows him to discover the God of the Apostle. It is this God, testified to within Christian discourse, and given his place in Hölderlin’s narration as the one called ‘the Only One’ (*Der Einzige*), who perfects withdrawal, preserves distance, and thus opens a space where a true human poetics can occur.²⁷ In relation to the burden and the task of finding measure in an encounter with the “immediate God” that characterizes the cultural work of both the Greeks and the Hesperians, Hölderlin notes the emergence of another figure of God, according to which

²⁵ Marion, ID, p. 89/117.

²⁶ Marion, ID, p. 91/119.

²⁷ Marion tracks Hölderlin’s treatment of the ‘Greeks’ and the ‘Hesperians,’ the latter typifying the modern, Western human figure. He shows how, for Hölderlin, each type of human existence must take upon itself the task of achieving its own proper relation to the divinity by appropriating from the other type what it lacks. For Marion’s full account of this see ID, pp. 94-102/122-131.

divine presence opens in an entirely different space of appearance. This note comes, Marion tells us, in a “decisive aside.” Hölderlin writes: “The immediate God, wholly-one with man (for the God of an apostle is more mediate, is the highest conception of the highest mind).”²⁸ Marion explains:

The God of the apostle is opposed to the immediate God of tragedy, because he is ‘more mediate’. . . . The apostolic God would therefore never make measure disappear, because his appearance would remain in distance, and therefore would remain, simply, an *appearance* visible in an image. Apostolicity indicates, theologically, that God never arrives more intimately than through the mediation of an envoy, to the point that, in the Christ, the misery of the envoy and the splendor of the one who sends him are embodied in the same figure.²⁹

According to Marion, as Hölderlin’s vision of divine distance concretizes and, therefore, moves beyond generic appeals to the divine Celestials in order to take up the figures of the divine itself, he comes to testify to a particular figure of God which is given according to a witness that preserves distance. Where, in the case of Greek tragedy and the quest for measure, human poetic activity works under the burden of figures of the divine that are determined by either a consumptive splendor or a sad absence, in the case of the apostolic God, measure itself is given in the distance preserved by this God’s mediated advance. Marion concludes: “It remains, then, to be thought that measure, or more radically distance, renders possible the imaging of the world and of that which works man, only in

²⁸ Marion, ID, p. 102/131.

²⁹ Marion, ID, pp. 102-103/131.

that, more essentially, it arranges the presence, by all evidence unknown, of God. For God gives himself only within the distance that he keeps, and where he keeps us.”³⁰

The transformation of divine figures from the immediate God to the apostolic one is marked by Hölderlin’s migration from one literary local to another. That is, it “is necessary to learn from Greece how to leave Greece” and, upon doing so, it is necessary to dwell with the Only One on the island of Patmos. For it is here, on Patmos, that the poverty of the Son marks a measure that is in keeping with distance and the withdrawal of the Father. Marion explains that “Patmos prepares the space in which the god neither obfuscates man with its presence nor, as in the henceforth ‘atheistic’ Greece, saddens man with its absence. . . . The sun that aorgically glorifies or burns, here uncovers only poverty.”³¹ On the apostolic island the disciple can speak of poverty and particularly the poverty of the Son because poverty “indicates that the highest presence of God to man does not obfuscate the figure of man with light but, by means of distance, assures him of assuming an image.”³² Rather than finding himself confronted with the task of achieving measure in the face of the immediate God, the one who dwells on Patmos receives measure from the God who approaches in distance and, therefore, establishes measure in himself. The fate and task of the poet, now no longer tragic, is to bear the measure that the God establishes. But how, Marion asks with Hölderlin, is the human poet to bear this divine measure? In order to answer this question, Marion tracks three important moves in

³⁰ Marion, ID, p. 103/132. The language here of ‘working man’ [*oeuvre l’homme*] and arranging presence [*ménage la présence*] powerfully speaks to the connection I am making between distance, anteriority, and horizon.

³¹ Marion, ID, p. 104-105/134.

³² Marion, ID, p. 105/134.

Hölderlin's texts. The human poet dwells according to the divine measure because the divine himself establishes this measure in the figure of a human—the Incarnate Christ. Secondly, such an establishment is possible because of the very nature of God—God is triune. Finally, to recognize the ultimate figure of God as Father means, moreover, that the figure of human *poesis* will be cast in the image of the Son such that human poets—human selves—will be understood *as* sons.

Hölderlin shares with Nietzsche the insight that the true site of human poetics is the site in which the human poet and the divine come together. Because of Nietzsche's own commitment to the logic of idolatry, however, he was not able follow through on an account of Christ in which true measure is achieved Christologically.³³ In contrast, Hölderlin holds to the claim that “man himself does not fix the measure within which his relation to the divine becomes an image.”³⁴ He continues: “The measure of the sky and the earth, of man and the gods, is taken care of only by the man who, poetically, dwells—that is, the one who receives in his humanity the divine overabundance and who, so to speak, absorbs its shock in his flesh, to the point that the human and the divine are translated one into the other with neither confusion nor separation.”³⁵ It is the Christ, the Only One, who becomes in his person and body the poetic centre of the world, for it is in him that human measure in relation to the divine is set.³⁶ As I have shown, however, to

³³ For Marion's account of Nietzsche's treatment of Christ see ID, pp. 55-68/74-87.

³⁴ Marion, ID, pp. 106-107/136.

³⁵ Marion, ID, p. 107/136-137.

³⁶ This claim, along with all that has led up to it in Marion's reading of Hölderlin, as well as all that proceeds from it not only here, but in Marion's treatment of Christ's *kenosis* in *The Crossing of the Visible*, stands against Bruce Ellis Benson's claim that Marion is like Marcion. Such an equation, based on the idea that Marion's “Christ cannot ‘humble himself’ and take on the form of a fleshly body” is evidence of a

speak of receiving measure is to speak of receiving oneself in that measure. To name the Son as the poetic centre, the very measurer of measure, is to understand human poetic dwelling in relation to God in terms of a ‘becoming-Son’. Before drawing out this consequence, however, Marion must account for what it is about God that establishes this measure in Christ rather than simply annihilating him in the darkness of divine investment.

In his poverty, the Son bears the presence of the Father and is not crushed because the divine “admits, in itself, distinction.”³⁷ In the case of the Celestials, Marion noted the logic of withdrawal at work and alluded to the metaphor the gift exchange in order to articulate the productivity of that withdrawal. We saw that, by withdrawing in distance, the gods ‘saved’ the perspective which ‘gave’ a space for the visible to appear. With the appearance of the Son, it now becomes clear that the metaphor of the gift exchange is to be central. The Son can only assume the proper measure between humans and God because it is the Son who gives witness to the figure of God as Father. For he alone “attests the paternity of God in manifesting himself, par excellence, in a filial manner. In the Christ, divinity becomes filial. Alone among the gods, the Christ experiences his divinity less as an investment or a dispossession than as the freedom of a gift received

major error in interpreting these texts. If anything, as Kathryn Tanner has pointed out, Marion *over stresses* the abasement of Christ. See Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies: Nietzsche, Derrida & Marion on Modern Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 222-223. For Tanner’s point see her “Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 220-228. For Marion’s treatment of Christ’s *kenosis* in *The Crossing of the Visible*, see pp. 66-87.

³⁷ Marion, ID, p. 108/137.

from the Father and returned.”³⁸ The reciprocity of the gift exchange functions well to mark the logic of withdrawal and distance that is crucial here: God appears mediated through the reciprocal exchange between the Father and the Son in which the Son abandons himself to death in reference to the Father and is given, precisely in that abandonment, his place as Son. Marion points out how Hölderlin employs the Pauline logic of kenosis in the poem, “Celebration of Peace.” In both the Pauline text and that of Hölderlin’s poem, the “exile from his divine figure does not lead the Christ to annihilation. . . . Or, more exactly, the annihilation that goes to the point of death on a cross reveals, by its very radicality, the reference to the Father, who, in return, graces the annihilated one as All-powerful Son.”³⁹ Marion continues, nicely capturing the flow of this reciprocation:

The dispossession here is voluntary (*gern*, Hölderlin says, echoing the verbs of annihilation that, in the hymn, all have Christ as subject); it therefore marks the profound reference of the Son to the Father, as the source from which all his plenitude comes. The reference begins by annihilation, to the point of death. But, since death definitively manifests this reference, it also definitively opens the horizon onto the Father: the Son immediately shines there because annihilated, as He who receives from the Father that which he sends back to him in annihilation. . . . The appearance of a God no longer follows after annihilation: it coincides with it, or rather the annihilation finally shines with its true light, where it appears as filial reference to the depth of the Father who, by that very fact, invests the Son—triumphant—with his power.⁴⁰

All of this, for Marion, points to the trinitarian nature of God. More important than the noticeable lack of the Holy Spirit in this ‘trinitarian account’ is the claim that distance

³⁸ Marion, ID, p. 108-109/138.

³⁹ Marion, ID, pp. 111-112/140.

⁴⁰ Marion, ID, p. 112/140.

determines human *poesis*—and, therefore, human experience free of idolatrous constraints—by situating it in relationship to a human-divine encounter that is, itself, determined by God’s own trinitarian identity.⁴¹ Bringing together the Christological and Trinitarian moments, Marion claims:

The unicity of ‘the Only One’ refracts in the actual field of the human the filiation that constitutively affects the divine. The Christ is ‘the Only One’ who finds his distinction precisely when the divine invests him, because God admits a Son in him, or rather welcomes in his essence the multivalent distance that polarizes him as Father, as Son, as Spirit—or rather, again, welcomes as his essence the field polarized by the triple play of the relation. We experience the distance that is properly constitutive of God only in the unicity of the Christ, who refers in filial manner to the Father.⁴²

The notion of distance emerges, in Hölderlin’s thought, first and constitutively in relation to his understanding of Christ, the Only One, and his reference to the Father. If human *poesis* is worked out in the relationship between ‘beauty’ and ‘purity’ that is, itself, finally measured by the measure of a divine imitation, the logic of that imitation finds its source in the very nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For it is as filial and, therefore, as paternal, that God manifests distance and, therefore, gives measure to human *poesis*.

Marion concludes:

⁴¹ To be fair, Marion’s reading of Hölderlin is not without an account of the Holy Spirit. Later in his analysis, where he discusses the refraction of the distance between the Father and the Son within the relationship between the Christ and his disciples, appeals are made to the Holy Spirit. If distance is ‘missed’ by the disciples who desire an immediate relationship with Jesus, it is the work of the Spirit to preserve distance by opening a space of withdrawal. Pointing to the similarities between Hölderlin’s account and that of Luke 24: 27ff., Marion suggests that, thanks to the Spirit, “God’s present is not inscribed in a presence that a possessive gaze could bind. The present reveals itself in the withdrawal of presence, because that withdrawal harbors in itself, and delivers by a gift, the only presence of the present, and the sole present of a presence. It is only in such a withdrawal that presence and the present can be conjoined. This is what is rendered thinkable by recourse to the Spirit, this is what the disciples miss” (ID, p. 120/148).

⁴² Marion, ID, p. 110/139.

Measure, which the divine establishes for man, is here deciphered, and here alone; the measure through which the human and the divine can encounter one another without dissolution, but without absence, is indeed founded on the internal distance of the divine—in Christ, the divine distance also plays humanly. Distance becomes the distance from man to God, on the basis of its play as distance from the Son to the Father.⁴³

For Hölderlin, distance plays humanly because it first plays divinely. With this established it remains to see more clearly just how distance plays humanly. For in seeing this we will see more clearly the nature of a human *poesis* constituted by anterior conditions other than those determined by human subjectivity.

As the concept of distance emerges it names a relation in which a prior withdrawal establishes the ‘space,’ the ‘opening,’ the horizon not only for the relationship as such to take place but, even more importantly, for the other pole of the relationship to appear. Just as the world appears *as* world in the space opened by the human being’s poetic withdrawal, so does the human poet herself appear *as* poet in the withdrawal of the Father who advances, *as* Father, in the Son. Furthermore, I have shown that the relation of this withdrawal to the notions of presence and absence, notions already at play in metaphysics, is best articulated according to the metaphor of a gift exchange. In fact, the metaphor of the gift exchange brings to light the particular kind of anteriority that is constituted in this advance-in-withdrawal: according to the logic of distance the ‘absence’ of the constituting pole is the withdrawal of that pole; but this withdrawal is, precisely, the constitutive and therefore productive moment in the relating such that absence no longer names simply a lack of presence but, rather, a new mode of presence. It is in this

⁴³ Marion, ID, p. 114/142.

new mode of presence that the recipient of the gift (the other pole of the relationship) is given the gift of receiving or appropriating herself in the horizon opened by the constituting withdrawal. Employing the language of gift, Marion writes: “The withdrawal [*repli*], or what seems to us ‘in appearance’ a withdrawal, deploys the gift in its singularity to the point of giving to the beneficiary the gift of appropriating it to himself. The obvious absence of the giver is not an obstacle to the gift, but a path between the gift, the giver, and the recipient.”⁴⁴ What remains to be discussed in Marion’s reading of Hölderlin, and what will take us beyond Hölderlin and into Marion’s treatment of Dionysius the Areopagite, is the precise nature of this reception of selfhood in the appropriation of the gift.

Constituted as selves by the withdrawal of the Father in his revelation as Son, the figure of the human poet is overdetermined by the figure of the son. Marion writes:

What qualifies men as the sons of gods is, precisely, the withdrawal in whose reserve the gods achieve the figure of the Father. . . . Men, in their turn, become sons of God only if, as the Rhine accepts banks that hem in the growth of its continuous power, they learn how to ‘bear the divine plenitude’ in the ‘holy night,’ which ‘strengthens’ because it mediates the divine, transforms the aorgic irruption into filial donation.⁴⁵

To bear the distance of God is to bear the advance-in-withdrawal and to imitate it. In Marion’s reading, this notion of ‘bearing’ or of ‘dwelling within’ has everything to do with the will. In fact, it is precisely the notion of ‘poverty,’ already introduced in reference to Christ’s filial reference to the Father, that provides the key to Hölderlin’s account of human beings as ‘sons of God’. This is so, Marion argues, because a relation

⁴⁴ Marion, ID, p. 124/152.

⁴⁵ Marion, ID, p. 124/153.

constituted and determined by distance is not to be known, in the sense of comprehended and thematized as from the outside, but rather inhabited or, even better, traversed. To appeal to a will that dwells and traverses is not, however, to instantiate an overbearing voluntarism but, rather, to appeal to a “most subtle and sustained intimacy which no absence can undo.”⁴⁶ For Marion, the will receives a withdrawal and bears it because to exercise a withdrawal is already to enact within oneself a voluntary limitation. It is to exercise discretion. From the side of God, Marion argues that “what was lacking for the completion of the presence of the divine” in the other gods “was precisely this: that the figure of the divine . . . be experienced as divine in a voluntary limitation.”⁴⁷ The human response to this divinely voluntary limitation is the endurance of this withdrawal. To dwell in distance, to endure and bear the withdrawal is, for the poet-become-son, to inhabit not only a new place of encounter with God but also a new way of speaking and thinking about God. The endurance that anticipates God in his advancing withdrawal refuses to either rush God, demanding an immediate relationship, or grow impatient and replace God with idols. As Marion points out, nowhere is our impatience more perceptible than in our thinking and speaking about God’s revelation. For instead of enduring his withdrawal, we launch into speeches of atheism or apologetics, speaking ‘God’ into a manageable presence or relegating ‘God’ to the margins of absent silence, and thus lose the God who befalls us as God. To receive myself in distance, therefore, is to find myself already born within anterior conditions in which I am given to myself. This is the gift of distance. Such a gift, however, imposes a task: to appropriate myself in this

⁴⁶ Marion, ID, p. 125/154.

⁴⁷ Marion, ID, p. 126/155.

gift is to endure the withdrawal in which I was born and, furthermore, give it speech. To articulate how distance is given speech, however, Marion departs from Hölderlin and turns to the mystical theology of Dionysius the Areopagite.

2.3. Speaking Distance: Dionysius the Areopagite

If Hölderlin and Nietzsche shared an epoch even though they placed themselves very differently within it, Hölderlin and Dionysius dwell together in distance even though they do not share an epoch. For Marion, the logic of distance that emerges in Hölderlin's poems plays also in the mystical theology of the Areopagite. In the latter, however, the relation of distance to language and, therefore, to the very enactment of subjectivity, is made explicit. As a result, the theological anteriority that Hölderlin brought to light is developed further. In this development, the metaphor of the gift exchange is employed even more explicitly in order to bring out the particular kind of reciprocity that is peculiar to distance. Before turning directly to Marion's lengthy study of Dionysius in *The Idol and Distance*, it is important to enter Marion's discussion according to his own route in *God Without Being*. By doing so we see better how this theological discourse helps Marion to articulate an iconic horizon.

Through a phenomenological account of the conceptual idol, described in Chapter 1, Marion explored the insurmountability of the concept of Being for both metaphysical and postmetaphysical modes of thinking God's manifestation. At the root of this insurmountability was an intentional aim that placed God in a site determined in advance by the conditions for the possibility of human experience. In this site, God is determined

by a concept and, Marion adds, given a name. The connection here between the ‘concept’ and the ‘name’ is not coincidental. In fact, according to Marion, if one is to join a theological analysis of the insurmountability of Being to the philosophical analysis discussed in Chapter 1, it is necessary to revisit the controversy between Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite on the question of the divine names. For, as Marion argues in *God Without Being*, Heidegger himself “takes a position in a debate that can be historically situated, in favor of the *ens* as the first divine name: the good intervenes now only as a manner of beingness, which alone sets forth the first name of ‘God’.”⁴⁸ While Marion is not suggesting a direct connection between Heidegger’s account of Being and Thomas’ privileging of Being as the first of divine names, as though Heidegger was simply repeating in a philosophical key what Thomas advanced theologically, what is at stake, for Marion, is “the analogy between two relations of anteriority.”⁴⁹ That is, the conceptual claims made about God within both metaphysical and postmetaphysical modes of thought are similar to the claims made concerning the primacy of one name (Being) over another (Good) in a theology of divine names because both sets of claims share a common ground in an anterior subjective aim. By examining Thomas’ decision in favor of Being in relation to Dionysius’ decision in favor of the Good, Marion allows to be seen, on the one hand, the anterior subjective aim at work in Thomas’ position and, on the other hand, in Dionysius, an anterior aim constituted by a different horizon. Seen in this light, the seriousness of the debate over the divine names exceeds the question of which name is better and points instead to the very issue of naming and the

⁴⁸ Marion, *GWB*, p. 72/108.

⁴⁹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 72/108-109.

questionableness of predication—in which a ‘subject’ names an ‘object’ in and through a concept—in relation to God. For if predication is the province of Being—such that God must be named first according to Being, because God is thought first in a predication—then the Good does not function as another name within the same system of predication but, rather, it displaces predication as the way of speaking and thinking about God. For, as Dionysius teaches Marion, to name God according to the Good is not to predicate but to praise.

According to Marion, when Thomas Aquinas substitutes Being (*ens*) for the Good (*bonum*) as the first of the divine names, he does so in opposition to a tradition going back to Dionysius. For Thomas, “the name taken from Exodus 3:14, ‘who is, the one who is,’ stands as ‘the most proper name of God’ . . . [because] this name ‘does not signify form, but simply being itself [*ipsum esse*]. Hence since the being of God is His essence itself [*esse Dei sit ipsa ejus essentia*], which can be said of no other . . . , it is clear that among other names this one specially nominates God [*hoc maxime proprie nominat Deum*].”⁵⁰ According to this argument, the naming of God is tied to the identification of God’s essence: God is called Being because Being best names God’s essence since the being of God is his essence itself. The Good, however, adds something to the determination of God’s essence but does not define that essence. For this reason it is a derivative name. In light of this decision, Marion asks according to what conditions Thomas argues that the name/concept Being is to function as the most inclusive and universal designation such that it signifies not the form of God—which would be the case for the Good—but God’s

⁵⁰ Marion, *GWB*, p. 76/114.

essence, i.e., the primary thing one thinks when one thinks God. Or, in other words, Marion asks about the anteriority that is given to Being such that it is thought first and, thus, named highest. The root of such an anteriority is telling. According to Thomas, “the first term that falls within the imagination of understanding is the *ens*, without which the understanding can apprehend nothing.”⁵¹ Marion continues:

The *ens* appears first, at least on condition that one takes the point of view of human understanding; the primacy of the *ens* depends on the primacy of a conception of the understanding and of the mind of man. The primacy of the *ens* has nothing absolute or unconditional about it; it relies on another primacy, which remains discretely in the background. But it is this second primacy that one must question, since it alone gives its domination to the *ens*, to the detriment of the good (and of the Dionysian tradition).⁵²

For Thomas, the privilege of *ens* as the first name of God emerges in a conceptual approach to God wherein ‘to name’ God is ‘to apprehend’ God according to the measure by which all things are apprehended: the human understanding. At work here is the same anteriority that Marion tracks through both metaphysically and ontologically determined modes of thinking God. It is one in which a subject designates an object in a predication measured out by the conditions proper to the subject itself. God is named and known as Being because the human subject, in knowing anything, knows being first. Such a position, Marion argues, is offered not only against the Dionysian tradition which gives primacy to goodness, but against Thomas’ own, later, development of the doctrine of divine names and the subsequent theory of analogy. Letting the latter concern pass, it is necessary to ask: if this is what it means, for Thomas, to name God by Being, what is at

⁵¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 79/119.

⁵² Marion, *GWB*, p. 80/119.

stake in the Dionysian tradition where God is named according to the Good? Marion states the issue concisely: “For Denys deploys the primacy of goodness . . . over the *ipsum esse* with particular rigor. To begin with, he does not pretend that goodness constitutes the proper name of [God], but that in the apprehension of goodness the dimension is cleared where the very possibility of a categorical statement concerning God ceases to be valid, and where the reversal of denomination into praise becomes inevitable.”⁵³ It remains now to dive more deeply into Marion’s analysis of Denys in order to track this reversal and the theological anteriority that constitutes it.

As a divine name, Goodness too has to pass through the negations reserved for all other names as kataphasis turns to apophasis. However, what makes this name different than all the others, and what places it at the pinnacle, is the fact that in it the nature of naming itself changes. For Goodness is not one more name that seeks to measure the essence of God through a categorical predication but, rather, it is the name that signals the transcendence that draws all naming into the unthinkable. This is so, according to Marion, because to name God according to Goodness is to think of God as, what Denys calls, the *Aιτία*, which is often translated as the Cause. Marion writes:

Indeed, the cause/ *Aιτία* is thought in close relation with Goodness. This name, ‘the most venerable of names,’ would have to undergo the test of negation, if it were meant alone; here it is taken up by the transcendence that introduces it into the unthinkable: ‘all the gifts from the cause/ *Aιτία* as Goodness’; ‘the universal cause/ *Aιτία* loves all things through the hyperbole of its Goodness’; cause/ *Aιτία* of beings, since all things were led to be by its Goodness, which was their essence.’ . . . Goodness, which a hyperbole refers to the cause/ *Aιτία*, refers in

⁵³ Marion, *GWB*, p. 76/114. In both *God Without Being* and *The Idol and Distance* Marion’s designation of Dionysius the Areopagite as ‘Denys’ is left untranslated. From this point on, in order to maintain consistency with the quotations from Marion, I will use this designation as well.

distance, to the point of being conjoined with the unthinkable. It escapes our investigation since, thought as an acolyte of the cause/ Αἰτία, it ends up being typified therein.⁵⁴

To see what is at stake, for Marion, in retrieving the theology of Denys, it is necessary to begin with this notion of the Αἰτία.

Marion begins his analysis with a discussion of the relation of kataphatic and apophatic modes of naming. He suggests that beyond the aesthetic, purifying function⁵⁵ of the apophatic mode, the work of negation brings about a crucial transition and transformation in Denys' theology of the divine names. He writes: “[N]egation, which, exactly, mobilizes the aesthetic model, opens indeed onto a different depth. Denys underlines that it negates ‘according to transcendence and not at all according to insufficiency,’ which is to say that it does not register the insufficiency of that of which it is a question, but indexes the failure of our linguistic approach.”⁵⁶ To come to the end of a process of naming God in which apophasis negates what kataphasis affirmed is to come to the aporia at the end of language. Such an aporia, however, is one only for a mode of speaking determined by the structures of predication in which one can only affirm or deny. However, to refer to God as Αἰτία, when there seems to be nothing more to say, is to speak according to a logic of praise. It is to inhabit a different site than one measured

⁵⁴ Marion, ID, pp. 154-155/193.

⁵⁵ Marion writes: “[Negation] does not deny that of which it is a question, by successively tearing away from it all of its attributes, but rather it frees it all the more insofar as certain nominations seemed to be more essentially suitable to it. Negation clears away and highlights a silhouette, far from opening onto a void. As sculpture frees from the brute and visible material that which renders invisible the invisible thing to be seen—the form itself—such that the stone no longer masks what it contains, ‘we deny and remove every thing in order to know without concealment that unknowing, which is concealed by all the knowledge that knows beings’” (ID, p. 148/186).

⁵⁶ Marion, ID, p. 149/188.

by the anteriority of a subjective aim that determines the logic of predication. While it is possible and, indeed, common to translate Αἰτία as ‘cause’, nothing could be further from the truth if ‘cause’ is understood “following the usage imposed by the history of metaphysics.”⁵⁷ For Αἰτία is the designation of the transcendence in which God dwells according to his own measure. This divine measure is not, however, the measure determined by human understanding and, for that reason, to say Αἰτία is as much to say the unsayable as it is to think the unthinkable. Marion writes: “If the cause/Αἰτία remains unthinkable, if it disqualifies every naming of God and if transcendence slips away from the speaking grasp, perhaps one can agree that the cause does not have to be thought but indeed received. . . . The distance of the Absolute precedes every utterance and every statement by an anteriority that nothing will be able to abolish.”⁵⁸ Moving beyond the “two truth values of categorical predication,” Goodness signals a transcendence that attests an anterior aim that does not belong to the subject but, instead, precedes the subject and situates him in a ‘space,’ a horizon, that is not of his making. Before discussing the discourse of praise it is necessary to think more carefully about Marion’s contrast between thinking and receiving for it is here that his reflections on anteriority are anchored.

Marion’s analysis of Hölderlin highlighted the manner in which human subjectivity is itself received in and through distance. Being given over to ourselves in the distance of a withdrawal in which God opens a ‘space’ for us to abide in relation to him,

⁵⁷ Marion, ID, p. 152/190-191.

⁵⁸ Marion, ID, p. 153/192.

we, in turn, are able to live poetically as ‘sons’: that is, we too open a world and inhabit it meaningfully. The relation does not establish this ‘space’ as a neutral space which two already existing beings may freely enter—or not—but, rather, it allows one term (the human being) to appear *as such* in relation to the other term (God). At stake in this relation is the metaphor of ‘space’ or ‘site’ that Marion employs. We recall, in Marion’s discussion of the subjective anteriority proper to the aim that constitutes the idol, his use of the image of the ‘temple’ to communicate the idea of a pre-established site set to measure the conditions of the possibility of God’s manifestation. Making reference to Heidegger’s discussion of the Fourfold, he also uses the notion of ‘world’ to communicate this idea of a predetermined domain by contrasting it with the idea that God’s revelation ‘does not belong to this world’ (John 18:36).⁵⁹ This metaphor of a ‘site’ refers us to the notion of horizon, that I am discussing. The connection between the metaphor of ‘site’ and the horizon is at work, for example, in his discussion of Nietzsche. Marion argues that the real issue that arises when one speaks of the ‘death of God’ has to do with the task of “opening up the situation in which man must be found as *Dasein* in order that the ‘death of God’ might befall him. That situation does not depend in any way on individual convictions or on psychological predispositions . . . but they become significant only when understood within an otherwise rigorous, and in a sense inevitable, site. It is precisely that site that we must here seek out.”⁶⁰ That is, to identify the site inhabited by *Dasein* such that the death of God might befall him; to articulate the phenomenological space of the *templum* from which God is named and, thus, allowed to

⁵⁹ Marion, *GWB*, p. 71/106-107.

⁶⁰ Marion, *ID*, p. 28/46.

appear; to surround human experience by a notion of ‘world’ defined by the reciprocating regulation of the Fourfold: all of these tasks live from the notion of anteriority, or horizon, which I am discussing in my analysis of Marion’s early work. Thus, when he turns to Denys and seeks an alternative to the thinking and naming of God that works according to a subjective anteriority, he takes up again the metaphor of a site and claims that the subject finds itself—receives itself—within a horizon opened by an Other. This site is a ‘clearing’ or, indeed, a ‘landing pit’ stretched out, raised up, and prepared by a productive withdrawal of God. In this site the subject finds herself constituted within a set of coordinates neither set nor measured by her own conditions of possibility but, rather, by the conditions set by an approach of and reference to the *Αἰτία*. Marion writes:

Anterior distance conceives us because it engenders us. Distance is given only in order to be received. Anterior distance demands to be received because it more fundamentally gives us [the chance] to receive ourselves in it. Distance, precisely because it remains the Ab-solute, delivers the space where it becomes possible for us to receive ourselves—to receive ourselves in the sense that the athlete, having cleared the bar, completes the jump by landing [literally, in receiving himself, *en se recevant*] on the ground prepared for this purpose, of the landing pit [*fosse de réception*]. . . . We discover ourselves, in distance, delivered to ourselves, or rather delivered for ourselves, given, not abandoned, to ourselves. This means that distance does not separate us from the Ab-solute so much as it prepares for us, with all its anteriority, our identity.⁶¹

This notion of distance around which Marion organizes his early work lives off the concept of anteriority that it signals. Itself a metaphor signaling a unique type of relation by figuring it spatially, the notion of distance attests a set of metaphors in which subjectivity is understood in terms of the horizon, the nexus of conditions of possibility,

⁶¹ Marion, ID, p. 153/192.

in which a subject attains its subjectivity. The contrast, then, is between a subject who is figured by the conditions of possibility immanent to itself and articulated in its aim, and one that is figured by the advancing and constitutive approach of a divine Other.

In light of this contrast, however, we would do well to remember Marion's claim about the authenticity of idolatrous intentionality and its corresponding subjective anteriority. That we experience the divine according to the measure set by our own anterior aim—and therefore according to coordinates measured by the possibilities open to human experience immanently understood—is not denied. It is simply located as one way to experience the divine. In contrasting this with the anteriority described by Dionysian theology, Marion describes a mode of experience in which subjective anteriority is taken up and displaced by a relation in which the subject comes to find itself already constituted by an Other. The crucial relation between these two modes of anteriority lies, then, in this notion of displacement. Or, to use the language of *God Without Being* and to say that being is 'crossed' by the anterior approach of God in distance, is to say that the divine function of *Dasein*—the measure of religious experience constituted by our own conditions of possibility—is displaced by the self-revelation of God. Such a displacement is carried out in the difference between our 'conceiving' and 'receiving' God. I have just shown how that reception involves a figure of subjectivity constituted by God's advance in withdrawal and the horizon of distance established therein. Marion now connects this reception of self to anteriority through his account of God's unthinkability.

The unthinkability of God attests to the experienced anteriority at play here. God does not appear as the Unthinkable because God is 'beyond' but, rather, because God is

‘before’. By being ‘before’, God is encountered according to no terms other than God’s own revelatory advance. For Marion, then, God’s unthinkability is the figure of God’s revelation. He writes: “The incomprehensibility of the unthinkable seems then to be the mark of anteriority; the seriousness of anterior distance is attested by the unthinkable. To admit that the incomprehensible cannot, must not, and does not have to be comprehended amounts to recognizing, receiving, and revering distance as distance.”⁶² Picking up the connection between anteriority and reception and contrasting it with comprehension, he continues:

The unthinkable, as the distance of Goodness, gives itself—not to be comprehended but to be received. It is therefore not a question of giving up on comprehending It is a question of managing to receive that which becomes thinkable, or rather acceptable, only for the one who knows how to receive it. It is not a question of admitting distance despite its unthinkability, but of preciously receiving the unthinkable, as the sign and seal of the measureless origin of the distance that gives us our measure.⁶³

To say that the seriousness of anterior distance is attested by the unthinkable is to recognize the manner in which ‘comprehending-thinking,’ guided by an anterior subjective aim, is displaced by an anterior constitution that is enacted in thought’s own limitation. This form of ‘thinking,’ determined now by a logic of reception, is constituted by a relation to transcendence in which what is thought is the “beyond of the limit that revokes both *limit* and *beyond* while [thinking] them.”⁶⁴ For Marion what is crucial here is that this not be construed negatively. As he tells us, it is neither a matter of ‘giving up’ on thinking nor even recognizing this unthinkability as an unfortunate but undeniable side

⁶² Marion, ID, p. 154/192-193.

⁶³ Marion, ID, p. 155/194.

⁶⁴ Marion, ID, p. 153/191.

effect of inhabiting ‘distance’. On the contrary, “[f]ar from it being the case that the factually and theoretically unavoidable impossibility of thinking the ab-solutely unthinkable should end the enterprise of thinking it, that impossibility authenticates and, in a sense, inaugurates the enterprise.”⁶⁵ The positivity entailed here connects to the notion of anteriority at stake: opened in a different subjective space, the subject does not approach God in terms of an already established and measured mode of access called ‘knowledge’ but, rather, is constituted by the divine approach which displaces the relation of ‘knowledge’—characterized actively in terms of conceiving—with a ‘thinking’ that lives off its reception and, indeed, its identity as a receiver.

To think God as a ‘receiver’ is to measure one’s thought in terms of its capacity to welcome the divine advance. This theme has been sounded, of course, since Marion’s earliest pages dedicated to Hölderlin. As Marion revisits it in relation to Denys, however, he explicitly connects this notion of welcome to that of love. Early in his study of Denys he suggests that we consider the work of this theologian as an “elaboration” of Paul’s reflections on love in 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, where we learn that “[o]nly love can claim to know love.”⁶⁶ That he notes, even at this point, that to know love is to speak from love indicates where we are going as we follow him toward a discourse of praise. Because this discourse lives off the anteriority proper to the divine advance, it is to necessary to note how love lives in distance and is, in fact, the point of distance itself. At stake here is a mode of participation entirely different than that established between a subject and an object joined in the thematizing vision of predication. Marion writes:

⁶⁵ Marion, ID, p. 141/179.

⁶⁶ Marion, ID, p. 145/183.

If love reveals itself hermetically as distance (which is glossed by *cause* and *goodness*) in order to give itself, only love will be able to welcome it. If distance manifests love itself as unthinkable, then distance will disappear no more than charity will pass. Distance refuses nothing, nor does it separate enviously, but it brings about the separation where we experience love. Love (like Goodness) requires distance (as unthinkable), in order that participation be fortified in, and reinforce, the mystery of alterity. Distance brings about separation in order that love should receive all the more intimately the mystery of love.⁶⁷

This participation is measured according to the logic of withdrawal that I have shown in both Hölderlin and Denys. It is, as Marion calls it here, a participation “in the imparticable as such.”⁶⁸ From the perspective of God, such participation occurs because “the unthinkable calls to participation beings that have no common measure with it—no common measure other than a reciprocal disappropriation in distance.”⁶⁹ From the side of the human being, participation is measured “solely according to the measure of welcome that each participant can or cannot offer.”⁷⁰ At stake here, as with Hölderlin, is the will, thought, again, in terms of its openness and receptivity and not, as I noted in reference to Hölderlin, its voluntary power. In fact, Marion stresses the receptive and passive stakes of this welcome by speaking of the human being’s “analogical capacity” for participation,

⁶⁷ Marion, ID, p. 156/194. Much has been made of Marion’s thought as a thought of love. In my own reading of him, however, I have found that love tends to be a cipher for other concepts which actually ‘do the work’: distance, the gift, givenness. Beyond this discussion of love in Dionysius, therefore, I will say very little of love. The one exception to this, of course, is Marion’s recent book dedicated to love: *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) / *La phénomène érotique: six méditations* (Paris: Grasset, 2003). I do not discuss this book in the dissertation for two reasons. First, taking Marion’s word that *In Excess* marks an end-point in his thinking of revelation, I circumscribed Marion’s ever-growing body of work in reference to that point. Secondly, *The Erotic Phenomenon* does not discuss divine revelation, even if it makes reference to God being a particularly good lover (p. 222/342).

⁶⁸ Marion, ID, p. 156/195.

⁶⁹ Marion, ID, p. 156/195.

⁷⁰ Marion, ID, p. 158/197.

pointing not only to Denys here but also to Augustine's *Commentary on the First Epistle of John* 4:6.⁷¹ It is precisely this openness—this *capacitas*—that determines the scope of participation because insofar as the will enacts discretion and, in love, consents to bear the presence of God in its withdrawal, it opens itself to be filled by God's manifestation in distance. Here we come back to Denys' Pauline orientation: only love can know love because only love, enacted in this receptive discretion, can “perceive love correctly,” that is, can perceive, in distance, the faithful and filial love of God. Such perception is not merely a state of the soul or a pre-established anthropological fact. It is, rather, a cultivated and determinate practice. It is to this practice that we now turn. According to Marion, the “measured receptivity” of love “depends, in its turn, on another instance, which alone can hollow out the space where a capacity might contain a greater participation.”⁷² This other instance, this practice of love, is prayer. For it is in terms of prayer that Denys speaks not abstractly of the subject as a ‘receiver’ but concretely as a ‘requestant’. This is so because Denys' understanding of prayer is always determined in relation to the reference to God as Αἰτία.⁷³ In other words, prayer *is* the traverse of distance because, in the enactment of prayer, a relation is established between the Requisite (God) and the ‘requestants’ (human beings). While prayer is, for Denys, εὐχή, it is also and especially, αἴτησις because it makes demands (αἰτέω) in the sense that, “for the Evangelists, demanding amounts, in its fullness, to praying” (John 14:16 and

⁷¹ Marion, ID, p. 159, n. 39/n. 37, pp. 238-239.

⁷² Marion, ID, p. 160/198.

⁷³ See Carlson's discussion of this in *Indiscretion*, pp. 200-202.

15:16).⁷⁴ Marion spells out the etymological connection between prayer as an approaching demand and God as Αἰτία when he writes: “[W]hat we have just translated here exactly, but all the less correctly, as ‘cause’ must perhaps be understood as that which all those beings request (αἰτέω, αἰτιάομαι) who for their part fundamentally receive themselves therefrom as requestants (τα αἰτιατά).”⁷⁵ Concretizing a theme now familiar, Marion argues that in prayer the subject becomes a recipient not of something but, indeed, of itself. The subject becomes ‘requestant’ because it discovers itself in an intentional reference, but one that is aimed at something always already there, in a site measured beforehand, and therefore, beyond the constituting power of the subjective anteriority of that intentional reference. To pray is to refer oneself to one whose approach draws us out of ourselves just as we are met in a space not fit to our own measure. To refer ourselves by *requesting* is, therefore, not only to approach God as a question—in reference to which our requests remain, in love, discrete—but to put ourselves in question to such an extent that that very subjectivity is displaced by the approach of an Other. To request is precisely not to name or define, but, as I show, to praise. Marion concludes:

It is necessary here to understand this relation, in all of its lively rigor and simplicity, as the praying request in which requestants appeal, by hurling accusations or by making an appeal, to a Requisite. We understand better, perhaps, why the Αἰτία in no way constitutes a new, surreptitious, or terroristic naming that would side-step negation. It pronounces as Requisite the unthinkable that, without ignoring it or knowing it, without comprehending it but being comprehended in it, without abolishing in it the ever anterior distance but in receiving itself therein, the very prayer of requestants traverses.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Marion, ID, p. 160/199.

⁷⁵ Marion, ID, p. 160/199.

⁷⁶ Marion, ID, p. 161/199.

In the relationship between the Requisite and the requestants we see, concretely, human participation in the imparticipable. Indeed, if the distance of Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit names the relationship that is God, prayer names the concrete enactment of distance from the side of human beings. Prayer is the traversal of distance because it is the “communion of two loves”.⁷⁷ It is the site in which God’s “ecstatically disappropriating” love meets the discrete love of human reception. In prayer, giving and receiving meet and become one such that God, who advances in distance, gives communion to those who become themselves in the receipt of this gift. It is with such language that Marion further develops his important notion of prayer by setting it within the context of Denys’ account of hierarchy.

Contrary to many popular accounts of prayer, in which the praying subject names and demands something from the prayed-to object, Marion finds in Denys’ account of prayer the very enactment of distance. This is so, as the etymological work has shown, because prayer is always an approach. As an approach of and toward the unthinkable, however, it names a relationship of participation that has now been described. In order to understand the logic of this unique relationship of participation, Marion follows Denys who locates his account of prayer within an understanding of hierarchy. Hierarchy, in this case, has nothing to do with political structures of inequality but, rather, defines holiness.⁷⁸ What is crucial about Marion’s discussion of hierarchy is the way in which, through it, his development of the gift exchange metaphor becomes central to the account

⁷⁷ Marion, ID, p. 162/200.

⁷⁸ For Marion’s discussion of this contrast, see ID, pp. 163-164/201-202.

of divine anteriority.⁷⁹ At stake here, as he points out, is the further development of the logic of distance itself in which participation and communion are held together with and, in fact, constituted by, an “anterior incommensurability.”⁸⁰ Marion begins by arguing that at the root of hierarchy is the question of holiness itself and, furthermore, that holiness “cannot—as anterior distance—but give itself.”⁸¹ Marion believes that such an insistence is backed up by what he has already said about love itself: that love, defined and described by the distance measured in the withdrawal of the Father, gives itself as an “ecstatic origin” and, therefore, “does not demean itself when it goes out of itself, since it is defined precisely by that ecstasy.”⁸² Unlike Plotinian notions of emanation in which loss is implied, love gives itself and, in that giving, remains ever more itself. For Marion, this points to a unique aspect of love’s giving (i.e., holiness): “Each redundancy of the gift, where it abandons itself without return, attests its unique and permanent cohesion.”⁸³ This notion of redundancy, in turn, essentially determines the nature in which holiness is given and, in the wider scope of Marion’s thought, the manner in which the gift exchange metaphor operates. Speaking in the language of hierarchy, he explains that “each member receives the gift only in order to give it, such that this gift, in the same gesture, regives the gift in redundancy (“emanation”) and, giving, sends the original gift back to its

⁷⁹ Indeed, Thomas Carlson writes: “The fundamental question of theology . . . is the question of the gift, which has two modes: that in which it is given and that in which it is received. To receive the gift, one must give oneself . . . to it. Reception is itself a repetition or imitation of the initial giving—and this an indispensable aspect of its appearance. . . . For Marion, as theologian, this thought of the pure gift, or love, assumes its rigor in the theology of Dionysius” (Carlson, *Indiscretion*, p. 197).

⁸⁰ Marion, ID, p. 162/201.

⁸¹ Marion, ID, p. 165/203.

⁸² Marion, ID, p. 165/204.

⁸³ Marion, ID, p. 165/204.

foundation (“ascent”).”⁸⁴ All of this signals, for Marion, the idea that the “gift is received only in order to be given anew” and this is so for the most central of reasons: “the gift cannot be received unless it is given, for otherwise it would cease to merit its name.”⁸⁵ However, what does it mean that the gift be received precisely by being given? For Marion, this means that the gift be “welcomed in its essence—as a giving act.”⁸⁶ He continues:

In supposing that he wants to take possession of it (Philippians 2:7), he clutches onto a ‘content’ that is in fact not at all valid if it is not carried by the giving act—unless it is valid as an idol. To receive the gift amounts to receiving the giving act, for God gives nothing except the movement of the infinite kenosis of charity, that is, everything. Man therefore does not receive the gift as such except in welcoming the act of giving, that is, through repetition by giving himself. Receiving the gift and giving it come together in one and the same operation, redundancy.⁸⁷

We will see the important themes of redundancy and repetition arise again in Marion’s later work when he recasts this very use of the gift exchange metaphor to discuss the relation of call and response. For the moment, however, what is important is the kind of reciprocity that is established here in this communion of wills. If, as I argued earlier, love welcomes love in the practice of prayer, then the traversal of distance that *is* prayer signals a subject who is born in the gift exchange between God and the human being who receives the gift by becoming a gift himself in the reception of it. What is most important here is the further concretization of the self as requestant. If the etymological track that led Denys, and Marion, to speak of prayer as a means of approach productive of a

⁸⁴ Marion, ID, p. 165/204.

⁸⁵ Marion, ID, p. 166/204.

⁸⁶ Marion, ID, p. 166/205.

⁸⁷ Marion, ID, p. 166/205.

displaced figure of subjectivity seemed to bear within itself a vestige of the displaced idolatrous aim by being identified as ‘requestant,’ the situating of this approach within an account of hierarchy thought through according to the gift exchange disallows the requestant to regain control of the relationship because what he receives in his request is nothing but the gift that, in receiving it by giving it again, gives him to himself. For this reason, the anterior incommensurability is maintained such that it actually constitutes the communion between the two poles of the relationship.

Precisely as this description tends to veer toward abstraction—indeed, some might even say a smoke and mirrors show of gifts that become receivers and receivers who become gifts, where anything could be anything because, in the end, everything is mystified—Marion returns to a concrete analysis of this anteriority at work in theological knowledge and language. All along this path into the thought of Denys, Marion claims that to name God according to the Good is to transcend and transform naming itself by the discourse of praise. Before approaching that discourse head on, Marion had to lead us through a fundamental displacement of one form of subjectivity by another. As a result, we revisited the themes that emerged in Hölderlin and connected them explicitly to love and the practice of prayer. On the threshold of the discourse of praise we find a model of the gift exchange in which perfect reciprocity is achieved in and because of an anterior incommensurability between the poles of the relationship. Like prayer, the discourse of praise enacts this communion in distance by offering a mode of language that lives from this perfect gift exchange.

For Marion, to enter the discourse of praise is to think no longer in terms of the idol but, rather, the icon. What is crucial about the icon, and what I have now shown on this long route through Hölderlin and Denys, is that the icon is made manifest as icon within the logic of distance because it mediates the poles of the relationship not through similarity but through origin.⁸⁸ As I indicated above, the idol mediates the relationship it establishes by constructing a reflective similarity between the ‘God’ it presents and the conditions that measure the presentation. That is why the idol works according to the typology of a mirror. The icon, on the other hand, does not establish a similarity but, rather, a distance that constitutes a relationship of a different kind. The conceptual door has already been opened to this logic by Marion’s discussion of participation in the impaticipable. There we saw that the human being participates in God precisely because of the space opened by God’s withdrawal, a space in which all commonalities are lacking but, for exactly this reason, participation is granted because human beings are given over to themselves precisely in this withdrawal measured by God’s paternal calling of them as sons. Insofar as the icon mediates this relationship it does so as a gift. Indeed, we now see the connection with the reciprocal gift exchange which was just described.

“Fundamentally,” Marion claims, “icons come to us, in distance, as gifts ‘starting from’ the unthinkable.”⁸⁹ As a gift of distance, an icon appears in an “evident dissemblance” in order that it might express “in its way, in the visible, the invisible, by rendering inevitable

⁸⁸ Marion discusses this relation of similarity in dissimilarity in *The Crossing of the Visible*, pp. 66-87/119-154.

⁸⁹ Marion, ID, p. 179/218.

the traverse of distance.”⁹⁰ For Denys, the *logia* (the Scriptures) function as icons because, at once, they have their source in the *logos* and yet, as bare words abandoned to us humans in the Father’s withdrawal, they offer no ressemblent access by which we might name and define God’s essence. Not only does the form in which these *logia* appear provoke a dissemblance that demands the traversal of distance, but their testimony as well gives no immediate access to the Father but, instead, demands that those who receive them traverse the distance of the Son and his kenosis. Marion concludes:

The discourse on God, held within anterior distance, presupposes the gift of the *logia*: we do not say, and never will say, anything of God that does not develop, take up—and ground itself in—the *logia*. Here we reach the decisive threshold: the Christian, in Dionysian terms, is decided according to acceptance or refusal of the Scriptures as the sole foundation that might validate a discourse on the *Logos*, because they issue from it.⁹¹

Such a claim, however, is possible because of the manner in which subjectivity is born out of the divine gift exchange. For Marion, the discourse of praise is, precisely, the regiving of the gift, the redundancy that makes giving and receiving one. To say that a discourse on God requires the *logia* is no mere claim to ‘biblical authority’ but, rather, a claim about how those respond who speak of God and, in so speaking, discover themselves anew.⁹²

⁹⁰ Marion, ID, p. 177/217.

⁹¹ Marion, ID, p. 181/221.

⁹² Marion elaborates on this giftedness: “In another sense than that understood by French traditionalists, it would indeed be necessary to say that language [*langage*] comes from God, since it comes to us hierarchically in distance. . . . It is a question neither of reproducing the biblical lexicon, nor of claiming to rediscover therein a privileged semantics (the *hebraïca veritas*, from Saint Jerome to A. Chouraqui, passing through Kittel), but of receiving, at each step along the path of thought, a biblical citation or situation, as the naturally supernatural place where speech is authenticated. The place from which we speak could be, if we speak of the divine, only the *logia* where the *Logos* speaks and is incarnated” (ID, p. 182/221-222).

To speak in and as praise is to regive the gift of the *logia*. It is to traverse distance in its icon and, therefore, to participate and, indeed, dwell in the divine advance-in-withdrawal that constitutes his most intimate encounter and, finally, gives me over to myself. For this reason, it is not to predicate categorically because it is, most basically, to traverse distance in language. Such a traversal begins with the “abdication of meaning” that, through a constitutive divine anonymity, “gives to be thought the sense-less direction of an excessive signification.”⁹³ Such an abdication is necessary, first of all, in order that language recognize the depth of divine anonymity as a depth that is proper to receiving the icon as icon. For to do so is, finally, to “renounce the category and its affirmation in favour of” praise.⁹⁴ Secondly, the same distance that requires the abdication of meaning through an excess of significations requires, in turn, “the excess of meanings and the multiplication of names.”⁹⁵ Marion continues: “Because anonymous, one and the same meaning-lessness [*in-sensé*] gives rise to an infinity of praises—thus distance, now ensured of its irreducibility, can be endlessly traversed.”⁹⁶ This endless traversal is opened by an operation of language in which the requestant approaches the Requisite with a name, to be sure, but a name that does not seek to define the Requisite but, instead, to name the approach and, in so doing, offer the approach as a gift returned. Such an operation speaks in distance because it places the requestant, that is, it locates her, in the act of giving back by giving praise *as* “good, as beautiful, as wise, as loved, as God of

⁹³ Marion, ID, p. 185/225.

⁹⁴ Marion, ID, p. 186/225.

⁹⁵ Marion, ID, p. 186/225.

⁹⁶ Marion, ID, p. 186/226.

gods, as Lord of lords, as Holy of Holies, as eternal, as being, as author of the centuries, as giver of life, as wisdom, as spirit, as *Logos*, etc.”⁹⁷ Marion explains:

Praise plays the role of a language appropriate to the distance that iconically comprehends language itself. . . . [For here] Denys utilizes the operation designated by ‘as’; whence a proposition of the type ‘*x* praises the Requisite as *y*,’ where ‘as’ is . . . [equivalent] to ‘inasmuch as,’ and where the Requisite is especially not identified with *y*, which is not predicated categorically of the Requisite; *y* indicates the relation under which *x* aims at the Requisite; *y* thus presupposes distance and therefore refers back first to *x*.⁹⁸

To speak of God such that one’s speech regives the gift of revelation is to speak in distance. It is to acknowledge with one’s speech and, therefore, insofar as all thought is born in speaking, one’s thought, an anteriority more radical than the subjective anteriority that determines predication and comprehension. To praise God as . . . is to discover language itself as an iconic gift given to us, and, because of the way gifts work for Marion, a gift that, in its regiving, is constitutive of the very self who speaks.

What is crucial in this long and detailed study of Marion’s reading of Hölderlin and Denys is the manner in which the self is received in a divine anteriority. To speak of a divine anteriority is to say two things. In the first instance, it is to speak of the anteriority of the divine. In contrast to the ‘God’ who appears according to the measure of *Dasein*’s idolatrous measure, the iconic appearance of God precedes all human measure and, as a result, catches the human recipient of divine revelation by surprise. Such surprise, however, points to the second sense in which one speaks of divine anteriority.

⁹⁷ Marion, ID, p. 188/228.

⁹⁸ Marion, ID, p. 187/227. See the remainder of this important and difficult page for his elaboration on what I have summarized in reference to the whole of the Denys study and, particularly, the metaphor of the gift exchange.

Already before the subject constitutes itself intentionally, it is constituted by its relation to the divine and its subsequent displacement from itself on the horizon opened by the divine. Denys' theology of praise is central, for Marion, in establishing this second sense of divine anteriority, for to speak of praise as the mode of address to God is always to be aware that the subject is shot through with its own late arrival: even the language the *I* uses to say itself when it speaks of God is already a gift that can only be given back to God as its origin. Of course, this is no loss for the *I* but already the gain that, in being displaced and disappropriated, gives it to itself as it truly is.

2.4. Distance and Being: Donation / Givenness

We recall that for Marion the question which prompted his analysis of the idol and, subsequently, the icon was the question of the insurmountability of Being as the organizing concept for thinking about God. We also recall from the analysis given thus far that the problem of Being is the problem of a horizon which restricts God's appearance according to the conditions of possibility established by an anterior gaze. All along this path Marion has been pointing to the fundamental connection between the phenomenological notion of the horizon and the anterior gaze of the *I* who constitutes phenomena according to an intentional aim. Now, through his study of Hölderlin and Dionysius, Marion has described the logic of distance, a logic which is operative in the iconic summons of a gaze that precedes the *I* and establishes a horizon that displaces the horizon-setting aim of that *I*. In the course of these analyses, the metaphor of the gift exchange has become increasingly central. This model articulates the reciprocal

relationship in which the iconic summons is received in a response that brings to light the giving of the gift itself. At the center of this exchange is the notion of withdrawal: according to Marion, it is the unique aspect of the gift given that, in being given, its givenness withdraws behind the gift itself such that the givenness of the gift only appears in its being received as a gift. Such a reception, however, is already a counter-gift, a giving act which gives the original gift to be seen as such. With language like this we see, in the connection of the icon and distance, a horizon of appearance on which revelation will shine in its truth. This is the horizon of givenness.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that the concept of distance expresses a relation of difference between God and the world that is not reducible to the pseudo-difference established by the idol. In Chapter 1, I showed how, for Marion, this pseudo-difference of the idol culminates in the ‘doctrine of Being’ as the horizon of God’s appearance. What is crucial, therefore, is the relationship between distance and Being (thought in terms of the ontological difference). However, as Marion shows in his discussion of the difference between distance and the ontological difference, it is not enough to simply juxtapose Being and distance.⁹⁹ To establish the potential of distance in relation to Being, it is necessary to find a way to express this concept in such a way that it can be seen to displace the horizon of Being. Marion sets the stakes and the task: “To pursue distance, we took difference into view, along with its results and theory. Not having progressed thus by one step toward distance, we are looking for a certain position toward the ontological difference that does not claim in illusory fashion to withdraw

⁹⁹ See Marion, ID, pp. 200-215/249-264.

everything from that difference, but that, restraining us, allows us this result (*re-saltare*: to rebound) to accede, through it but outside it, to distance.”¹⁰⁰ To move outside of the difference of Being, Marion turns to the gift that gives Being.

The question of Being and beings can be asked, he suggests, by asking, “before a given, or a datum (for a problem, a question, an enterprise) how that given is given, and above all whether its character as a given has any relation with its manner of Being the particular being it is”?¹⁰¹ To pose such a question is to take up the stakes of Being and, therefore, of appearance, in terms of the metaphor of the gift exchange that has been introduced above. By thinking in these terms, Marion argues, it is possible to see in beings more than the organization of appearance within the reflexive fold of Being. In fact, to ask about the givenness of the given being is to catch sight of the “arrival in presence” of the “being-present,” such that one comes to see that “[m]ore essential to the present than its presence seems to be the gift of the present, or better the present that makes a present of itself.”¹⁰² Addressing Heidegger’s consideration of the *es gibt*, Marion argues that to “receive the given as given amounts finally to receiving the *giving* [donner] as the manner of the given [*donné*], no longer only as the origin or the ontic event of its presence: more than an [ontic] matter, the given is registered as a manner of Being—as

¹⁰⁰ Marion makes this claim after having reviewed the thought of Levinas and Derrida in search for a difference older than the ontological difference. While he finds important signals in their projects, he judges the thought of both to be insufficient. According to his reading, ontological difference is preserved despite the inversion of its terms (Levinas) or the generalization of them (Derrida). For this analysis see ID, pp. 215-233/264-281.

¹⁰¹ Marion, ID, p. 234/283.

¹⁰² Marion, ID, p. 234/283-284.

the manner of Being.”¹⁰³ The implication drawn from this is crucial. To take up the question of the ontological difference from the perspective of the given and, thus, to see its appearing as the appearance of a giving, not only changes our view of beings but of Being as well. This is so, as the earlier analysis of the metaphor of the gift exchange made clear, because at the heart of this givenness is the withdrawal. This withdrawal, for Marion, does not work according to the logic of reflexivity (the logic of the idol) but, rather, according to the logic of distance. He writes: “Through the giving, Being befalls being as the abandonment of the letting that abandons or gives it to itself. In this very withdrawal, it manifests its donation [*donation*].”¹⁰⁴ What is essential about this return to the gift, however, is not so much the gift as it is “the donation that gives.”¹⁰⁵ Marion suggests, therefore, that:

[o]nly a correct understanding of the giving would allow one to complete the ontological difference, but also to undo oneself from its forgetting; but that understanding requires pushing the paradox of a reciprocal belonging where, nevertheless, giving and donation do not cease to detach themselves from one another, through a detachment governed all the more by the hold of the giving over donation.¹⁰⁶

To follow ‘giving’ to ‘distance’ is to release Being from its fold. It is, therefore, to recover Being precisely as one sets it aside. Indeed, where metaphysics masked giving, given its obsession with the fact of present beings, Being was thought not only in terms of a present presence but also according to the subject whose objectifying gaze continued to fall on beings as it sought to possess them in its presence to them and to itself. By

¹⁰³ Marion, ID, p. 235/284.

¹⁰⁴ Marion, ID, p. 235/284.

¹⁰⁵ Marion, ID, p. 236/285.

¹⁰⁶ Marion, ID, p. 236/286.

drawing deeply on the logic of donation that has come to light in the notion of distance, however, the fold of ontological difference is broken open such that “as gift, Being departs from donation and this departure belongs to it as the most proper part that it could ever impart to itself.”¹⁰⁷ To speak of this proper departure is to speak of the withdrawal and to remember that, in distance, every withdrawal marks an advance of that which gives itself. The event of this advance-in-withdrawal, what Heidegger names the *Ereignis*, “completes and passes beyond the ontological difference” because it “never reaches what is proper to itself as much as in disappropriating itself, since it is in this way that it makes ‘something else’ reach what is proper to it. The *Ereignis*, in abandon, ensures the *giving*, and in the *giving* gives it to be thought.”¹⁰⁸ In this way, from the side of Being, we reach distance.

The question that remains, on the other side of this displacement of ontological difference by reference to givenness [*donation*] and its giving [*donner*], pertains to the relation of Being to God. In what manner, that is, does distance open to revelation now that it has displaced even the domain of Being? In the two books that I have been focusing on—*The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*—Marion provides two different answers to that question. On the one hand, as I have just shown, in *The Idol and Distance* he suggests that the paternal distance revealed in the Trinitarian relations (*caritas*) sets itself at a distance from the distance opened up in Being (*Ereignis*). At stake here is an understanding of the *Ereignis* as, itself, an icon of the divine withdrawal. Such an understanding enacts a tremendous reversal: under these terms Being is no longer the

¹⁰⁷ Marion, ID, p. 237/286.

¹⁰⁸ Marion, ID, p. 242/291.

instance, *par excellence*, of idolatrous reflexivity but, rather, it is an icon whose own power of manifestation comes not from the gaze that invests it, but rather from a source in which it participates but with which it has no fixable similarity. Under these terms, according to Marion, one could take up Hans Urs von Balthasar's definition of the Christian as one who "because he believes in the absolute Love of God for the world, is compelled to read Being in its ontological difference as a reference (*Verweis*) to love."¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, however, and in the analyses of *God without Being*, Marion suggests a different account of the relation of givenness and Being to God.

In *God Without Being*, Marion proposes two ways to consider the relationship of the gift to Being. On the one hand, he writes, "there is the sense of the gift that leads, in the *there is*, to the accentuating of the *it gives* starting from the giving itself, thus starting from giving insofar as it does not cease to give itself."¹¹⁰ Here, as in *The Idol and Distance*, the 'it' of the 'it gives' must remain undetermined so as to allow the giving [*donner*] itself to come forth in givenness [*donation*]. This means that we must "leave the giver in suspension."¹¹¹ Such a suspension, however, leads toward a giving that is, as Heidegger understood it, a "clearing" and, therefore, the "dominion (*Reichen*), which unfolds its clearing, unfolds it as the four-dimensional, as the Fourfold."¹¹² In contrast to *The Idol and Distance*, where Marion found the withdrawal at work in Heidegger's *es gibt* and *Ereignis*, here he finds only the Fourfold. As a result, the "gift here is of a piece with the *Fourfold* and the *Ereignis*: the gift arises from appropriation of Time to Being,

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Marion, ID, p. 249/299.

¹¹⁰ Marion, GWB, pp. 102-103/149.

¹¹¹ Marion, GWB, p. 103/149.

¹¹² Marion, GWB, p. 103/150.

hence also of being to Being—gift as appropriation, without any distance.”¹¹³ Clearly, one can no longer join von Balthasar in seeing the ontological difference as a reference to love. On the other hand, Marion wagers, “the gift can be understood starting from giving—at least, as it is accomplished by the giver.”¹¹⁴ He continues: “The gift must be understood according to giving [*donation*], but giving [*donation*] must not be understood as a pure and simple *giving* [*donner*]. Giving [*donation*] must be understood by reference to the giver.”¹¹⁵ Such a reference is necessary, Marion argues, because between the gift and the giver distance opens up. He writes:

Distance lays out the intimate gap [*l'écart*] between the giver and the gift, so that the self-withdrawal of the giver in the gift may be read on the gift, in the very fact that it refers back absolutely to the giver. Distance opens the intangible gap wherein circulate the two terms that accomplish giving in inverse directions. The giver is read on the gift, to the extent that the gift repeats the giving of the initial sending by the giving of the final sending back. The gift gives the giver to be seen, in repeating the giving backward.¹¹⁶

What is crucial to Marion here is the contrast between appropriation, on one hand, and distance, on the other. In the case of the first model, the one very closely aligned with *The Idol and Distance* and yet clearly rejected here, the emphasis is on establishing the logic of distance within a Heideggerian account of Being. Once this was done, the distance of Being could be set in a relation with paternal distance. Despite Marion’s critique, which seems quite abrupt given his careful analysis of Heidegger in *The Idol and Distance*, not to mention his explicit evocation of von Balathasar, this account of things remains

¹¹³ Marion, *GWB*, p. 104/151.

¹¹⁴ Marion, *GWB*, p. 104/151.

¹¹⁵ Marion, *GWB*, p. 104/151.

¹¹⁶ Marion, *GWB*, p. 104/151.

persuasive. Indeed, Marion's phenomenology of givenness has much in common with it. In the second model, the one advocated by *God Without Being*, givenness is understood according to distance in such a way that God, identified here as the giver, is incorporated in its logic. The route to God as love is, therefore, much more direct here. Having identified givenness according to a reference to the giver, Marion suggests that in the very unknowability of the giver, who is God, one finds a witness to the crossed-out God who crosses out Being according to a "hyperbolic *agape*."¹¹⁷ While Marion's early work seems uncertain as how best to express the relation of God, Being, and givenness, in both cases the logic of distance is recognized as that which must articulate the givenness that displaces Being. It is, finally, this idea that provides the connection with Marion's phenomenological work, at least as I see it.

2.5. Conclusion

The logic of distance stands at the center of Marion's work. This chapter argues that while 'distance' emerges in Marion's treatment of Hölderlin and Dionysius as a response to the idolatrous logic of metaphysics, he develops its metaphorical employment of a gift exchange into an account of givenness in order to displace the horizon of Being that measures and determines God's revelation. By mapping the conceptual elements of Marion's theory of distance, and by showing how it develops into a theory of givenness, I prepare the way to show how it continues to function in his phenomenology of givenness. It is this phenomenology of givenness that is the subject of the next chapter.

¹¹⁷ Marion, *GWB*, p. 106/153.

CHAPTER 3 DONATION AND REVELATION

If the Revelation of God as showing himself starting from himself alone can in fact ever take place, phenomenology must redefine its own limits and learn to pass beyond them following clear-cut and rigorous procedures.

—Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*, p. 242.

3.1. Introduction

According to Marion, phenomenology stands at a crossroads. It will either continue in its metaphysical modes of investigation, deciding in advance which phenomena have a right to appear and which do not, or it will take up the question of God and push beyond these metaphysical limitations. For him the “debate is summed up in a simple alternative: is it necessary to confine the possibility of the appearing of God to the uninterrogated and supposedly untouchable limits of one or the other figure of philosophy and phenomenology, or should we broaden phenomenological possibility to the measure of the possibility of manifestation demanded by the question of God?”¹ At the heart of this question is the notion of revelation and, therefore, the phenomenological notion of the horizon. Throughout the analysis so far, I have been arguing for the centrality of this notion of the horizon. In Marion’s essay, “The Possible and Revelation,” which was discussed in the Introduction, I showed how the horizons of Husserlian consciousness and Heideggerian Being served to block phenomenology’s access to revelation. In Chapter 1, I discussed the notion of horizon as Marion discovers and develops it in reference to a set of studies of the idol, passing from a phenomenology of the material idol to that of a

¹ Marion, BG, p. 242.

conceptual idol through the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger. This analysis culminates in Marion's reading of Heidegger, where he not only finds the phenomenological concepts to connect idolatry to the notion of the horizon, but he shows that Being itself is the greatest threat to revelation precisely because it functions as a horizon. Chapter 1 ended, however, with a look toward the icon. Here I discussed Marion's focus on the anterior summons of the iconic gaze and the manner in which it opens a space of appearance not constituted by the perspective of the *I*. In order to explore the logic of this counter-intentionality, I connected the phenomenological category of the icon to the notion of distance. In Chapter 2 I developed Marion's notion of distance. Here I showed how the notion of distance comes on the scene as an alternative horizon to that of Being. Through a careful analysis of Marion's reading of Hölderlin and Dionysius the Areopagite, I brought out the key horizontal features of the notion of distance: its positive account of the notion of 'absence' that allows for a 'withdrawal' which opens a space of appearance more anterior than that opened by the gaze of the subject; the manner in which it sees language as emerging from this anterior opening; and finally the way in which it figures subjectivity in relation to its anteriority. In the midst of this discussion, I observed how the metaphor of the gift exchange becomes more and more central in Marion's articulation of the logic of distance until, finally, in order to draw distance into an 'ontological' register, Marion transforms the horizon of distance into the horizon of the gift. Despite this transformation, I argued, the logic of distance remains determinative of the horizon of the gift. It is this argument that I take up now in reference to Marion's phenomenology of revelation.

My discussion of Marion's phenomenology of givenness is based on an analysis of his *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. In the short introductory section of this book, entitled 'Answers,' Marion introduces the central claims and themes to be addressed. His goal is to rethink Being in reference to givenness. I highlight this, from the start, not only in reference to my own argument in which I tie givenness to the concept of horizon, but also in light of his well known claims to do 'without' Being. As I have shown in the last chapter, for God to be without (*sans*) Being is for God to displace Being by placing it on a horizon that it does not determine. Phenomenologically, however, to rethink being according to givenness—to arrive at the notion of 'Being given'—necessarily involves an account of the phenomenon *as* the given and, furthermore, an account of the 'givenness' that produces, in the sense of stages, the given. He states: "'Being given'—the given is given in fact and thus attests its givenness. 'Being given' does not reconduct the given to the status of a being not yet adequately named, nor does it inscribe it in supposedly normative beingness. Rather, 'being given' discloses it as a given, owing nothing to anybody, given inasmuch as given, organized in terms of givenness and even employing 'being' therein."²

In reference to this programme, Marion spells out the tasks of his argument in *Being Given*. First, he must connect his new phenomenological principle—"So much reduction, so much givenness," to the new definition of the phenomenon as given.³ This is

² Marion, BG, p. 2.

³ For Marion's earlier discussion of this phenomenological principle see his *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998) / *Réduction et donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger, et la phénoménologie* (Paris: PUF, 1989).

the task of Bk. 1. Second, recognizing that this very language of givenness depends on the metaphor of the gift exchange, he must investigate “the given character of the gift.” What is at stake here, as he notes, is “the possibility of deploying givenness solely within the frame of reduced immanence.”⁴ This is the task of Bk. 2. Having established the definition of the phenomenon as the given, and having brought to light its essential aspects through a phenomenology of the gift, Marion turns to a definition of the given phenomenon in Bk. 3. Here he brings to light its fundamental identity as a contingent event. Bk. 4 develops that discussion with particular reference to ‘saturated phenomena’. In the course of this treatment of saturated phenomena, Marion arrives at his discussion of the phenomenon of revelation. Finally, Bk. 5 takes up the figure of subjectivity that corresponds to givenness (*l’adonné*).

I provide this summary because my particular engagement with *Being Given* focuses, first, on Marion’s discussion of givenness in Bk.1 (along with his definition of the given phenomenon in Bk. 3); secondly, in order to address his actual phenomenology of revelation, I discuss his treatment of the saturated phenomena in Bk.4. In relation to this second task, I do not intend to provide a detailed description of each of the saturated phenomena but rather to focus on Marion’s discussion of the horizon and the *I* in relation to them and, most particularly, to the phenomenon of revelation. This latter discussion will lead me to an analysis of Marion’s further treatment of the saturated phenomena in his study subsequent to *Being Given*, entitled *In Excess: Studies of*

⁴ Marion, BG, p. 3/8.

Saturated Phenomena.⁵ Throughout my analysis I argue that givenness continues to function as a horizontal concept in Marion's phenomenology and, as such, it continues to work according to the logic of distance, in which advent coincides with withdrawal and separation with communion.

3.2. Givenness and the Horizon

In his *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, Marion makes it clear that givenness is discovered by a radical employment of the phenomenological reduction.⁶ From what Marion has suggested so far about the reduction, this may come as a surprise. After all, is it not the reduction, in "The Possible and Revelation," that is precisely the problem insofar as it leads all appearance back to the *I* through the horizon and, therefore, blocks the appearance of a revelation that gives itself in and for itself? This is precisely the case, says Marion, and it is exactly why the reduction needs to be rethought. For Marion, there is indeed no phenomenology without the reduction. However, he argues that the reduction does not necessarily block the phenomenon of revelation.⁷ Thus, the first task in accounting for the nature of givenness is to discuss its relation to the phenomenological reduction.

⁵ I refer the reader to Shane Mackinlay's recent and detailed treatment of Marion's saturated phenomena in his *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

⁶ See, particularly, *Reduction and Givenness*, pp. 192-198/289-297.

⁷ In *Being Given* Marion writes: "[W]ithout the reduction, no procedure of knowledge deserves the title 'phenomenology'" (BG, p. 13/23). As I show, however, the centrality of the reduction in Marion's thought is ambiguous. On the one hand, it functions almost as a first principle while, on the other hand, this very function continues to entangle it in all the problems of subjectivity that have already been identified.

According to Marion, “phenomenology has no other goal and no other legitimacy than to attempt to reach the apparition in appearance” of the thing itself.⁸ He speaks, therefore, of the “privilege of the apparition of the thing itself at the heart of its . . . appearance—the sole truly decisive matter.”⁹ This formulation of the issue should come as no surprise: already in the Introduction I showed how he draws the essence of the religious phenomenon (as revelation) into the domain of phenomenality and lived experiences, as well as the invisible ‘inapparent’; furthermore, in his account of the icon, and then again in his discussion of givenness in relation to Being, he focuses not on the thing itself but on its appearing. Here is the first indication of something that will come up in the analysis to follow: as Marion posits givenness as the horizon which arises for a phenomenological gaze open to the question of God, he does so with an explicit focus on the structures of phenomenality and their correlative modes in the lived experiences of consciousness. A phenomenology of givenness allows us to see how the given (phenomenon) is given in its appearing. To speak of a hermeneutical ‘displacement’ of the concept of revelation, as I do in Chapter 4, is to suggest that this is not an adequate way to account for what happens when God reveals Godself.

For Marion, the question is that of apparition: the coming into appearance of that which appears. However, before moving directly to an examination of that appearing, Marion recognizes that he must be able to account for phenomenological access to it. This leads him to a discussion of the reduction. The reduction is necessary, he claims, because

⁸ Marion, BG, p. 7/14

⁹ Marion, BG, p. 8/14. He goes on: Phenomenology, he says, “claims to connect the apparitions of things in their most initial originarity to the so-to-speak native state of their unconditional manifestation in themselves, therefore starting from themselves” (BG, p. 9/15).

while phenomena give themselves, they do so in relation to human knowledge which seeks to impose upon that manifestation its own theories and dogmas. What is needed, therefore, is a method that “travels in tandem with the phenomenon, as if protecting it and clearing a path for it by eliminating roadblocks” in order to “let lived experiences bring about as much as possible the appearing of what manifests itself as and through them.”¹⁰ Marion recognizes the strange nature of this claim: it seems that to posit a methodological act of knowledge that is meant to prevent knowledge from blocking our access to the manifestation of the phenomenon is to talk in circles. Marion’s response to this brings to light an ambiguity in his work that needs to be discussed at this point. On the one hand, he makes a case for an understanding of the reduction in which it works not to constitute phenomena but to allow them to appear as given after the fact of their appearance. To this end, he uses the metaphor of a stage director. He writes:

The reduction must be done in order to undo it and let it become the apparition of what shows *itself* in it, though finally without it. Or rather, the reduction opens the show of the phenomenon at first like a very present director, so as to then let this show continue as a simple scene where the director is necessary, to be sure, but forgotten and making no difference—with the result that, in the end, the phenomenon so dominates the scene that it is absorbed in it and no longer distinguished from it: self-directing.¹¹

This metaphor, however, sits uneasily with what he goes on to say about the reduction. In contrast to his claim that the “reduction does nothing” and, certainly, “does not so much provoke the apparition of what manifests itself,”¹² he goes on to describe the work of the reduction in very active and, indeed, constitutive terms. In his section dedicated to a

¹⁰ Marion, BG, pp. 8-9/15.

¹¹ Marion, BG, p. 10/17.

¹² Marion, BG, p. 10/17.

discussion of the fourth principle of phenomenology, the one he himself advances in *Reduction and Givenness*, he argues that what “phenomenologically validates a phenomenon as an absolutely given is therefore not its mere appearing but its reduced character: only the reduction grants access to absolute givenness, and it has no other goal than this.”¹³ And again: “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.”¹⁴ Far from the reduction ‘doing nothing,’ it is invested here with the job of making given phenomena appear. Insofar as this method enacts such an active and productive task, it faces a very serious difficulty, one that points very clearly to a precise concern that Marion has already raised in reference to phenomenology’s relation to divine revelation. If the reduction actually “validates” the appearance of given phenomena by “granting access to absolute givenness,” that is, if a “phenomenon becomes absolutely given only to the degree” that it is reduced and, thus, ‘made’ a given phenomenon by the methodological reduction, the reduction seems to play the role of a first principle very much like that of the principle of sufficient reason. In relation to this, Christina Gschwandtner discusses a concern held by Natalie Depraz who argues that Marion turns the reduction into an “obligatory procedure” and therefore “step[s] outside primary phenomenology.” In fact, Depraz claims that by “making the reduction a founding phenomenon Marion is led back

¹³ Marion, BG, p. 14/24.

¹⁴ Marion, BG, p. 15/25.

into the scholastic sterility that Heidegger condemned under the name ‘ontotheology.’”¹⁵ While Gschwandtner disagrees with this assessment, it is worth noting that only pages earlier in her own analysis of Marion’s employment of the reduction she writes: “By making reduction an absolute principle, something [Marion] contends Husserl’s own definitions of the basic principles of phenomenology justify, we can move beyond these metaphysical restrictions to a point where phenomena can give themselves purely and unconditionally.”¹⁶ It seems, by Gschwandtner’s own admission, that Marion’s reduction bears within it a significant ambiguity.¹⁷ There is, however, a further problem. Later, in Marion’s analysis of the painting, where the concept of givenness is articulated positively for the first time, he suggests that givenness arises most powerfully in “a new class of phenomena reduced to givenness by themselves.”¹⁸ This new class of phenomena allows him to claim, in fact, that “givenness itself reduces,” that in certain phenomena “the derealization of bracketing” comes about from a “spontaneous reduction” enacted by the appearance of the phenomenon itself.¹⁹ Such a suggestion further muddies the methodological discussion of the reduction. Without a doubt, this notion falls more naturally into line with the metaphor of the director in which a phenomenological method (a “counter-method,” Marion says) simply prepares the way for what consciousness will

¹⁵ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 65. The quotation is from Natalie Depraz, “Gibt es eine Gebung des Unendlichen?” in *Perspektiven der Philosophie*, ed. Rudolph Berlinger (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 112-113. Depraz continues this line of questioning in her review of *Étant Donnée* in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* Octobre-Décembre 2000, 4, pp. 564-568.

¹⁶ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 60.

¹⁷ Marion responds to this in *In Excess*: “The principle of phenomenology, ‘As much reduction, as much givenness,’ as fundamental as it remains, has nothing of the character of a foundation, or even a first principle. Instead, it offers a *last* principle” (IE, p. 25/30).

¹⁸ Marion, BG, p. 52/77.

¹⁹ Marion, BG, p. 52/77.

undergo in response to the phenomena. Here we recall the idea that the reduction must be done in order that it be undone by the phenomenon itself which takes the initiative of its appearing. However, a 'spontaneous reduction' effected by the phenomenon itself seems to call into question the need for a methodological appeal to the reduction. If phenomena derealize themselves, such that they present themselves as they are given, phenomenology's mode of access would depend on accessing this mode of derealization *in the phenomenon* far more so than validating phenomena as given or making them appear as such.

The stakes of this discussion need to be clarified because they pertain to the status of givenness as a horizon. If givenness comes about because of something the reduction does to phenomena, even after the fact of their appearance, one rightfully describes the methodology, itself, as constitutive of givenness. In this case, givenness is a correlative category of the reduction and thus an epistemological designation: the given phenomenon appears as the particular kind of lived experience of consciousness produced by the reduction. This production is called givenness. With this view of the relation between the reduction and givenness, however, givenness does not function as a horizon in the manner that it does in Marion's account of it in *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being*. This discontinuity is due to the introduction of a methodological or, as I just said, an epistemological notion of the reduction. On the other hand, if the reduction functions in line with Marion's metaphor of the director and the identification of phenomena that reduce themselves—which are, for that reason, exemplary phenomena—then the reduction is seen as a means of access to a horizon of appearance in which phenomena

give themselves. I introduce this discussion not so much because I doubt which of these options Marion wants—though whether his Husserlian methodology allows it or not is, of course, the question) and ultimately sides with, but because the ambiguity raises some crucial issues for his phenomenology. First, if the reduction to givenness is, in fact, the means of phenomenological access to the horizon in which phenomena truly appear, it stands in opposition to former phenomenological claims to have accessed that horizon, claims made by Husserl (objectness) and Heidegger (Being). Therefore, not only does Marion have to describe the logic of givenness as a horizon but he has to explain why it is the true horizon of appearance or, at least, the horizon of appearance that contains and displaces the horizons of objectness and Being. Second, in reference to my hermeneutical response to Marion, this opens the door to a challenge precisely at the level of horizon. I argue, in fact, that while Marion and Ricoeur agree that the notion of horizon is very much at issue in a discussion of revelation, Ricoeur's claim is that a 'pure' phenomenology of the type offered by Marion is blocked from accessing that horizon by its commitment to a philosophy of consciousness. Third, as long as the reduction is not a principle imposed by a constituting subject but, rather, a means of access to givenness provoked by givenness itself, which opens the eyes of the phenomenological gaze, so to speak, the reduction must occur in tandem with particular modes of subjectivity. Here lies the important connection between divine revelation and selfhood.

If givenness is to be accessed as the horizon of phenomenal appearance, a horizon, in fact, that is opened by bringing thought to bear on the question of God and therefore the logic of distance, it is necessary to identify it and to say what givenness gives when it

gives. This is not, however, an easy task. As one might expect, *if* givenness names the logic of a horizon, just as distance did earlier, givenness itself does not appear but only gives phenomena to appear according to its horizontal anteriority. In fact, Marion argues that “[g]ivenness can only appear indirectly, in the fold of the given (as objectness in its connection with the object, as Being in the difference from beings). It therefore should be read starting from and on the surface of a given.”²⁰ What is needed, then, is a phenomenon whose most authentic self-showing will show the givenness that brings it to appearance. In finding this exemplary phenomenon, it is possible to bring to light both the appearance of the phenomenon as it genuinely shows itself (the given) *and* the coordinates of the horizon on which it is given (givenness). Like Hölderlin and Heidegger before him, Marion remains committed to an ontic approach to that which gives the ontic its space of appearance. Unlike Heidegger, however, he does not go to *Dasein* as his exemplary phenomenon but, rather, to the painting.²¹

Before discussing the painting as such an exemplary phenomenon, it is necessary to note another ambiguity in Marion’s project, one that is connected to his commitment to apparition. From the beginning of the dissertation I have been arguing that Marion’s thought is dedicated to staging a confrontation between philosophy and the ‘question of God.’ In the Introduction I discussed two essays in which the ‘religious phenomenon’ was

²⁰ Marion, BG, p. 39/61.

²¹ Heidegger writes: “If the question about Being is to be explicitly formulated and carried through in such a manner as to be completely transparent to itself, then any treatment of it in line with the elucidations we have given requires us to explain how Being is to be looked at, how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped; it requires us to prepare the way for choosing the right entity for our example, and to work out the genuine way of access to it.” See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p.26.

equated with phenomenality *par excellence*. In turn, I open this present chapter with a quotation from *Being Given* that calls for nothing less than the broadening of “phenomenological possibility to the measure of the possibility of manifestation demanded by the question of God.” It is curious then, to say the least, that when he needs to identify an exemplary phenomenon he chooses a painting.²² While his rationale for this choice certainly makes sense, this choice brings to light something which has, until now, been only indirectly indicated. First, though, his rationale: “It is by design that I do not take on an overly remarkable phenomenon—man or Dasein, the Other, the sublime, the divine or the supreme being—but a trivial one. . . . My motive is obvious. Since I seek to establish that one phenomenon, indeed all phenomena, even those as ordinary as possible, belong under the jurisdiction of givenness, I should work on an indisputably visible item—the painting.”²³ As obvious as this motive may be, it also brings to light the fact that Marion’s thought about divine revelation has, from the beginning, been carried out in an aesthetic register. We need only recall, for example, the idol / icon pairing and the crucial articulation of the logic of distance in terms of Hölderlin’s aesthetics. I bring this up, here, not by way of criticism but only to flag the centrality of aesthetic categories in Marion’s thought and to suggest that his choice of the painting is by no means as innocent as he suggests. He even indicates this, perhaps despite himself, in the last sentence of the above quotation: because he wants to lead phenomenality back to givenness he takes it for

²² And this is not the first time he has looked at the visibility of the painting as a privileged example of phenomenality. In his Preface to *The Crossing of the Visible*, he stated: “The exceptional visibility of the painting has thus become a privileged case of the phenomenon, and therefore one possible route to a consideration of phenomenality in general” (Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, p. ix/7).

²³ Marion, BG, pp. 39-40/61.

granted that he must draw on an example that privileges visibility. Perhaps, given his treatment of saturation in terms of intuition and his construal of phenomenology's task as pertaining to apparition, it is that a thoroughly visible phenomenon lends itself more easily to being located within the horizon of givenness. If nothing else, this should make us cautious of his claims to the exemplarity of the painting.²⁴

Marion's claim, with all caution duly noted, is the following: "If this phenomenon, the banal painting, can be led back to the visibility of a purely given given, then all ordinary phenomenality, whose paradigm it would be, could also be reduced to a given."²⁵ In this case, then, what *is* given in the painting? What does the painting give that opens its particular appearance as a mode of access to the horizon of givenness? If Dasein, in its very questioning concerning its own being, opens the question of Being, what does the painting show that opens the question of givenness? Contrary to the reductions of Husserl and Heidegger, the painting shows itself neither in its objectness nor in its Being. Rather, it gives itself when it gives its *effect* (l'effet). For Marion, what must be added to the "ontic visibility" of the painting is its "super-visibility, ontically indescribable—its upsurge. This exceptional visibility adds nothing real to the ordinary visibility, but it imposes it as such, no longer to my representational sight, but to me, in the flesh, in person, without screen For it is no longer a matter of seeing what is, but

²⁴ From an openly critical perspective, see Kathryn Tanner's comments about Marion's construal of givenness in terms of a "hyper-Kantian view of art for art's sake" in her "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," pp. 213-218.

²⁵ Marion, BG, p. 40/61-62.

of seeing its coming up into visibility—a coming up that has nothing ontic about it.”²⁶ In order to articulate this he turns, first, to the writings of Cézanne who argues that “the effect constitutes the painting” and this means that its “appearing always has the rank and function not of a representation submitted to the imperial initiative of the gaze of consciousness, but of an event whose happening stems not so much from a form or from real . . . colors as from an upsurging, a coming-up, an arising—in short, an effect.”²⁷ Turning to Kandinsky, he articulates this further. The issue is not only a physical effect, produced by the color and form of the painting, but, with and beyond this “elementary effect” is produced “a more profound one, which carries with it an emotion of the soul.”²⁸ Employing a Cartesian conceptuality, Marion interprets Kandinsky’s reference to the emotion of the soul in terms of a “passion of the soul” in which the soul vibrates “with vibrations that evidently represent neither an object nor a being and which cannot themselves be described or represented in the mode of objects or beings.”²⁹ Such an effect, Marion argues, “is not produced in the mode of an object, nor is it constituted or reconstituted in the mode of beings. It gives itself [*Il se donne*].”³⁰ He continues:

The painting (and, in and through it, every other phenomenon in different degrees) is reduced to its ultimate phenomenality insofar as it gives its effect. . . . In the end, for every reduced being, all that remains is the effect, such that in it the visible is given, is reduced to a given. The painting is not visible; it makes visible.

²⁶ Marion, BG, pp. 47-48/71. Marion also speaks of the “ascent into visibility itself, the entry of the unseen through the pictorial frame into sight, in short the appearing and its process in the raw” (BG, p. 49/73).

²⁷ Marion, BG, p. 49/73.

²⁸ Marion, BG, p. 50/74.

²⁹ Marion, BG, pp. 50-51/75.

³⁰ Marion, BG, p. 51/76.

It makes visible in a gesture that remains by definition invisible—the effect, the upsurge, the advance of givenness [*se donner*].³¹

The painting, as exemplary phenomenon, brings to light in its ontic manifestation the truth of its appearance—that it is given. Furthermore, in bringing this to light, it points to the concepts that organize its horizon. The aesthetic notion of effect is phenomenologically articulated in reference to the notions of an upsurge, an advance, and an event. To draw this analysis into an analysis of givenness itself, it is necessary to turn to Marion's discussion in Bk. 3 of *Being Given*.

When Marion articulates his notion of distance as the horizon opened by divine revelation, he describes the manner in which distance plays itself out in its players: first, in relation to the trinitarian enactment and, subsequently, in the creaturely enactment of responsive praise. As Marion now seeks to articulate a phenomenological account of givenness as horizon, he continues to develop the notion of givenness that emerges from the logic of distance. Just as distance does not give itself to be defined directly but rather appears in the reflections of its enactments, so does the horizon of givenness come to appearance on the surface of given phenomena.³² Marion has just shown one, privileged,

³¹ Marion, BG, pp. 51-52/76-77.

³² This logic is captured well in the following statement, from *The Idol and Distance*: “[Distance] gives rise to an indefinite succession of definitions, which are linked to one another without any closure ever being able to exhaust the subject. Neither a subject of discourse, nor an object of science, distance removes itself from definition by definition. . . . For distance opens the separation that unites only on the basis of a term that is discovered there, or better that discovers there its own horizon: distance is discovered only like a path is cleared, starting from a site, but not like one reads an itinerary on a map, in the elsewhere of a neutralized representation” (ID, p. 199/248-249). Analogously, givenness can only be defined by a definition that is, itself, given on the surface of the givens that it brings to light. As with distance, one names it and determines concepts that support its articulation, but because it is a horizon which gives to be seen, it can only be disclosed in what it gives to be seen. This does not remove it from a rigorous treatment but requires that the rigor of its treatment be in tune with what is accounted for.

example of this in the painting. His argument, I recall, is that the privilege of the painting marks not its uniqueness but, rather, its exemplarity. In order to move to an account of how phenomenality as whole is inscribed within the horizon of givenness, it is necessary to move beyond this aesthetic example and look at his definition of the phenomenon according to givenness.

In Thomas Carlson's important analysis of the notion of givenness, both in his book entitled *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* and his Translator's Introduction to *The Idol and Distance*,³³ he develops the important connection between givenness and 'the call' in Marion's work. I discuss this connection in more detail later in this chapter. For now, however, I raise a caution: by focusing the discussion of givenness in terms of its relation to the call and response of the receiver, it may be that the connection of givenness with the notion of event is overlooked. Without disagreeing with Carlson's connection of givenness to the call/response structure of its reception, I think it is necessary to take up Marion's analysis in Bk. 3 of *Being Given* in order to explore 'the given' (phenomenon) and, therefore, givenness in terms of the event. I argue that the category of the event is crucial because, through it, what Marion means when he speaks about the *self* of what shows *itself* becomes clear and, in that clarity, points to a fundamental connection between givenness and distance.³⁴

³³ Thomas A. Carlson, "Converting the Given into the Seen: Introductory Remarks on Theological and Phenomenological Vision," in ID, pp. xi-xxxii.

³⁴ Shane Mackinlay rightly notes that Marion's account of givenness entails "two complementary subclaims" in which, first, Marion argues that the "phenomenon does not depend on anything external to it for its appearance" and, second, "that what gives and shows a phenomenon is the phenomenon itself," indeed, that the initiative of such showing can be localized in the the "*self*" of a phenomenon (Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, p. 16). He goes on to suggest, however, that while Marion "explicitly refers to such a

Marion develops his definition of the phenomenon as given in terms of five categories of appearance: *anamorphosis*, *l'arrivage* (translated by Kosky as “unpredictable landing”), the *fait accompli*, the incident, and the event. At the center of Marion’s treatment of these five categories is the notion of contingency. For him, contingency is not a logical category set in opposition to necessity but, rather, a phenomenological category which describes that which touches me, “what reaches me and therefore arrives to me,” what “falls upon me from above.”³⁵ According to its essential contingency, Marion argues, the “phenomenon appears to the degree to which first it goes, pushes, and extends as far as me (it becomes contiguous with me; it enters into contact with me) so as to then affect me (act on me, modify me).”³⁶ In the language already familiar to us from the example of the painting, he concludes: “It makes a difference solely by its coming up. To see it, it must first be endured, borne, suffered.”³⁷ What is crucial, for Marion, about the idea of contingency is that it articulates—in the language of phenomenality—the logic of a gift’s appearance, once ‘gift’ is understood outside the conditions of economic exchange. What these conditions hide, according to his argument, is that the gift is born from an experience of “giveability” and “acceptability/receivability.” In both cases, the gift makes a claim on the giver (giveability) and the givee (acceptability/receivability) and it is this ‘making a claim upon’ that Marion

‘self’ on many occasions . . . he never specifies exactly what this self is” (p.17). While I agree completely with Mackinlay’s assessment of the two-sided structure of Marion’s argument, I intend to show that Marion does offer a very careful analysis of this notion of the phenomenon’s *self* and that, in fact, this notion is crucial to understanding givenness.

³⁵ Marion, BG, p. 125/177.

³⁶ Marion, BG, p. 125/177.

³⁷ Marion, BG, p. 125/177.

carries over into the domain of phenomenality when he draws together ‘what shows itself’ with ‘what gives itself’.³⁸

The phenomenon’s essential contingency is attested first in its *anamorphosis*. This notion designates the manner in which the phenomenon arises into view by taking form according to the demand *it* places on the viewer. Marion writes: “To accede to it, not only must a gaze know how to become curious, available, and enacted, but above all it must know how to submit to the demands of the figure to be seen.”³⁹ To meet such a demand is to “renounce organizing visibility on the basis of free choice or the proper site of a disengaged spectator, in favor of letting visibility be dictated by the phenomenon itself, in itself.”⁴⁰ Secondly, to renounce the task of constitution and to prepare myself to bear what ‘falls upon’ me, is to recognize the phenomenon as *l’arrivage*: that which comes upon me “according to discontinuous rhythms, in fits and starts, unexpectedly, by surprise, detached each from the other, in bursts, aleatory.”⁴¹ Thirdly, as the given phenomenon

³⁸ Regarding “givability” Marion writes: “Givability characterizes certain phenomena in certain circumstances of appearing not as a passive potential . . . but as a positive potentiality: this phenomenon appears in such a way that it demands, of itself, passing to the state of gift, of giving *itself*. Givability does not merely permit the gift to give itself; it demands it—the gift as (the) about to be given” (BG, p. 107). Likewise, concerning “acceptability/receivability,” he explains: “The gift is perfectly accomplished when I—the givee—resolve myself to receive it. Its performance stems more from my decision to accept it than from the availability of its incidental object. There is more: this decision is one that I suffer as much as I make, since it depends first on the mode of the gift’s appearing. . . . The debate does not take place between my neutral free will and the neutral object, but between my gaze seeing the phenomenon given and the receivability of its appearing” (BG, p. 110/158).

³⁹ Marion, BG, p. 124/176.

⁴⁰ Marion, BG, p. 124/176.

⁴¹ Marion, BG, p. 132/186. Marion explains further: “Our initiative is limited to remaining ready to receive the shock of its anamorphosis, ready to take a beating from its unpredictable landing [*l’arrivage*]. The powerlessness to stage the phenomenon, which compels us to await it and be vigilant, can be understood as our abandoning the decisive role in appearing to the phenomenon itself” (p. 132/186).

comes upon me it does so as *fact*, marked by its *fait accompli*. This character of the *fait accompli* opens the factual dimension of the phenomenon's appearance. Marion writes:

Facticity does not consist in my being reducible to the factuality of a fact, but in exposing me to the fact, which can thus be accomplished only by weighing on me, no longer as a detached observer but as an engaged actor—or better, a critical patient into whom the fact has crashed in being visibly accomplished. . . . Its *fait accompli* arrives to me from above; it is a fact made *for* me, not *by* me, but at my expense.⁴²

Without yet arriving at a discussion of the call/response structure in which givenness appears in relation to the figure of subjectivity that it brings to light, we see the manner in which each aspect of the phenomenon's definition articulates the fundamental contingency of what appears according to givenness. This is particularly the case with the fourth notion. Marion writes: "As it is accomplished only with the end and the fact, the given phenomenon must therefore fall on and arrive to consciousness in order to come to itself. Following the path toward its final appearing, it is defined by its obscure movements and appears only when it finishes, by falling upon what receives and then sees it. This process of the phenomenon authorizes me to think it as the incident."⁴³ The notion of the incident makes clear what I was arguing earlier concerning the relation of the given to givenness. Because givenness, as the horizon of appearing, does not appear directly, it is discernable only in the trace it leaves on that which it gives to appear. In the case of the incident, we see the given phenomenon appearing only insofar as it arrives on the screen of consciousness. Its contingency affects not only the one on and for whom it arrives, but it defines the phenomenon itself. In its arrival the phenomenon shows itself.

⁴² Marion, BG, p. 146/207.

⁴³ Marion, BG, p. 151/213.

What is crucial, though, is that in this showing it also shows the mark of its emergence. It shows its givenness, the horizon from whence it appears, by showing *itself*. This notion of the *self* of the phenomenon leads Marion to the final aspect of his definition of the phenomenon: the event.

Reminding us that his strategy has been to connect the logic of ‘showing itself’ (phenomenality) to that of ‘giving itself’ (determined in Bk. 2 according to the notions of givability and acceptability/receivability), he suggests that what is crucial is the *self* of the phenomenon.⁴⁴ He argues, in fact, that the “*self* of the phenomenon is marked in its determination as event. It comes, does its thing, and leaves on its own; showing *itself*, it also shows the *self* that takes (or removes) the initiative of giving *itself*.”⁴⁵ Anamorphosis discloses the phenomenon’s “perseity.” *L’arrivage* figures its “individuation.” The *fait accompli* accomplishes the factual space of its contingency and the phenomenon’s character as incident allows it, finally, to appear upon the screen of the consciousness which receives it. It is in its character of event, however, that these four moments are gathered together. Here, in the disclosure of the *self* of the phenomenon, the phenomenon’s own initiative is brought to light. The event shows “the *self* that takes (or removes) the initiative of giving itself.”⁴⁶ At the height of his definition of the given

⁴⁴ Marion, BG, p. 159/225.

⁴⁵ Marion, BG, pp. 159-160/225.

⁴⁶ Marion, BG, p. 160/226. I find it curious that Gschwandtner’s treatment of the givenness of the phenomenon includes only a discussion of the first four figures of Marion’s definition and passes over the figure of the event completely. In fact, to say this difficult notion in Marion’s work is treated rather briefly by Gschwandtner would be an understatement. She summarizes his concept of givenness in one sentence: “Givenness designates the pure phenomenological act of self-giving” (Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, p. 69). As brief as it is, however, her reading seems to support an account of givenness that is,

phenomenon Marion leaves us with two very difficult notions. First, he claims that the phenomenon has a *self* and, second, that in that *self*, the phenomenon exercises the *initiative* of giving itself. It is difficult to know what such claims could mean. Before directing this difficulty to its proper site, two possibilities must be considered. On the one hand, givenness, as the condition for the possibility of this initiative, could be read as a sneaky way of accomplishing a metaphysical recovery of a hidden (first) principle—maybe even a divine one—that is responsible for the manifestation of the world. It might even be ‘magical’ as Ricard accuses.⁴⁷ On the other hand, if it is not magical or metaphysical, givenness may instead be radically metaphorical. In this case, appeals to givenness would be heuristic and givenness itself would function as models function in science. There is no doubt that givenness is thoroughly metaphorical—as Marion himself even admits from time to time: “The staging of the phenomenon is played out *as* the handing over of a gift.”⁴⁸ I also recall the manner in which his appeals to the gift and givenness emerged in the first place. However, Marion’s treatment does not show an awareness of its metaphorical nature in a self-reflective way and therefore it is unlikely that he intends to use the concept metaphorically.⁴⁹ There is, of course, one other option: that givenness signals the horizon according to which phenomena appear and, in so doing,

according to my earlier discussion, epistemological. It is also begs the question: what does ‘self-giving’ mean?

⁴⁷ See Marie-Andrée Ricard, “La question de la donation chez Jean-Luc Marion” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 57 (2001), pp. 83-94 and, particularly, pp. 89-92.

⁴⁸ Marion, BG, p. 27/42.

⁴⁹ Indeed, the lack of Marion’s awareness of the thoroughly metaphorical nature of his project is, at times, surprising. For an analysis of Marion’s failure to take into account the linguistic basis of his concepts see Jocelyn Benoist, “L’écart plutôt que l’excédent” *Philosophie: Jean-Luc Marion* 78 (2003), pp. 77-93. See also Gschwandtner’s analysis of it in *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 261-262, n. 19.

locates itself in relation to Being as having the capacity to describe, universally, phenomenality. I believe this to be Marion's argument and I think it is precisely in reference to the difficult notion of the *self* of the phenomenon that this argument can be made.

I noted earlier my agreement with Mackinlay's privileging of Marion's notion of the phenomenon's *self*. I also claimed that such a notion is crucial to identifying what Marion means by givenness. At the end of Bk. 1, Marion claims that it "belongs to the phenomenon considered in its essential phenomenality to manifest itself only as given: namely, as keeping the trace, more or less accentuated in each case, of its process of arising into appearing, in short its givenness."⁵⁰ Each phenomenon, some to a greater degree than others, comes forth with the trace of its givenness upon it. For Marion, this trace attests to the *self* of the phenomenon insofar as the *self* "consists in the gap [*l'écart*] that distinguishes and connects the arising (givenness) to its given. What arises into appearing does so under the pressure of givenness and laden with this move."⁵¹ This is a very significant claim. With the notion of the 'gap' [*l'écart*] Marion connects the logic of givenness with the logic of distance. Indeed, with this connection between 'self' and 'separation' [*l'écart*], there follows an important connection between the manner in which Marion uses *self* in reference to the phenomenon and the manner in which he used the notion of *person* in reference to the icon. In *The Idol and Distance* he writes: "The icon manifests neither the human face nor the divine nature that no one could envisage but, as the theologians of the icon said, the relation of the one to the other in the hypostasis, the

⁵⁰ Marion, BG, p. 68/101.

⁵¹ Marion, BG, p. 70/102.

person. The icon conceals and reveals that upon which it rests: the separation [*l'écart*] in it between the divine and its face.⁵² In *In Excess*, he discusses this further. He argues that, in the relationship between what gives itself and what shows itself, the “same *self* that one would identify in the phenomenon showing *itself* would proceed from the original *self* of what gives itself. More clearly, the *self* of the phenomenalization would manifest indirectly the *self* of givenness, because the latter would operate it and, in the end, become one with it.”⁵³ Having just seen the connection between the phenomenon’s *self* and the separation (*l'écart*) constitutive of appearance, it is possible to read Marion’s argument as follows: the advance-in-withdrawal that is constitutive of the phenomenon’s appearance and that comes to light there (as its *self*) proceeds from an always already more primordial withdrawal that establishes the horizon of givenness *itself*. To say, therefore, that each phenomenon, in its appearance (its *selfhood*) bears the mark of the *self* of givenness, is to say that each phenomenon comes forward in its very withdrawal and, in bearing the mark of that withdrawal (once again, its *self*), it bears the mark of the primordial withdrawal that is the horizon of appearance as such. I believe that the connections here to distance, and the logic of advance-in-withdrawal that it names, become evident in Marion’s treatment of the phenomenon of birth. It is precisely birth whose absence gives itself to such an extent that, even though no phenomenon appears, givenness is indicated all the more. He writes: “One can formalize this aporia by suggesting that my birth shows me precisely the fact that my origin does not show itself,

⁵² Marion, ID, p. 8/23.

⁵³ Marion, IE, p. 31/36.

or that it only shows itself in this very impossibility of appearing; in short, that only in this way is the ‘ . . . *original non-originality of the origin*’ attested.”⁵⁴

It would be tempting at this point, in conclusion, to identify givenness with the event. For Marion, however, what is crucial is the precise logic that is operative in givenness as event or, perhaps better, in thinking the event *as* givenness. This is why I have been arguing that givenness must be understood in connection to distance. It is why I have been marshalling my case for a continuity between Marion’s first treatment of the problem of the horizon in reference to metaphysical and postmetaphysical forms of idolatry. It is also why I spend so many pages analysing his treatments of Hölderlin and Dionysius. Most presently, this is why Marion continues to distinguish his account of the event from that of Heidegger. Thus along with his work in both *The Idol and Distance* and *God Without Being* where he distinguishes distance from the ontological difference it is necessary to consider Marion’s rejection of Heidegger’s displacement of givenness by the *Ereignis* in Bk. 1 of *Being Given*. He points out that “Heidegger admits that if only beings are and if Being itself is not, Being can be thought only as it is given—taken in a givenness.”⁵⁵ This is so, he continues, “because givenness, from the very first time it is described [by Heidegger], allows us to read the most essential trait of Being in its

⁵⁴ Marion, IE, p. 42/49-50. The reference here is to the work of Claude Romano. In support of my reading of this argument in relation to givenness/distance as horizon I record Romano’s own statement concerning birth: “Both by right and by fact, birth is the first event of any eventual hermeneutics; it is the original and inaugural event from which and in light of which all other events can in turn be characterised. It is this primary event—which is also the first event—that opens an *advenant*’s world for the first time and that alone gives rise to all the events that comes after it.” See *Event and World*, trans. Shane Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 69-70.

⁵⁵ Marion, BG, p. 35/54.

difference from beings, its withdrawal.”⁵⁶ And further: “What absolutely must be conceived is that the withdrawal of the giving (gift giving) does not contradict, as if after the fact and from the outside, the leaving that brings the gift given, but rather is one with it: to give the gift, the giving must withdraw ‘in favor of the gift.’”⁵⁷ All of this is Marion’s analysis of Heidegger’s position. The very logic being described here depends, Marion goes on to argue, on the anonymity of the event of givenness. Heidegger, however, betrays this anonymity by inserting, as an explanatory principle, the notion of the *Ereignis*. Marion writes: “Heidegger acknowledges givenness beyond or outside Being only to immediately misconstrue it by supposing that it still only gives (itself) on this side of the *Ereignis* and under its aegis. Givenness to be sure, but only as a brief transition between Being and *Ereignis*, a mere relay, provisional.”⁵⁸ The question, then, is how to interpret this criticism. According to the argument I’ve been advancing, one interprets it as follows: Heidegger discovers and articulates an authentic logic of givenness, what Marion himself articulates according to the notion of distance, thanks to the world of Hölderlin and Dionysius. This notion of givenness articulates a horizon in which alterity and transcendence are welcomed under the figure of a withdrawal that is, simultaneously and productively, an advance. However, by conceptually determining that horizon in terms of *Ereignis*, a notion already deeply determined by the logic of Being and its reflexive fold (note the parenthetical addition of “itself” in the above quotation), Heidegger recoils from givenness and opts, instead, for Being. Marion’s goal, on the

⁵⁶ Marion, BG, p. 35/54.

⁵⁷ Marion, BG, p. 35/55.

⁵⁸ Marion, BG, p. 37/57.

other hand, is to displace Being as the horizon from whence all phenomena emerge, including the phenomena of revelation, with the horizon of givenness. To identify givenness with event is, therefore, insufficient. It must be drawn back into connection with distance and allowed to displace Being itself as a horizon that does not measure the divine appearance but, on the contrary, finds itself constituted by that most impossible possibility. The question that now remains is how this account of givenness bears on the phenomenon of revelation.

3.3. Saturation and the Phenomenon of Revelation

I have argued that Marion's phenomenology of revelation seeks to make a space for phenomena that cannot be constituted by an *I* according to the coordinates of its perceptual horizon. Or, beyond the epistemological level at which this was left by Husserl, a phenomenology can have access to the revealed phenomena of religion only insofar as the idolatrous horizon of Being is displaced by a horizon opened by the question the God. I have just suggested that this is precisely the point of Marion's phenomenology of givenness. What remains to be examined is how Marion's notion of saturation sits with his notion of givenness. The nature of this relationship is by no means obvious, for two reasons. First, the ambiguities that I have pointed out regarding the status of givenness in Marion's thought can lead this notion away from the horizontal arguments I have made. Obviously, then, depending on how one understands givenness, one will understand the relation of givenness to saturation accordingly. There is another reason why the notion of saturation is bound to sit somewhat uneasily with that of

givenness: Marion arrives at an understanding of givenness in conversation with both Heidegger and Husserl (and I'm claiming *moreso* with Heidegger) while his definition of saturation and the saturated phenomenon emerges from a much more limited discussion of not only Husserl, but also Kant. My question, then, is this: by defining saturation in terms of the relationship between intuition and intention, which Marion does because Kant and Husserl posit their definition of the phenomenon in these terms, does the saturated phenomenon of revelation appear according to the logic of givenness, and therefore distance, or does it remain trapped in the interplay between intuition and intention?

Bk. 4 of *Being Given* is largely an expanded, revised, and corrected version of "The Saturated Phenomenon," the essay delivered by Marion at the 1992 seminar which was discussed in the Introduction. As in that essay, Marion sets out to account for a form of phenomenality that is irreducible to the metaphysical restrictions placed on phenomenality under the terms of possibility and impossibility. In order to assess the definition of the phenomenon that he must overcome, the one, that is, that is determined by metaphysical restrictions, he turns to an examination of Kant's and Husserl's definition of the phenomenon. It is Kant, after all, who accomplishes the "close connection . . . between possibility and phenomenality" by defining possibility as: "That which agrees with [*übereinkommt*] the formal conditions of experience, that is, with the conditions of intuition and of concepts."⁵⁹ Already in this definition the pair intuition/concept is put into play. In fact, these formal conditions are not, as Marion notes,

⁵⁹ Quoted in Marion, BG, p. 181/253.

the conditions of the appearance of the phenomenon, but rather the conditions of knowledge. He continues: “This is to say that intuition and the concept determine in advance the possibility of appearing for every phenomenon. The possibility—therefore also and especially the impossibility—of a phenomenon is decreed according to the ‘power of knowledge,’ therefore the play of intuition and the concept in a finite mind.”⁶⁰ When Marion turns to the definitions of the phenomenon given by Kant and Husserl he finds them given in terms of a relationship between intuition and concepts in which it is assumed that intuition “remains essentially deficient, poor, needful, indigent—*penia*.”⁶¹ As a result, the “phenomenon is therefore characterized, according to Husserl and Kant, by its lack of intuition, which gives it only by limiting it.”⁶² This definition is accomplished, he continues, “by a de-finition: phenomena are given in and through an intuition, but this intuition remains finite—either as sensible (Kant) or as lacking or ideal (Husserl).”⁶³

For Marion, “only one question remains: must the common definition of phenomenon be reversed?”⁶⁴ That is, “[t]o the phenomenon supposedly poor in intuition, can’t we oppose a phenomenon saturated with intuition?” Indeed, can we not imagine, he asks, “the possibility of a phenomenon where intuition would give *more, indeed immeasurably more*, than the intention would ever have aimed at or foreseen?”⁶⁵ It is important to note the argument here. According to Marion, the definition of the

⁶⁰ Marion, BG, p. 181/254.

⁶¹ Marion, BG, p. 191/268.

⁶² Marion, BG, p. 194/273.

⁶³ Marion, BG, p. 196/275-276.

⁶⁴ Marion, BG, p. 197/276.

⁶⁵ Marion, BG, p. 197/276; p. 197/277.

phenomenon determined by Kant, in keeping with Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason,⁶⁶ and accepted by Husserl, rendered it according to the polarity of intuition and concepts or intentionality. As a result, in order to overcome the metaphysical restrictions and allow the phenomenon to be understood in keeping with its own appearance, what is needed is an inversion or a reversal, such that where intuition was delimited as lacking it will now be given in spades. When we recall that all of this pertains to the definition of possibility, because Kant defined possibility in terms of phenomenality, it is at least safe to wonder if "only one question remains". There may be others: to what extent does Marion's account of saturation represent a simple inversion of the metaphysical definition of not only phenomenality but possibility? And, even more importantly, how does this inversion relate to the horizon opened by givenness? Is givenness, finally, to be restricted to the givenness of an overflow of intuition? What, then, will become of revelation's relation to Being, to the displacement of an idolatrous horizon by an iconic one?

According to his development of the phenomenon of revelation, it is necessary to recognize that the "phenomenon of revelation not only falls into the category of saturation (paradox in general), but it concentrates the four types of saturated phenomena and is given at once as historic event, idol, flesh, and icon (face)."⁶⁷ It is necessary, therefore, in developing Marion's phenomenology of revelation, to review each of the four types of saturated phenomena. I do this by briefly discussing the mode of saturation present in each type in order to connect this mode to the privileged figure that corresponds to each

⁶⁶ Marion, BG, pp. 181-183/254-255.

⁶⁷ Marion, BG, p. 235.

type. In reference to the later part of my discussion, I draw not only on the analyses in *Being Given* but also those from *In Excess*.

In order to set out his phenomenology of saturation, Marion advances four modes of saturated phenomenality. He articulates these modes in reference to a fourfold inversion of Kant's categories of the understanding: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. First, Marion argues, according to quantity, "the saturated phenomenon *cannot be aimed at* [*ne peut se viser*]." ⁶⁸ As Marion explains, under the normal conditions of experience quantity is "declined by composition of the whole in terms of its parts" such that consciousness is able to account for the finite magnitude of the thing by assembling the whole of the thing from its parts. ⁶⁹ However, the saturated phenomenon resists a foreseeable construction because "the intuition that gives it is not limited by its possible concept" and therefore "its excess can neither be divided nor adequately put together again by virtue of a finite magnitude homogeneous with finite parts." ⁷⁰ This type of appearance is exemplified in amazement ⁷¹ or, even more so, in the figure of the historical event which is constituted precisely in the fact that "nobody can claim for himself a 'here and now' that would permit him to describe it exhaustively and constitute it as an object." ⁷² While Marion discusses the notion of event in reference to a historical event of grand proportions (the battle of Waterloo) in *Being Given*, he focuses on a much more

⁶⁸ Marion, BG, p. 199/280.

⁶⁹ Marion, BG, p. 200/280.

⁷⁰ Marion, BG, p. 200/281.

⁷¹ Marion writes: "Every phenomenon that produces amazement is imposed on the gaze in the very measure (more exactly, in the excess of measure) to which it does not result from any foreseeable summation of partial quantities" (BG, p. 201/282).

⁷² Marion, BG, p. 228/318.

banal event in *In Excess*, the giving of a lecture in a lecture hall. Even here, however, he argues that the mode of saturation according to quantity is at work in the “eventmentality” [*l'événementialité*] that gives that lecture to appear.⁷³ For that reason, even this simple event “cannot be repeated,” “cannot be accorded [*se voir assigner*] a unique cause or an exhaustive explanation,” and “cannot be foreseen.”⁷⁴

Secondly, according to Marion, “the saturated phenomenon *cannot be borne*.”⁷⁵ Turning from quantity to quality the same issue of anticipation is at play but, in this case, it is no longer an issue of assembling a composite but, rather, of organizing an experience into qualifiable units.⁷⁶ Having to do, therefore, with intensity, the category of quality pertains to the power of the understanding to measure the qualitative scope of an appearance and, therefore, receive it. In case of this mode of saturation, however, “a phenomenon attains an intensive magnitude without measure, or common measure, such that starting from a certain degree, the intensity of the real intuition passes beyond all the conceptual anticipations of perception.”⁷⁷ Therefore, that which cannot be borne bedazzles the gaze.⁷⁸ The idol is the privileged figure for this mode of saturation. It

⁷³ Marion, IE, p. 36/42.

⁷⁴ Marion, IE, p. 36/43.

⁷⁵ Marion, BG, p. 202/284.

⁷⁶ Or, as Marion puts it, what is stake is “a perception of the heterogeneous, in which each degree is demarcated by a dissolution of continuity with the preceding, therefore by an absolutely singular novelty” (BG, p. 203/284).

⁷⁷ Marion, BG, p. 203/285.

⁷⁸ Marion, BG, p. 203/285.

produces a “blindness [that] stems from the intensity of intuition,” the way the visible, in filling the gaze, goes too far and overwhelms the gaze.⁷⁹

Thirdly, according to Marion, “the saturated phenomenon appears *absolute* according to relation, which means it evades any analogy of experience.”⁸⁰ Unlike quantity and quality, this category of the understanding pertains to the coherence of a phenomenal appearance upon a perceptual horizon. For Kant, “[e]xperience is possible only through the representation of a necessary connection of perceptions.”⁸¹ These connections are measured according to the analogy of experience which presupposes the “unity of experience,” that is, that all experience takes “place in a network as tightly bound as possible by lines of inherence, causality, and commonality that assign to it, in the hallows as it were, a site.”⁸² A phenomenon that is saturated according to this mode of saturation “receives an intuition that exceeds the frame set by the concept and signification that aim at and foresee it” and, therefore, not only overwhelms its own appearance but also blurs the horizon on which it appears.⁸³ Secondly, and within this same mode of saturation, it is possible that “the phenomenon saturated with intuition can . . . pass beyond all horizontal delimitation.”⁸⁴ In other words, in the first case the phenomenon appears so rich in intuition that its own appearing saturates not only the gaze which seeks to see it (and in this sense the first two modes of saturation are drawn in

⁷⁹ For Marion’s phenomenological discussion of the idol see BG, pp. 204-206/285-289; pp. 229-231/319-321 and IE, pp. 54-81/65-98.

⁸⁰ Marion, BG, p. 206/289.

⁸¹ Quoted in BG, p. 206/289.

⁸² Marion, BG, p. 207/289.

⁸³ Marion, BG, pp. 209-210/293.

⁸⁴ Marion, BG, p. 210/293.

here) but the entire horizon in and through which it appears. The effect here is one of blurring, Marion says. In the second case, however, the mode of saturation is more powerful. Not only is the one horizon on which the phenomenon appears ‘blurred’ but, in order to see it, it requires that more than one horizon is necessary and, therefore, calls for an “infinite hermeneutic” to address the richness of this phenomenal appearance.⁸⁵

Finally, Marion considers a third figure of saturation in this mode. In this case, he writes:

not only no single horizon, but no combination of horizons, could successfully tolerate the absoluteness of the phenomenon, precisely because it gives itself as absolute, that is to say, free from all analogy with common-law phenomenon and from all predetermination by a network of relations, with neither precedent nor antecedent in the already seen or foreseeable. In short, there would appear a phenomenon saturated to the point that the world (in all senses of the word) could not accept it. Having come among his own, his own do not recognize it; having come into phenomenality, the absolutely saturated phenomenon could find no space there for its display. But this denial of opening, therefore, this disfiguring, still remains a manifestation.⁸⁶

Having considered this “absolutely saturated phenomenon” under the mode of relation, it is surprising that Marion identifies as the privileged figure of this mode of saturation not the revealed phenomenon, which his rhetoric certainly suggests, but rather the *flesh*, or the lived-body [*la chair*]. According to him it is the flesh “that is torn from the category of relation and carries the *fait accompli* to its excellence. . . . For before intentionality opens a gap between the intended and the fulfillment or between the I and its objective” the subject is “affected in itself” and so affected “only inasmuch as its affection presupposes no external or preexisting affect, therefore inasmuch as it accomplishes itself

⁸⁵ Marion, BG, p. 210/294.

⁸⁶ Marion, BG, p. 211/295.

unconditionally.”⁸⁷ In this sense, the flesh is undergone “in agony, suffering, and grief, as well as in desire, feeling, or orgasm.”⁸⁸ The conditions for the possibility of experience are ab-solved from all relations to a perceptual horizon established in advance.⁸⁹

With the introduction of the third mode of saturation, Marion explicitly addresses the relation of phenomenality to the perceptual horizon of consciousness: saturation according to relation overwhelms the horizon of the gaze in the matter that I have just described and is figured, most particularly, in the auto-affection of the flesh. The fourth mode of saturation pertains directly to its relation to the *I*. Here, according to Marion, “the saturated phenomenon is spoken of as irregardable according to modality.”⁹⁰ For Kant, this category of the understanding describes the relation of the phenomenon to the knowing subject. In this sense, the “phenomenon is possible strictly to the extent that it agrees with the formal conditions of experience, therefore with the power of knowing that fixes them, therefore finally with the transcendental I itself.”⁹¹ In order to describe the mode of saturation proper to this category of the understanding, Marion “reverses the Kantian situation so as to ask” what would appear if “a phenomenon did *not* ‘agree with’ or ‘correspond to’ the power of knowing of the I.”⁹² In order to suggest an answer to this question, he appeals to the notion of the “counter-experience” brought about by this mode of appearance. He argues that “if, for the saturated phenomenon, there is no experience of

⁸⁷ Marion, BG, p. 231/322.

⁸⁸ Marion, BG, p. 231/322.

⁸⁹ In *In Excess*, Marion argues that the mode of saturation proper to the flesh is a privileged mode in relation to selfhood. I explore this further in the next section. See IE, pp. 99-101/121.

⁹⁰ Marion, BG, p. 212/296.

⁹¹ Marion, BG, p. 212/297.

⁹² Marion, BG, p. 213/298.

an object, it remains for us to imagine that there might be a counter-experience of a nonobject.”⁹³ With the phenomenon given here, the “eye no longer apperceives the apparition of the saturated phenomenon so much as it apperceives the perturbation that it in person produces within the ordinary conditions of experience.”⁹⁴ He continues: “In these cases, the eye does not see an exterior spectacle so much as it sees the reified traces of its own powerlessness to constitute whatever it might be into an object.”⁹⁵ In such a counter-experience, the *I* receives pure givenness because all that appears is the rushing up into appearance of the apparition itself. Saturation, in this mode, “comes upon me in such a way that it affects me directly as pure givenness mediated by almost no objectifiable given, and therefore imposes on me an actuality immediately its own.”⁹⁶ The privileged figure here is the icon. It offers no spectacle, Marion argues, but rather effects a counter-experience brought about by its own gaze which weighs on the one previously gazing at it. In this case “the paradox reverses the polarity of manifestation by taking the initiative, far from undergoing it, by giving it, far from being given by it.”⁹⁷ What Marion describes as the absence of a discernable object in this mode of saturation is given shape in the icon who saturates not by an excess of intuition but by a subversion of the subject of intentionality itself through the counter-gaze of a face. “The gaze that the Other,” he writes “casts and makes weigh on me therefore does not give itself to my gaze, nor even

⁹³ Marion, BG, p. 215/300.

⁹⁴ Marion, BG, pp. 215-216/301.

⁹⁵ Marion, BG, p. 216/301.

⁹⁶ Marion, BG, p. 216/302.

⁹⁷ Marion, BG, p. 232/323.

to be seen—this invisible gaze gives itself to only to be endured.”⁹⁸ Like the historical event, which “demands a summation of horizons and narrations” given its unforeseeable and uncontainable mode of excess, the icon cannot be constituted objectively and therefore opens “a teleology” of multiple interpretations.⁹⁹ Like the idol, furthermore, which “begs to be seen and reseen,” the icon exercises “an individuation over the gaze that confronts it” by drawing the gaze, alone, to its claim and therefore roots it to itself.¹⁰⁰ Finally, like the flesh “it accomplishes this individuation by affecting the I so originally that it loses its function as transcendental pole.”¹⁰¹ Just as the mode of saturation connected to the category of relation gathers within itself, by its reference to the horizon of appearance, the former two modes having to do only with the appearance of the object itself, so does the fourth mode gather the other three within itself. For this reason, the icon stands as the central figure of saturation in Marion’s phenomenology. Before raising some critical questions about this and looking more carefully at the relation of saturation to the notion of givenness, I discuss his sketch of the phenomenon of revelation as he presents it in *Being Given*.¹⁰²

As I indicated when I began my discussion of the saturated phenomena, the phenomenon of revelation “concentrates” the four modes of saturation in itself. If the icon effects this concentration insofar as it gathers within its mode of appearance the characteristics of the other three modes, the phenomenon of revelation concentrates all

⁹⁸ Marion, BG, p. 232/324.

⁹⁹ Marion, BG, p. 233/324-325. For the “teleology” of the event, see BG, p. 229/319.

¹⁰⁰ Marion, BG, p.233/325. For the individuation of the idol, see BG, p. 230/321.

¹⁰¹ Marion, BG, p. 233/325.

¹⁰² For Gschwandtner’s discussion of Marion’s notion of saturation see *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, pp. 79-86.

four modes by doubling them. That is, “it saturates phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation.”¹⁰³ Marion describes this in relation to the manifestation of Christ described in the New Testament. According to quantity, he argues, “the phenomenon of Christ gives itself intuitively as an event that is perfectly unforeseeable because radically heterogeneous to what it nevertheless completes (the prophecies).”¹⁰⁴ In fact, he argues that the character of event that marks this mode of saturation is integrally related to Christ’s identity as the one who John’s gospel names “he who must come [*ho erkhomenos*].”¹⁰⁵ Secondly, according to quality, “the figure of Christ obviously attests its paradoxical character because the intuition that saturates it reaches and most often overcomes what the phenomenological gaze can bear.”¹⁰⁶ Marion offers as an example of this not only the transfiguration (Luke 9:34-35) but also the notion that the disciples do not have the power to bear the many teachings that Jesus has for them (John 16:12). Finally, he appeals to the resurrection itself, which “by definition passes beyond what this world can receive, contain, or embrace” and therefore “can let itself be perceived only by terrifying” as in Mark 16:6. According to quality Christ “accomplishes the paradox of the idol.”¹⁰⁷ Thirdly, in terms of relation, “Christ appears as an absolute phenomenon” insofar as his appearance pertains to the flesh, which is manifested in his agony on the cross, as well as to the “plurality of horizons” required for interpreting this appearance.¹⁰⁸ Finally, in terms of modality, “Christ appears as an irremediable phenomenon precisely because as

¹⁰³ Marion, BG, p. 235/327.

¹⁰⁴ Marion, BG, p. 236/329.

¹⁰⁵ Marion, BG, p. 237/330.

¹⁰⁶ Marion, BG, p. 237/331.

¹⁰⁷ Marion, BG, p. 238/331-332.

¹⁰⁸ Marion, BG, p. 239/332-333.

icon he regards me in such a way that He constitutes me as his witness.”¹⁰⁹ Here Marion refers to the numerous call narratives in the New Testament.¹¹⁰

When I introduced the concept of saturation in relation to Marion’s inversion of the metaphysical determination of phenomenality, as when I introduced it in relation to the notion of the perceptual horizon in the Introduction, I pointed out the problem of Marion’s logic of inversion. The question I alluded to at that time was this: does inversion have the power to displace what it inverts or does it merely repeat the logic of that which is inverted? Beyond this question, another emerges that helps to assess the relation of saturation to givenness and the logic of distance it employs: To what extent does saturation attest givenness? This question can be confronted by considering it in terms of another: what is the relation of the focus on excess in saturation to the logic distance and its privileged notion of withdrawal? In the end the two concerns come together: by settling for an inversion of Kantian thought, does Marion develop the phenomenology of saturation along lines that are at odds with his phenomenology of givenness and, indeed, can that divergent development not be witnessed in the privileged concept of excess over the concept of withdrawal that determines the logic of givenness vis à vis distance? In order to address these issues, particularly as they pertain to Marion’s understanding of

¹⁰⁹ Marion, BG, p. 240/334.

¹¹⁰ After reading this paragraph and the pages in *Being Given* to which it has made reference, it should come as no surprise that when Marion takes up the phenomenon of revelation in *In Excess* he returns to his work on Dionysius and mystical theology (see IE, pp. 128-162/155-195). Whether because of the shallow hermeneutic sense that it displays or because of the profoundly contrived nature of its reading, it seems that Marion too is aware of the failure of his phenomenology of Christ. For an attempt to save this account of the ‘phenomenon of Christ’ and connect it to the potential of Marion’s phenomenology of givenness as a whole see Merald Westphal’s “Transfiguration as Saturated Phenomenon,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1:1 (2003), pp. 1-10.

revelation, I point to two ambiguities in his most advanced treatment of saturated phenomena. First, as I've shown, he explicitly argues that the icon gathers together the other three modes of saturation and, therefore, that it stands as the most sophisticated disclosure of saturation. How, then, I ask, does the icon stand in relation to distance? Secondly, in the wake of the very weak account of the phenomenon of Christ offered in *Being Given*, Marion returns to his work on Dionysius in order to develop his phenomenology of revelation in *In Excess*. Likewise, I ask to what extent Marion's return to mystical theology connects the phenomenology of revelation, conceptually grounded now in his notion of saturation, to a phenomenology of distance.

3.4. Dionysius and the Icon: Revelation Reconsidered

In light of these questions, and in light of what appears to be a divergence from the path toward a robust thinking of revelation in terms of givenness, Marion's treatment of the icon in *In Excess* offers two important conceptual resources that keep open the connection of saturation to givenness and are, therefore, important to my reading. First, his study of the icon is framed in reference to a discussion of the *invu*, that which "cannot reach or yet reach visibility."¹¹¹ While the *invu* is a negative category, playing a similar role in his present analysis as the *invisible* played in his earlier accounts of the idol, it does point to the important argument advanced throughout *In Excess* that what gives itself does not necessarily show itself.¹¹² We have, in fact, already seen this claim at work in the discussion of the *self* of the phenomenon. In that case, the separation (*l'écart*) between the

¹¹¹ Marion, IE, p. 109/131.

¹¹² Marion, IE, p. 109/131.

self (separation) of what is given (phenomenon) and the self (separation) of givenness (horizon) was crucial to establishing a connection between the notion of givenness and distance insofar as *l'écart* signaled the withdrawal that is constitutive of appearance. It is significant, therefore, that this notion appears in Marion's discussion of the icon. As I said, however, the notion works negatively to provoke a question: by showing how all intentional constitution of an object "obscurely gives rise to *l'invu*," Marion proceeds to ask about the possibility of a phenomenal appearance which would open access to the invisible, the givenness that is given but not shown. He states: "It is therefore a question of acceding to an invisible that does not reduce itself to *l'invu*, distinguishing itself from it and preserving it."¹¹³ In order to accede to this invisible, Marion launches a phenomenology of the saturated phenomenon and arrives, most particularly, at the icon. What is significant about the icon in this regard is the manner in which it positively stages the separation between what gives itself and what shows itself. Addressing himself to Levinas' phenomenology of the face, Marion argues that, "more than any other phenomena, [the face] must appear under the form, not of an object spectacle, but of a call. The face, saturated phenomenon according to modality, accomplishes the phenomenological operation of the call more, perhaps, than any other phenomenon (saturated or not)."¹¹⁴ In fact, insofar as it accomplishes the call, the face is distinguished from both the phenomenological category of flesh as well as the ethical concept of the Other by being understood in terms of the icon. Marion states: "The icon gives itself to be

¹¹³ Marion, IE, p. 111/133.

¹¹⁴ Marion, IE, p. 118/142.

seen in that it makes me attend to [*entendre*] its call.”¹¹⁵ Here he remains in direct continuity with his earlier account of the icon and the logic of distance that informs it. As I argue in Chapter 2, the horizontal status of distance and then givenness emerges through an analysis of the anteriority of the (divine) withdrawal in and through which the advance-in-withdrawal of phenomenality itself becomes possible. In both Hölderlin and Dionysius, this anteriority is designated in terms of a call or a summons. By connecting the saturated phenomenon of the icon to the phenomenological operation of call and, furthermore, by situating this in reference to the issue of the separation between what gives itself and what shows itself, Marion provides a route from saturation back into givenness. Or, to put it otherwise, the excess of the icon is not, after all, an excess of intuition but, rather, a displacing of intuition in favor of a more primordial encounter with the absence of what shows itself precisely in order to give what gives itself and, thus, brings to light the horizon of givenness. Before developing this connection between the call and givenness, I address Marion’s study of Dionysius in order to see if, in his explicit discussion of revelation, these connections are also made.

The final study of *In Excess* is the revised version of a paper originally given at a conference in which both Marion and Derrida were present. The occasion for the paper, therefore, is an engagement between Marion and Derrida on the question of the relationship between mystical theology, metaphysics, and deconstruction. After discussing matters pertaining to these designations, Marion turns to an analysis of

¹¹⁵ Marion, IE, pp. 118-119/143. The translators deal with *entendre* by writing “hear [understand].” While *entendre* means ‘understand,’ it also calls forth a sense of attending to or, as they say, hearing. I have suggested ‘attends to’ in order to signal a connection with *l’adonné*, whose devotion to the call allows what gives itself to show itself.

Dionysius the Areopagite that is, itself, a version of the much longer and more detailed study of Dionysius that he presented in *The Idol and Distance*. Given my own treatment of that material in Chapter 2, I focus here on the questions concerning the relation of saturation to that of givenness. The crucial addition made by this study is the discussion, at the conclusion, of the relation between Dionysian mystical theology and the saturated phenomenon. The juxtaposition of the work on Dionysius, work that was crucial to Marion's account of distance, with a reflection on the saturated phenomenon of revelation proves very enlightening for the questions I am here pursuing.

As in the earlier study, at stake in Marion's reading of Dionysius is the meaning of the 'third way' in its relation to the positive and negative claims of mystical theology. In continuity with the earlier reading, Dionysius' "third way is played out beyond the oppositions between affirmation and negation, synthesis and separation, in short, between the true and the false."¹¹⁶ Indeed, as he continues, the "third way would transgress nothing less than the two truth values, between which the entire logic of metaphysics is carried out."¹¹⁷ This is so, Marion argues, because the 'third way' is the way of de-nomination [*dé-nomination*] and, as such, it "concerns a form of speech that no longer says something about something (or a name of someone) but which denies all relevance to predication, rejects the nominative function of names, and suspends the rule of truth's two values."¹¹⁸ This allows Marion to speak of a "new pragmatic function of language" that is in keeping with the notion of language that emerges from his earlier treatment of

¹¹⁶ Marion, IE, p. 137/166.

¹¹⁷ Marion, IE, p. 138/166.

¹¹⁸ Marion, IE, p. 139/167-168.

Dionysius. What is crucial to this pragmatics of speech is way in which one is “exposed in one’s intending a non-object, exposed to the point of receiving from this non-object determinations that are so radical and new that they speak to me and shape me far more than they teach and inform me.”¹¹⁹ As in his earlier study, Marion connects this anterior exposure and the reception of selfhood that it effects with the incomprehensibility of God.¹²⁰ This incomprehensibility is, in turn, connected to God’s anonymity which, at once, signals the excess of the divine name and its withdrawal.¹²¹ He concludes, invoking the crucial concept of the horizon: “For the Name no longer functions by inscribing God within the theoretical horizon of our predication but rather by inscribing us, according to a radically new praxis, in the very horizon of God.”¹²² Thus far in Marion’s treatment of the phenomenon of revelation he returns faithfully to the concepts articulated in his earlier study of Dionysius. As a result he sounds the themes crucial to my argument concerning givenness and distance: the horizontal of status of distance based on the anteriority of divine revelation and the manner in which that anteriority not only figures subjects through its engendering summons but opens manifestation in language. The question that remains now is how all this fairs when it is read through the lens of the concept of saturation.

With his analysis of Dionysius in place, Marion takes up his “remaining task”: “to conceive the formal possibility of the phenomenon that seems to demand an ‘absence of

¹¹⁹ Marion, IE, p. 148/178.

¹²⁰ Marion, IE, p. 154/185-186.

¹²¹ Marion points to this with the notion of a “pragmatic theology of absence” in which God is shielded from presence by the “Name above all names” which excepts “God from predication, so as to include us in it and allow us to name on the basis of its essential anonymity” (IE, p. 156/187; p.157/189).

¹²² Marion, IE, p. 157/189.

divine names' and our entering *into* the Name."¹²³ He returns to the relationship between intuitions and concepts and argues that what is given in mystical theology can be accounted for in terms of an "excess of intuition [which] overcomes, submerges, exceeds—in short, saturates—the measure of each and every concept. What is given disqualifies every concept."¹²⁴ With this return to intuition, however, a strange ambiguity arises. What does it mean to speak of an excess of intuition in respect to God? Marion considers this objection. His treatment of it is, in fact, instructive. First, he disparages the objection for having to do with an "actuality" and not the "formal possibility of phenomena corresponding to the third way."¹²⁵ Second, he claims that "even in the case when the positive form of the giving intuition would be missing, apparently or factually, this intuition is not wholly submerged beneath two of its undeniable figures, even if we can describe them only negatively."¹²⁶ He designates the first of these two figures in terms of "stupor" and appeals to Jean Daniélou's account of the experience of divine incomprehensibility as mode of terror and fatigue. He connects the second of these figures to the very question of God itself by suggesting that such a question would not continue to "dwell within us so deeply" if "an intuition did not fascinate us."¹²⁷ I find both his appeal to possibility and his two exemplary figures to be inadequate responses to the objection because, at its strongest, the objection requires Marion to explain how, in seeking to address divine revelation phenomenologically, an appeal to intuitive excess

¹²³ Marion, IE, p. 158/190.

¹²⁴ Marion, IE, p. 159/192.

¹²⁵ Marion, IE, p. 161/193.

¹²⁶ Marion, IE, p. 161/194.

¹²⁷ Marion, IE, pp. 161-162/194-195.

accounts for the anterior summons effected by revelation according to Dionysius himself. What is clear, in fact, and what the objection signals, is the marked shift in discourse between his analysis of Dionysian mystical theology and the epistemological conversion of this analysis into the register of the intuition/concept pair. This shift is unfortunate. For precisely as the displacement of intuition in the icon opens a path back to givenness, Marion's Dionysian revelation, when treated in terms of a saturated phenomenon, constitutes a step back, in which he recoils from his earlier discovery by remaining tied to intuitive excess. The final judgement must come, therefore, in his account of *l'adonné*, the one devoted to the call that joins what gives *itself* with what shows *itself* in the separation that unites in its very withdrawal.

3.5. The One Devoted (*L'adonné*)

In the first section of this chapter I argued that Marion's explicitly phenomenological account of givenness should be understood in continuity with the notion of it that emerges in his earlier work. By focusing on his idea of the phenomenon's *self*, and by connecting that *self* to the separation (*l'écart*) that articulates the nature of manifestation according to the logic of advance-in-withdrawal, I argued that givenness must be understood horizontally. The stakes of this argument are clear: a horizontal understanding of givenness allows Marion to interact with and displace Heidegger's account of Being. In reference to the question of God and, therefore, divine revelation, this means that a "conceptual thought of God" can be "developed outside of the doctrine of Being" in terms of "the horizon of the gift itself." As Marion claims, the "gift constitutes at once the mode and

body of his revelation.”¹²⁸ In making this argument I reject an ‘epistemological’ reading of givenness as a heuristic device that is posited by phenomenology to explain the relation of apparition to consciousness. As I turned to the second section of the chapter, in order to assess Marion’s phenomenology of saturation and, particularly, the phenomenon of revelation, I detected an ambiguity. Because of his reliance on a Kantian definition of the phenomenon, a reliance which is maintained precisely in its inversion, Marion is forced to articulate the notion of saturation in reference to a set of concepts that are organized in relation to the excess of intuition over concepts. As a result, his account of saturation is advanced in an epistemological space determined by Husserl. However, given that such a space is determined by the inversion of Kantian metaphysical decisions it does not reach the logic of givenness / distance developed by Marion throughout his project. This provides a dilemma for his phenomenology of revelation: is Marion’s phenomenology of revelation to be understood in reference to his phenomenology of givenness (*vis à vis* Heidegger, horizontally) or to his phenomenology of saturation (*vis à vis* Husserl, epistemologically)? In the third section of the chapter I revisited the relation between saturation and givenness by paying particular attention to his phenomenology of the icon, developed in *In Excess*, and his treatment of Dionysian mystical theology in relation to his notion of the saturated phenomenon. The ambiguities were intensified. On the one hand, his account of the mode of saturation proper to the icon, a mode which exemplifies saturation insofar as it contains the other three modes, opened onto givenness by its indirect reference to the relationship between what gives itself and what shows itself and,

¹²⁸ *GWB*, p. xxiv.

furthermore, to the notion of call through which giving and showing are joined in a reference to *l'adonné*. At this point I was ready to proceed to the fifth and final book of *Being Given* to explore that important notion. Before doing so, however, I looked to Marion's treatment of Dionysian mystical theology in the final study of *In Excess*. Here I found all the themes from his earlier study of Dionysius put together with a concluding section dedicated to explicating Dionysius' 'third way' in terms of saturation. Here all the ambiguities returned. Having just described the 'third way' according to a 'pragmatic theology of absence' and, therefore, in terms deeply invested in the logic of distance and givenness, Marion proceeded to reduce the incomprehensible anteriority of God and, indeed, the manner in which this anteriority places us on the very "horizon of God," to the excess of divine intuition over concepts. The question that remains is as follows: if, according to the notion of horizon, Marion's phenomenology remains unclear, how do things stand with the figure of subjectivity provoked and called on here? We have already received a hint of this in the icon: if his explicit phenomenology of revelation is compromised by a Husserlian epistemology that merely inverts a Kantian metaphysics, perhaps his phenomenology of selfhood will work in favor of givenness and, ultimately, distance.

The first clue that this later outcome will prove to be the case is discovered in the very first lines of Bk. 5 of *Being Given*. Marion writes: "To manifest itself as well as to give itself, it is first necessary that the 'self' with which the phenomenon is deployed attest itself as such. It does this only by appropriating the gravitational center of

phenomenality, therefore by assuming the origin of its own event.”¹²⁹ Such an appropriation, however, will have significant consequences for the subject who has long been thought to constitute appearance and be responsible for phenomenality. In other words, for Marion, the “phenomenon gives itself and shows itself only by confirming itself as a ‘self’; and this ‘self’ is attested only counter to every exclusively transcendental claim of the I.”¹³⁰ To account for this *self* of the phenomenon, a notion which I have quite clearly privileged¹³¹, and therefore to complete my account of Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, it is necessary to discuss Marion’s treatment of *l’adonné*, the figure of subjectivity that arises in relation to saturated phenomena. I argue that this notion of selfhood is developed in connection to the robust horizontal account of givenness and, therefore, that it recapitulates, phenomenologically, the logic of distance at the root of Marion’s work.

The fundamental idea here is that of the call. Having resisted moving too quickly to this, in order to bring out Marion’s notion of the event and its important connection to the phenomenon’s *self* and the notion of separation that this entails, I now join Thomas

¹²⁹ Marion, BG, p. 248/343.

¹³⁰ Marion, BG, p. 248/343.

¹³¹ From the beginning to the end, however, I stand by this privileging. In his conclusion to *Being Given*, Marion writes: “The phenomenality of the given suggests that the phenomenon does not appear only when an other besides it (the I) constitutes it (Kant, Husserl) but first when it shows *itself* in itself and from itself (Heidegger). What remains is to take the most perilous step: thinking this *self/itself*—which alone permits the phenomenon to show *itself*. For this project, I turn to the phenomenology of givenness because it opens at least a way of access to the *self/itself*. The phenomenon shows itself inasmuch as it unfolds in it the fold of givenness; it always keeps, at the end of this unfolding, the mark of the passage, trajectory, or movement that it accomplished in order to come forward. The given testifies, by the trembling with which it still and always vibrates, not only to its irreversible and intrinsic difference, but also to its incessantly lost and repeated happening. It therefore attests that if it appears (shows itself), it owes this only to itself, only to its *self* (which gives itself)” (BG, pp. 320-321/439-440).

Carlson's argument for the centrality of this notion.¹³² In fact, Marion had already identified his turn to givenness with a turn to the call when, in *Reduction and Givenness*, he shows how the notion of givenness emerges in relation to Heidegger's treatment of the call of Being. There he argues that "[a]fter the transcendental reduction and the existential reduction there intervenes the reduction to and of this call. That which gives itself gives itself only to the one who gives himself over to the call and only in the pure form of confirmation of the call, which is repeated because received. . . . The pure form of the call plays before any specification, even Being."¹³³ In order to specify further the relation of this call to givenness and, therefore, in order to plumb the depths of what Marion means by the *self* of the phenomenon, it is necessary to examine his notion of the call. At stake here is the coming together of what gives itself and what shows itself.

The first figure of subjectivity that corresponds to the logic of reception that is determined by the call is that of the receiver [*l'attributaire*]. In this case the subject is related to a phenomenon of the non-saturated sort. Even here, however, because givenness is at play as the horizon of appearance, to receive "for the receiver, . . . means nothing less than to accomplish givenness by transforming it into manifestation, by according what gives itself that it show itself on its own basis. . . . The receiver . . . transforms givenness into manifestation, or more exactly, he lets what gives itself through intuition show itself."¹³⁴ What is crucial here, and what becomes increasingly obvious as Marion's account develops, is the convergence of a logic of reception that is identical to

¹³² Carlson, *Indiscretion*, pp. 203-214.

¹³³ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, pp. 197-198/296-297.

¹³⁴ Marion, BG, p. 264/364.

that discovered in relation to distance (particularly in his study of Dionysius) and the notion of saturation. This convergence is key to drawing together two ideas which, to say the least, at times sit uneasily together. Both the recapitulation of the logic of distance and the convergence of this logic with the categories of consciousness stand out even clearer in Marion's next move. If receiving oneself means transforming the given into the manifest, it follows that the "receiver does not precede what it forms . . . but results from it."¹³⁵ He continues: "It is received in the exact instant when it receives what gives itself in order to, thanks to its own reception, finally show itself. The thought of the consciousness-pole is born with the manifestation that it renders visible without knowing or wanting it, and perhaps without even being able to do so."¹³⁶ Before taking up the transformation of the receiver [*l'attributaire*] into the *l'adonné*, it can already be noted how the *self* of the phenomenon determines the subjectivity of the subject. The key lies in the notion of separation at the heart of the logic of reception. The transformation of the given into the shown is of a piece with the subject's reception of itself by its reception of the given phenomenon. Receiving itself in the separation effected by the withdrawal that, primordially, opens the horizon, the subject, as receiver, enacts a withdrawal through which the *self* of the phenomenon comes forward. This *self* remains understood as a separation because it bears the marks of the twofold withdrawal. As always with the logic of distance, what is crucial is the relation of two relationships of separation in which withdrawal constitutes advance. The phenomenon comes forward in and as the separation of a withdrawal enacted by the subject (this is the separation that unites what

¹³⁵ Marion, BG, p. 265/365.

¹³⁶ Marion, BG, p. 265/365.

gives itself to what shows itself) and, thus, simultaneously, the subject is born as *l'attributaire* by receiving itself on the horizon of givenness which grants the possibility of manifestation through its own primordial withdrawal.¹³⁷

In relation to saturated phenomena, the receiver becomes the *l'adonné* (the gifted) insofar as the relationship between what gives itself and what shows itself is determined as a *call*. In the case of the receiver, the focus was on the correspondence, or one might even say equality, between what gives itself and what shows itself. In the case of saturation, however, this is no longer so. Now we have a counter-intentionality in which what gives itself will always be greater than what *l'attributaire* can manifest. For this reason, the essential categories of the call are “summons,” “surprise,” “interlocution,” and “facticity.”¹³⁸ What is crucial to each of these determinations is the manner in which the subject is constituted by what it receives of the given in such a way that it is set at a distance from itself. Thus we pass, Marion argues, from the *I* to the *me/myself*. He writes: “[I]ndividuality loses its autarchic essence on account of a relation that is not only more originary than it, but above all half unknown, seeing as it can fix one of the two poles—*me*—without at first and most of the time delivering the other, the origin of the call.”¹³⁹ As with the logic of distance, the anteriority of this call is not only constituted by its

¹³⁷ We recall here, for example, how for Hölderlin, it is the withdrawal of the Celestials or, indeed, the Father, that opens the horizon through which the poetic withdrawal of *Dasein* opens a world. To put this in the language used here, we could say that *Dasein* receives itself in the relation between the two withdrawals: the subject becomes receiver as a horizon is opened for it by a withdrawal (enacted by the gods) such that *Dasein* (now designated as *l'attributaire*) receives itself in the enactment of a withdrawal that gives the phenomenon to appear (what Marion here calls the function of the receiver to bring together what gives itself and what shows itself).

¹³⁸ Marion, BG, pp. 268-271.

¹³⁹ Marion, BG, p. 268/370.

originary nature, as in the case of *l'attributaire*, but also by the manner in which one of the two poles of the relationship remains undetermined. As we have seen, this indetermination is one of excess and not one of lack. In fact, by inscribing the saturated phenomenon within this logic of distance through the notion of call, Marion reopens its connections with givenness understood as a horizon of appearance. To be called by the excess of the saturated phenomenon, and here Marion holds out the possibility that each type of saturated phenomena makes a call possible,¹⁴⁰ is to be *placed* in a facticity of inauthenticity. It is important to recall here the emphasis on the 'site' that we saw in reference to Marion's earlier development of distance. With his ongoing discussion of facticity he has been developing this. By determining selfhood in terms of the placement or location of a figure in a site, he connects the notion of selfhood with that of horizon and is able to describe the ecstatic manifestation of selfhood, construed here in terms of an 'inauthentic site'. He signals this already in *Reduction and Givenness*:

The irreducibility of the claim [or call] to each of its specifications (Being, the other, the Father, etc.) establishes the legitimacy of *Dasein* only in requiring that one think it starting from the *there* in it, rather than from its *Being* (or from any other instance): it will be necessary to learn to read *Dasein* more as *Da(sein)* than as *(da)Sein*, as the *there* of Being more than as Being in its *there*.¹⁴¹

What makes this facticity, this placement, 'inauthentic' is the realization that *l'adonné* responds to a call that has always already been issued and, therefore, "the facticity of the call renders the called's access to itself as a *myself/me* (therefore its selfhood) equal to its

¹⁴⁰ Marion, BG, p. 267/368-369.

¹⁴¹ Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, p 200/299.

originary difference with itself as an I.”¹⁴² We begin to see why the self that takes place on the horizon of givenness and in response to saturated phenomena is *l’adonné*: the one devoted or, even, the addict. My identity as a self is received in relation to that which I cannot contain or possess. As a result, I become devoted to its excessive appearance and, indeed, *addicted* to giving it the space of a manifestation. In order to develop this further, it is necessary to discuss the relation between the call and the responsal and, furthermore, the constitutive delay that plays between what gives itself and what shows itself.

According to Marion, *l’adonné* lets “the given arise unreservedly” and therefore “frees givenness as such. He is thus marked as the sole given in which the fold of givenness is unfolded.”¹⁴³ Givenness is unfolded in *l’adonné* in the relation between the call and response. Through an analysis of Caravaggio’s “the calling of Saint Matthew,” he describes the way in which the call emerges from the response itself. He writes: “If Matthew alone suffers the silent call of his calling, even though everyone indifferently could see its indistinct signal, this is because he alone answered it straightaway. Matthew received the call of his calling by taking it upon himself—and this taking it upon himself already constituted the first response. . . . This call is painted in this response: the painter’s gaze saw (and now shows us) that the call gives itself phenomenologically only by first showing itself in a response. The response that gives itself after the call

¹⁴² Marion, BG, p. 270/373. See also BG, pp. 290-291/400-401.

¹⁴³ Marion, BG, p. 282/390. This is a remarkable claim as it would seem that, contrary to what was said earlier regarding the painting, it is the self that serves as the privileged ontic site of givenness. Marion would not dispute this, of course, recognizing that the painting served as the privileged *entry* into givenness but also that a displacement of Being by givenness requires a parallel reevaluation of *Dasein*.

nevertheless is the first to show it.”¹⁴⁴ What is key here is the claim that though the call is first—preceding as it does even the one to whom it is addressed, as we saw in Marion’s descriptions of the summons, surprise, interlocution, and facticity—it does not pass from its givenness to its manifestation until it is received in a response. By responding to the call, *l’adonné* not only gives herself over to the call but gives the call a space of manifestation that is, precisely, herself. Once again, the logic here is that of distance and its givenness. In reference to Dionysius, Marion explained how the hierarchical gift of holiness is manifested in the reception of it as a gift only by an equally giving act. Such a ‘giving act,’ however, was accomplished in nothing less than the subject’s giving herself over to the originary gift. Because this is a matter of distance and, therefore, givenness, it is a matter of a horizon. In the following quotation, note the way in which the notion of horizon is used in two different senses.

[T]he call remains always as such unheard and invisible because no receptor awaits it or welcomes it; it arises so originarily that no hearing can in advance outline a horizon of manifestation for it, since, as paradox (saturated phenomenon), it makes an exception to every possible horizon. But it is nevertheless transcribed in visibility by way of the response. By admitting itself to be the target of the call, therefore by responding with the simple interrogative ‘Me?’ the gifted opens a field [*champ*] for manifestation by lending itself to its reception and the retention of its impact. The gifted holds the place of a horizon of visibility [*lieu d’horizon de visibilité*] for the paradox that gives itself. It makes the call visible by accepting it in its own visibility; it manifests the a priori in the prism of it’s a posteriori. What gives itself (the call) becomes a phenomenon—shows itself—in and through what responds to it and thus puts it on stage (the gifted).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Marion, BG, p. 285/393.

¹⁴⁵ Marion, BG, p. 287/396-397.

The call is given and, in its reception, manifested beyond any perceptual horizon precisely because it appears on the horizon of the gift, the horizon in and through which the self appears in the very manifestation of the reception of the call that is given to it. This quotation brings together much of what I have been discussing throughout these chapters on Marion. It also serves to highlight the manner in which this final book of *Being Given* draws the notion of saturation back into the field of givenness understood horizontally.¹⁴⁶ In order to put in place the final element of *l'adonné*, it is necessary to discuss the delay that is crucial to the relation between call and response.

Marion calls the “responsal” a response “which opens visibility and let’s the call speak.”¹⁴⁷ It is “nothing like an optional act, an arbitrary choice, or a chance—in it we are, we live, and we receive ourselves.”¹⁴⁸ However, inhabiting this responsal means always being late. For there is, according to Marion, an essential paradox at work here: “the responsal completes the call, but it is belated—late for what gives itself, it delays its monstration.”¹⁴⁹ This delay does not, however, mark a limitation but rather a constitutive feature of the call-responsal relation. Furthermore, it continues to align this relation with the logic of distance. First, as we’ve been expecting, the delay is what provokes the devotion or even addiction of *l'adonné*. It signals the “irreparable excess” of the call “over and above all possible responsal.” He continues: “The exhaustion of phenomenality

¹⁴⁶ It is worth noting here that precisely as the notion of saturation is drawn back into the horizontal logic of givenness, the primary metaphor has changed from one of sight to one of sound and hearing. For an excellent discussion of this, precisely in reference to this section, see Westphal, “Vision and Voice,” pp. 133-134.

¹⁴⁷ Marion, BG, p. 288/397. ‘Reponsal’ here translates *répons*.

¹⁴⁸ Marion, BG, p. 288/397.

¹⁴⁹ Marion, BG, p. 289/398.

never concerns the givenness of the call—invisible by definition—but only the respondent’s fatigue—limited in its power of manifestation.”¹⁵⁰ Second, the delay marks the facticity of the call. Because *l’adonné* is always late, the call is always experienced as prior, as anterior; there is no way that it can be caught up with and contained. With this claim, Marion refers to the “phenomenon of birth,” which I have already indicated in reference to Romano’s work, and points toward the originary reception of selfhood and worldhood in the horizon of the call, the horizon of the gift.¹⁵¹ In relation to both features, it is the delay that allows us to see the withdrawal at work between the source of the call (anonymous as that remains, for Marion)¹⁵² and its reception. Such a withdrawal gives the self over to itself precisely as delayed, devoted, and addicted to the call which exceeds it. The logic here is of a piece with that of distance. No one describes this better than Thomas Carlson:

Just as the *interloqué* or *adonné* comes to birth in—or more precisely as—an irreducibly delayed response to a call that, for this very reason, can never be defined or identified within the fullness or fixity of a name, even as it will provoke the infinite polyonymy of an endless response to that which remains forever anonymous, so already Marion’s theological subject—which is modeled on the Christic subject himself—comes to birth in response to the inconceivable goodness, charity, or love of a God whom the subject can never identify or define in a name, but whom for this very reason the subject will name over and again ad infinitum. Just as, phenomenologically, givenness has always already given itself in a call to which my response is always belated, and just as the play of call and response would appear exemplarily in the facticity of language, so theologically,

¹⁵⁰ Marion, BG, p. 289/398.

¹⁵¹ Marion, BG, p. 289/399.

¹⁵² Marion, BG, pp. 296-300/408-413.

‘the unthinkable speaks even before we think we hear it, anterior distance holds out to us a language that precedes and inverts our predication.’¹⁵³

The logic of distance that originally shaped and led to the logic of givenness horizontally understood shapes the logic of the *self* of the phenomenon because this self plays in relation to the self who is *l’adonné*.

In this section I have shown that despite a significant ambiguity between Marion’s notion of saturation and his notion of givenness earlier in *Being Given*, he very powerfully draws saturation back into the logic of givenness in Bk. 5. In fact, by locating his understanding of saturation within the call/responsal relation, that is, by accounting for its excess not only as an excess of intuition, epistemologically understood, but as the mark of its originary summons, surprise, interlocution, and facticity, Marion provides a way to reconsider, for example, the manner in which Dionysian mystical theology manifests a saturated phenomenon. Even so, there remains a strange disconnect between his explicit phenomenology of revelation, developed in Bk. 4 of *Being Given*, and the material dedicated to the call and its response. This disconnect continues to mark the ambiguity in Marion’s thought between a Husserlian framework and a Heideggerian one.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that it is possible and, indeed, desirable to read Marion’s phenomenology of givenness in relation to his earlier account of distance because it is this earlier account that locates Marion’s investment in overcoming and displacing

¹⁵³ Carlson, “Converting the Given into the Seen,” in ID, p. xxiv. On this relation see Carlson, *Indiscretion*, p. 205.

Heidegger's account of Being. Such a displacement, of course, is crucial for him to return philosophy to a situation in which it can hear and attune itself to the question of God. I have suggested that this way of reading Marion's phenomenology is in contrast to an epistemological one in which givenness functions as a heuristic concept to explain the structures of consciousness in the process of phenomenal apparition. This later option would so focus on Marion's Husserlian debts that it would inscribe his analysis within those debts. Given my argument, however, I detected an ambiguity in his phenomenology of revelation. From the beginning of the dissertation, I have argued that the goal of Marion's philosophy has been to think in attunement with the question of God and, therefore, a large part of his work has been dedicated to thinking about divine revelation. I discussed in detail his account of the idol and the icon, as well as the logics that inform them. I showed how his logic of distance developed into a logic of givenness and how that presented itself as the best way to think about divine revelation because it displaced the idolatrous horizon of Being and opened a space of appearance according to the possibility of transcendence itself. In eager anticipation, then, I turned to his phenomenology of saturation in order to see what this phenomenology of revelation would look like. What I found was questionable. Rather than following through with the insights developed in reference to his theology and phenomenology of givenness, Marion inscribed his phenomenology of revelation in an inverted Kantian metaphysics of intuition and signification. This produced not only a profoundly unsatisfying account of the "phenomenon of Christ"—which was nothing more than a series of proof texts contriving to connect certain aspects of the New Testament witness to the four categories

of saturation—but an unfortunate inscription of his earlier work on Dionysius into the inverted Kantianism of his notion of saturation.¹⁵⁴ Still, I argued, there was hope.

Turning to his final study in *Being Given*, I showed how the call and responsal brought to light, in his phenomenology of givenness, the very logic of distance itself. While this was important, it left open the question of the phenomenology of revelation: why did this account of the call and the responsal not inform the phenomenology of revelation? How are we to account for the disconnect between Bks. 4 and 5 of *Being Given*?

The completion of this chapter brings to an end my study of Marion's thought. As I move now into my final chapter, where I stage a hermeneutic intervention, I conclude that Marion's work presents two options for thinking about divine revelation. On the one hand, his phenomenology of givenness represents an attempt to deepen and philosophically justify the themes that emerged in conversation with Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Dionysius, and Heidegger. This phenomenology of givenness, connected back to his theological work, represents a compelling resource for a thinking that seeks to align itself with the question of God. On the other hand, his explicit phenomenology of revelation, insofar as it is disconnected from the deeper notions of givenness and distance because of a Husserlian commitment to the inversion of Kantian categories, remains less helpful for thinking God. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, for example, an appeal to

¹⁵⁴ Another instance of this very unsatisfactory deployment of a phenomenology of revelation comes at the end of Marion's "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology" published in VR. Here Marion suggests, though strictly according to phenomenology, that we might consider God as the being-given *par excellence*. In this case, 'God' would be "found given without reserve or restraint . . . in the atonal tonality of bedazzlement" (VR, p. 63/94-95). It is worth noting, however, that such an appeal to bedazzlement (which would seem to repeat the logic of excess that is opposed to distance in Marion's theological studies) is understood in this essay in terms of unknowability and absence, terms which *could be* informed by the logic of distance and, thus, withdrawal. Carlson discusses this essay in *Indiscretion*, pp. 211-213.

the intuitive excess of God's manifestation is not sufficient unless one can account for what that excess *means* in relation to 'God'.¹⁵⁵

One last question remains: is the Husserlian phenomenology of revelation the only aspect of Marion's thought that is subject to criticism? It, clearly, remains trapped in a philosophy of consciousness, tied as it is to phenomenological inversions and reversals that do little to displace phenomenological thinking from its commitment to private lived experiences, possible forms of apparition, and states of consciousness. But what about the phenomenology of givenness that I've been defending? Is it not a powerful example of those phenomenologies of religion that Ricoeur highlighted as being immediate and without connection to the *concrete* manifestation of experience in its historical, textual, and cultural forms?¹⁵⁶ It is to this question that I now turn.

¹⁵⁵ This is particularly so, I'll mention here, given the work of someone like Jean-Yves Lacoste who so profoundly argues for a positive understanding of God's non-appearance. See, for example, his *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Raftery-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) and, more recently, *La phénoménologie de Dieu: Neuf études* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Carlson offers a helpful way to think about the problem: "Now, insofar as Marion defines revelation phenomenologically in terms of the 'saturated phenomenon' whose presence is so overwhelming that it can seem to be absent or unavailable, his distinction between revelation [as a phenomenological category] and Revelation [as a theological one] leads to a strange bind: either the phenomenology of revelation sheds no light on Revelation—which leaves one to wonder what meaning or purpose such a phenomenology might have—or else Revelation can indeed be described according to the phenomenology of the saturated phenomenon—in which case one is left to wonder how the saturated phenomenon's 'unavailability' [or excess] relates to the real, historical experience that would define revelation" (*Indiscretion*, p. 209).

CHAPTER 4

A HERMENEUTIC INTERVENTION

If the Bible may be said to be revealed this must refer to what it says, to the new being it unfolds before us. Revelation, in short, is a feature of the biblical world proposed by the text.

—Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” p. 104

4.1. Introduction

In Chapters 1 to 3, my study of Jean-Luc Marion’s treatment of divine revelation followed his development of the idea from his theological writings to his phenomenological ones. I argue that the operative concepts of his early work continue to function implicitly in his phenomenology of givenness. I show, however, that these concepts sit uneasily with the Kantian and Husserlian logic that Marion unwittingly deploys in his development of the notion of saturation. This has significant consequences for his treatment of revelation. While the logic of distance which powerfully supported his theological thought is preserved in his phenomenology of givenness, his explicit phenomenology of revelation is developed in terms of saturation. I also suggest that it is possible to read this ambiguity in terms of Marion’s two ‘sources’: Heidegger and Husserl.¹ Insofar as Marion operates in connection with a Heideggerian mode of

¹ Here I would note my agreement with Jean Grondin who has also suggested Marion’s double allegiance in this way. He argues that “Marion hérite de Husserl un sens cartésien de la foundation ultime (il s’agit dans son cas d’une donation ultime)” while from Heidegger he takes “un sens aigu et probablement plus puissant de la finitude, de la dépossession, du décentrement et de la déréliction qui affole justement le cartésianisme de la foundation et de la certitude ultimes.” For him this tension is not resolved but runs through Marion’s work and, indeed, makes *Being Given* a conflicted book. What I have tried to show is that this double allegiance runs between and complicates his two key notions of saturation and givenness and this, in turn, drives a fundamental ambiguity into the heart of his account of divine revelation. See Jean Grondin, “La

thinking—what I even dared to call an ontological mode of thinking—he remains connected to his earlier work which sought to displace the ‘doctrine of Being’ as a horizontal notion with the equally horizontal notion of givenness. This is what I meant when I spoke of Marion’s notion of givenness as a displacement of Heidegger’s notion of Being. On the other hand, Marion’s notion of saturation remains connected to a Husserlian and, finally, Kantian mode of thought which is not aimed and situated ontologically but, rather, epistemologically.² This way of thinking represents a break from his earlier work and a much weaker form of thought, content to ‘reverse’ or ‘invert’ the metaphysical epistemologies of Husserl and Kant rather than conquer and displace them.

As I consider Marion’s account of revelation in light of its development from *The Idol and Distance* to *In Excess*, it seems that two possibilities remain. On the one hand, in keeping with his treatment of revelation in his two essays from the early 1990s and developed according to the concept of saturation in his later work, the limitations of his radicalized philosophy of consciousness are evident. In this philosophy divine revelation is understood in terms of unique and excessive lived experiences that lead a transformed ‘subject’ into an encounter with an ‘object’ that blurs its perceptual horizons, overwhelms it with stupor, terror, and bedazzlement, but never removes it from the subject-object construction that it posits in the first place. On the other hand, however, my own attempts to connect his phenomenology of givenness to his theological development of distance

tension de la donation ultime et de la pensée herméneutique de l’application chez Jean-Luc Marion,” *Dialogue* 38 (1999), pp. 547-559 (p. 549).

² I also noted, of course, that *Being Given* could also be read in continuity with this epistemological approach. This would have the advantage of drawing together ‘givenness’ and ‘saturation’. It would, however, represent a complete break with Marion’s earlier work which would seem difficult to sustain.

would suggest that what is needed is not a ‘hermeneutic intervention’ staged in reference to his phenomenology but, rather, a retrieval of Marion’s early theological work; perhaps even a critique of his phenomenology of revelation (as saturation) on the basis of that early work. While there are aspects of Marion’s theological thought that warrant retrieval, the concept of distance is not enough to address Ricoeur’s challenge. For example, while it could be most fruitful to return, with Marion, to Hölderlin’s poetics and Dionysius’ theology of language, such a return would only meet Ricoeur’s challenge by being carried out on the other side of an engagement with the mediating and reflective structures of historicity and textuality. Thus, to stage a hermeneutic intervention and, therefore, to propose a hermeneutic account of revelation, is to argue against Marion’s phenomenology and his theology that access to the anterior horizon of revelation lies in the very historicity and textuality through which God is revealed. For this reason, the horizon of revelation articulated by Ricoeur not only displaces Marion’s phenomenology of revelation, but it displaces his theology of distance as well. In fact, as I show in my treatment of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of testimony, the themes raised in Marion’s theology of givenness can and must be rethought more adequately from a hermeneutic perspective.

Before discussing Ricoeur’s account of phenomenology’s relation to hermeneutics and then his hermeneutics of revelation, it is necessary to locate my argument in reference to a common critique of Marion’s work, one to which he has responded. A number of Marion’s critics have faulted him for not having a ‘hermeneutic’. For example, in reference to his work on revelation and on God, Richard Kearney has suggested that Marion’s thought represents an exemplary case of a tendency to posit a transcendence of

God that is “too transcendent.” He argues: “If removed entirely from historical being, God can become so unknowable and invisible as to escape all identification whatsoever. Such a numinous deity often takes the form of a ‘negative’ or ‘apophatic’ theology.”³ According to Kearney, the ‘stupor’ and ‘terror’ of the saturated phenomenon, imposed by the very ‘incomprehensibility’ of the phenomenon itself, raises a serious hermeneutic problem. He explains: “If the saturated phenomenon is really as bedazzling as Marion suggests, how can we tell the difference between the divine and its opposites? How are we to distinguish between enabling and disabling revelations?”⁴ In an interview with Marion, Kearney pushes this question. He asks Marion how, in relation to saturated phenomena, we are to interpret and to judge. Marion’s response is telling: identifying the hermeneutic question as an “old question,” he argues that precisely because there is an excess of intuition over intention in the saturated phenomenon there is a need for a ‘hermeneutics’. Such an ‘endless hermeneutics’ is generated precisely by this excess as we seek to respond to it.⁵ In reference to the phenomenon of revelation in particular, Marion claims: “What is given in revelation is precisely what surpasses any expectation. The fact that we face something beyond any expectation and any final conception solicits an endless hermeneutics.”⁶ In response to the hermeneutic challenge, therefore, Marion

³ Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 31.

⁴ Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, p. 33.

⁵ Richard Kearney & John Manoussakis, “A Dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion,” *Philosophy Today* 48:1 (2004), pp. 12-26 (p. 12). Here we would recall the notion of ‘delay’ so crucial to Marion’s account of *l’adonné*.

⁶ Kearney & Manoussakis, “A Dialogue with Jean-Marion,” p. 14. Kearny adds to his criticism in his recent book, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). He notes that for Marion, at best, “the human recipient of such revelation—what he terms in French *l’adonné*—can

speaks of a hermeneutics called forth by the saturated phenomenon itself. However, as Shane Mackinlay points out, Marion has not taken the challenge at the level it has been made.⁷ In fact, according to his analysis, “Marion’s ‘endless hermeneutics’ refers [only] to epistemic acts that interpret the meaning of a phenomenon *after it has already appeared*: The actual appearing of the phenomenon is fully accomplished independent of any such interpretations of its meaning.”⁸ Such a hermeneutic does not question the thought operative in a pure phenomenology of givenness but merely supplements it with an appeal to the need for ‘interpretation’ as a supplementary operation.⁹ Here is where I seek to intervene: by framing my argument in terms of ‘anteriority’ or ‘horizon,’ and by suggesting that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of revelation articulates an account of a *more originary horizon*, I connect the ‘hermeneutic question’ to its proper stakes and, therefore, will not let Marion dodge it.

merely respond to the event of saturation as one responds to a devastating trauma: not with any discerning interpretation but, at best, by blocking or being bedazzled by this ineluctable force of incoming saturation. . . . At best, we have an ‘endless hermeneutics’ *after* the event, but never during the event of saturation itself. Discernment, for Marion, is always derivative, not instantaneous” (p. 198, n. 6).

⁷ For example, Grondin’s challenge, to which Marion refers, cannot be reduced to the need for an epistemic act of interpretation to deal with the excess of a phenomenon that keeps on giving. On the contrary, Grondin’s hermeneutic challenge is precisely a challenge to that notion of the ‘phenomenon’. He points out, for example, how Marion overlooks the constitutive function of language and historicity and, therefore, fails to account of the meaning of meaning and, furthermore, the meaning of the self as a meaning maker (Grondin, “La tension de la donation,” pp. 552-553; p. 556). The other hermeneutic challenge mentioned by Marion was given by Jean Greisch in “L’herméneutique dans la ‘phénoménologie comme telle.’” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 96:1 (1991), pp. 43-64.

⁸ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, p. 35.

⁹ Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess*, p. 36. Mackinlay’s own reading of Marion argues that despite Marion’s pure phenomenology of givenness, articulated in *Being Given*, a phenomenology which precludes any hermeneutic awareness of the active role of the self as interpreter, Marion’s studies of individual saturated phenomena in *In Excess* bear within them a hermeneutic dimension. As a result, Mackinlay argues that Marion performs that for which his theory has no room. While this may be true, it seems to me still to remain at the epistemic level. The hermeneutic displacement that Ricoeur effects cannot be reduced to a debate about whether subjects are too passive or sufficiently active because, before any of that, the whole way of thinking needs to be relocated according to a different horizon.

4.2. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Paul Ricoeur

Before taking up Ricoeur's hermeneutics of revelation it is necessary to situate it in relation to his understanding of a hermeneutic phenomenology. The manner in which his account is directed toward the relationship of hermeneutics to Husserlian phenomenology lends it a particular usefulness in reference to Marion's project. In fact, for Ricoeur, the question of philosophical hermeneutics¹⁰ is the question of phenomenology and, indeed, of phenomenology's destiny.¹¹ This is so, he claims, because at least since Heidegger and Gadamer phenomenology and hermeneutics have been fundamentally related. What is crucial, for Ricoeur, is to think through this relation without losing Husserl. However, essential to not losing Husserl is a critique of the idealism that Husserl's phenomenology made possible. By discussing his critique of Husserlian idealism in relation to Marion's phenomenology, I argue that while Marion tries to distance himself from the same problematic notions, he is unable to do so and, therefore, repeats them. As a result, Ricoeur's hermeneutic alternative to this idealism serves as an explicit opportunity to show the need for a displacement of Marion's phenomenology.

According to Ricoeur, a "Husserlian idealism" can be detected in a series of fundamental claims proper to a certain form of phenomenology which privileges intuition, subjectivity, and the operation of the reduction. First, Ricoeur shows how the "ideal of scientificity" is connected to the centrality of intuition. For an idealist

¹⁰ For a discussion of 'philosophical hermeneutics' as opposed to the technique of hermeneutics, see Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), particularly pp. 1-15.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in TA, p. 25/43. Ricoeur's use of the language of destiny recalls a similar language used by Marion at the beginning of *Reduction and Givenness*: "In an essential way, phenomenology assumes in our century the very role of philosophy" (p. 1/7).

phenomenology, that which founds its arguments and, therefore, grounds its claims, is so purely self-evident that it is attested by every attempt to deny it. What makes this claim important is its connection to intuition. According to Ricoeur: “The strangeness of phenomenology lies entirely therein: from the outset, the principle is a ‘field’ and the first truth an ‘experience.’”¹² In other words, the first truth of this phenomenology is *seen* and, furthermore, in being seen only according to immanent modalities of intuition, it is indubitable. This leads to the issue of subjectivity. He argues that the “place of plenary intuition is subjectivity. [For Husserlian idealism] all transcendence is doubtful; immanence alone is indubitable.”¹³ Such a connection, however, between the indubitability of immanence and subjectivity requires the work of the reduction because it is the reduction that separates the transcendental from the empirical and thus opens intuition to its pure seeing. In “On Interpretation,” Ricoeur writes: “In the reduction . . . applied to the natural attitude, [Husserl] then sees the conquest of an empire of sense from which any question concerning things-in-themselves is excluded by being put into brackets. It is this empire of sense, thus freed from any matter-of-fact question, that constitutes the privileged field of phenomenological experience, the domain of intuition *par excellence*.”¹⁴ This is the final fundamental claim. Before moving on to see how Ricoeur responds to each of these claims, it is worth asking about Marion’s relation to this idealistic phenomenology. While it is difficult to deny Marion’s investment in the indubitability of intuition (indeed, Grondin already connected it to Marion’s

¹² Paul Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in TA, p. 27/46.

¹³ Ricoeur, TA, p. 27/46.

¹⁴ Ricoeur, “On Interpretation,” in TA, p. 13/30.

Husserlian/Cartesian loyalties to an absolute foundation), he does seek to uncouple givenness from intuition and, as we saw in the case of the icon, he even seeks to move beyond intuition itself. Furthermore, in relation to the other concerns raised by Ricoeur, Marion also seeks to problematize the reduction and, even more so, to radically rethink the subject. As I turn now to Ricoeur's critical analysis, I do so in order to see how his alternative compares to that of Marion.

In place of a scientificity guaranteed by intuitive seeing, Ricoeur argues for an ontological understanding of belonging and its correlate, the understanding-interpretation pair. To belong to a 'world,' to recognize one's finitude, is to recognize that "any enterprise of justification and foundation" is "always preceded by a relation that supports it."¹⁵ What is crucial here is that the notion of intentionality requires this notion of belonging and, therefore, any phenomenology that compromises on it actually endangers intentionality itself. This is the case, Ricoeur argues, because intentionality only makes sense if it "presupposes a prior relation of inclusion that encompasses the allegedly autonomous subject and the allegedly adverse object."¹⁶ Such an appeal to a prior relation of inclusion is related directly to Heidegger's understanding of *being-in-the-world* which, Ricoeur says, "expresses better the primacy of care over the gaze" and "the horizontal character of that to which we are bound. It is indeed being-in-the-world that precedes reflection."¹⁷ This leads to the displacement of intuition by interpretation.¹⁸ It is precisely

¹⁵ Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," TA, p. 29/49.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, TA, p. 30/49.

¹⁷ Ricoeur, TA, p. 30/50. He also connects this discovery of the world to the later Husserl. Thanks to him. Ricoeur argues, "phenomenology discovers, in place of an idealist subject locked within its system of meanings, a living being which from all time has, as the horizon of all its intentions, a world, the world. . . ."

in belonging to the world that the human being understands the world. Furthermore, if understanding is the mode of being of the being who ‘finds its way around’ in the world by taking up the possibilities presented to it therein, interpretation is the explication of that mode of being. At work here are two conceptual structures. As Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, the human being finds itself thrown into a ‘there’ (da) only to take up in that world its own possibilities. This taking up or, as Heidegger says, ‘projecting’ of its being upon the possibilities of ‘there,’ is understanding. Interpretation is the becoming-explicit of that projection and its negotiation with its ‘there’. As a result, the primary mode of being understandingly is circumspective. Heidegger writes:

To say that ‘circumspection discovers’ means that the ‘world’ which has already been understood comes to be interpreted. The ready-to-hand comes *explicitly* into the sight which understands. . . . That which is disclosed in understanding—that which is understood—is already accessible in such a way that its ‘as which’ can be made to stand out explicitly. The ‘as’ makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation.¹⁹

This as-structure is connected to the “structure of anticipation” in which the categories of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception articulate both the rootedness of our

Before objectivity, there is the horizon of the world; before the subject of the theory of knowledge, there is operative life” (Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin in CI, p. 9/13).

¹⁸ Ricoeur points out that Husserl’s appeal to intuition grounds knowledge in certainty by avoiding the “partial sketches” or “profiles” (*Abschattungen*) that are proper to all transcendent knowledge, i.e., knowledge of external, intentional objects. Immanence, he explains, “is not doubtful, because it is not given by ‘profiles’ and hence involves nothing presumptive, allowing only the coincidence of reflection with what ‘has just’ been experienced” (TA, p. 28/47). In his discussion of the hermeneutic displacement of intuition by interpretation, Merald Westphal argues that “the hermeneutical claim is that what is given to intuition, strictly speaking, undermines our perception or understanding.” He goes on to explain: “Wittgenstein makes use of Jastrow’s duck-rabbit to make this point, namely, that all seeing is seeing-as in a context where other seeings-as are possible, and not just as mistakes.” See Merald Westphal, “Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Religion,” in *Reading Ricoeur*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 109.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 189.

belonging to the ‘world’ and the temporal orientation that makes all interpretation an act of appropriation within the as-structure. For example, in the case of fore-having,

Heidegger explains:

In every case this interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance*—in a *fore-having*. As the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood. . . . When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted.”²⁰

Thus, following Heidegger and in contrast to an epistemological appeal to a founding intuition, Ricoeur understands human being as a being who is always and already involved with the world in such a way that the task of making sense of its involvement is prior to constituting objects through the relation of intentionality and intuition. While it may seem straightforward to posit, with Kant and Marion, that intuition functions as the original mode of receptivity, Ricoeur argues that it is already a founded concept whose very possibility depends on the ‘fact’ that we are in-the-world understandingly.²¹

Given what has just been said, the idea that “the place of ultimate foundation is subjectivity, that all transcendence is doubtful and only immanence indubitable—this in turn becomes eminently doubtful.”²² With the introduction of the ‘as-structure’ and the idea that all ‘knowledge’ is first of all the interpretation of a being who understandingly navigates her world, it is possible to see the manner in which intentionality is central: all consciousness is consciousness of *something* because human being is always outside

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 191. For Ricoeur’s summary discussion see “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” TA, p. 31/51-52

²¹ For Heidegger’s important discussion of ‘knowing’ as a “founded mode” of Being, see *Being and Time*, pp. 86-90.

²² Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” TA, p. 33/54.

itself in the ‘world,’ interpreting the signs of meaning that it discovers there. Richard Kearney captures this nicely: “Human being, for Ricoeur, is always a *being-interpreted*. It cannot start from itself or simply invent meanings out of itself *ex nihilo*. Therefore, instead of proceeding according to the model of the Cartesian *concept*—a pure and distinct idea transparent to itself—hermeneutics is committed to the primacy of the *symbol*, where meaning emerges as oblique, mediated, enigmatic, layered and multiform.”²³ For Ricoeur this is crucial to approaching the question of subjectivity. Just as epistemological modes of thought posit an object which must be known, they also posit a self-conscious subject who, transparent to itself, knows both itself and the world. In the same way that philosophical hermeneutics overcomes the construction of the constituted object, so it overcomes that of the subject. It does this by taking up the critiques of ideology and psychoanalysis, critiques which bring to light a process of interpretative appropriation that is, on the one hand, dependent on the very historicity of the subject but, on the other hand, nondisclosive of that historicity.²⁴ At the center of this process of critique and its relation to the historicity of the subject is the notion of distancing. He writes: “The concept of distancing is the dialectical counterpart of the notion of belonging, in the sense that we belong to a historical tradition through a relation of

²³ Richard Kearney, “Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Hants: Ashgate, 2004), p. 14.

²⁴ Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” TA, p. 34/55. Concerning psychoanalysis, for example, Ricoeur writes: “If the viewpoint of consciousness is—from the outset and for the most part—a false point of view, I must make use of the Freudian systematization, its topography and economics, as a ‘discipline’ aimed at making me completely homeless, at dispossessing me of that illusory Cogito which at the outset occupies the place of the founding act, *I think, I am*. The path through Freudian topography and economics simply expresses the necessary discipline of an antiphenomenology.” See *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 422-423.

distance which oscillates between remoteness and proximity.”²⁵ With this notion, Ricoeur’s concept of the text becomes significant. Being interpretatively, the human person encounters signs in her world. These signs can take the form of texts, units of meaning detached from their author and original setting. These texts put us in relation to our own historicity by opening a situation of “communication in and through distance”: these texts make a claim on my self-knowledge (communication) but they do so only by first alienating me from myself in discovering that ‘they are not like me’ (distanciation).²⁶ Not only does such a textual account of hermeneutics maintain its tie to pre-philosophical notions of hermeneutics as exegesis, it also draws thought away from any immediate and transparent understanding of itself. Furthermore, a philosophical hermeneutics that employs modes of critique in relation to textuality is also able to draw out the temptations of consciousness to reduce the documents that ‘are not like me’ to ones that ‘are just how I want them to be.’ Ricoeur concludes: “The extension of the understanding through textual exegesis and its constant rectification through the critique of ideology are properly part of the process of *Auslegung* [explication]. Textual exegesis and critique of ideology are the two privileged routes along which understanding is developed into interpretation and thus becomes itself.”²⁷

Such an account of things opens, for Ricoeur, a crucial concept in his hermeneutics of revelation, one that stands in opposition to the Husserlian notion of the reduction. Given what has just been said about the privilege of the text, he will go on to

²⁵ Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” TA, p. 35/57.

²⁶ Ricoeur, TA, p. 35/57.

²⁷ Ricoeur, TA, p. 35/57.

argue that what is crucial to the text is ‘what it says,’ its ‘matter’. What is significant about this ‘matter’ of the text, and what I will explore later in the chapter, is the manner in which it exercises a double reference. In this double reference, the first-order reference, which pertains to the text’s literal claim, is poetically suspended, such that a second-order reference is released. According to this second-order reference, “the world is manifested no longer as the totality of the manipulable objects but as the horizon of our life and our project, in short as *Lebenswelt* [life-world], as being-in-the-world.”²⁸ Thus, and most importantly, he continues: “What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities.”²⁹ This second order reference and the world that it opens relies on an important doubling of distance: not only is a text read in distance (historicity) but it “places the reference of the text at a *distance* from the *world* articulated by everyday language.”³⁰ This is very important for Ricoeur’s understanding of selfhood. Contrary to Marion’s disavowal of authenticity, achieved through the championing of an account of an ecstatic subjectivity of *l’adonné*, Ricoeur holds to a strong notion of appropriation. However, by doing so he achieves what Marion’s *l’adonné* could not: a displacement from the subject-object relation that continues to mark all Marion’s figures of subjectivity. For despite his inversions and grammatical relocations, Marion’s figures remain defined by their relation to ‘the phenomenon’. For Ricoeur, however, authentic appropriation means a concrete *response*

²⁸ Ricoeur, TA, p. 36/58.

²⁹ Ricoeur, TA, p. 36/59.

³⁰ Ricoeur, TA, p. 36/59.

“to the matter of the text, and hence to the proposals of meaning the text unfolds.”³¹ Thus, Ricoeur states his paradoxical discovery: “That appropriation does not imply the secret return of the sovereign subject can be attested to in the following way: if it remains true that hermeneutics terminates in self-understanding, then the subjectivism of this proposition must be rectified by saying that to understand *oneself* is to understand oneself *in front of the text*.”³² Even more radically, this means that “the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text.”³³

Before considering Ricoeur’s hermeneutic responses to the problematic claims of Husserlian idealism I asked how Marion’s phenomenology fared in relation to its seeming identification with this same idealism. I suggested that Marion himself had implicitly identified problems within prior (Husserlian and Heideggerian) forms of phenomenology: the notion of intuition, the reduction, and the subject. It is important to remember that these three issues are crucially important to a phenomenology of divine revelation. While Marion himself identified the reduction and the *I* as possible restrictions to revelation’s phenomenality, I argued that Marion’s commitment to intuition (and its Husserlian and Kantian heritage) blocks his access to revelation because it directs his thought away from the horizontal notions whose stakes exceed the level of the epistemological. Now, in light of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical response, we can see how little Marion frees himself from these problematic claims of Husserlian idealism. In relation to

³¹ Ricoeur, TA, p. 37/60.

³² Ricoeur, TA, p. 37/60.

³³ Ricoeur, TA, p. 37/60.

the issue of intuition we see that the only way to displace the Kantian and Husserlian epistemology is to move to the ontological level of belonging and, starting from there, to locate knowledge as a derivative mode of being whose conditions lie in understanding and interpretation. Only with this displacement of intuition by interpretation can Marion escape the limited descriptive scope to which he commits himself in the realm of divine revelation. All inversions and reversals aside, his thought remains stuck in Husserlian idealism and, therefore, a subject-object oscillation. Things are the same for his attempts to overcome subjectivism. By refusing the detour through language, signs, and texts, Marion's subject remains just that: a subject, always defined in relation to that which stands against it, whether it be an 'object,' a 'being,' or a 'given'. Even its own historicity is subsumed under the terms of a reciprocating relation between a subjective response and an anonymous call. At the very best, then, Marion shifts grammatical designations: from *I*, to *me/myself*. What is precisely unavailable to him, however, is the *self* delivered over according to the concrete determinations of a subject matter whose presentation functions to open a determinate set of possibilities that call for appropriation. Finally, at the center of Ricoeur's hermeneutic engagement with phenomenology is a refusal to grant the reduction a privileged place.³⁴ In fact, in place of it Ricoeur develops his crucial notion of

³⁴ In this same essay, he writes: "[I]f we return from Husserl's *Ideas* and *Cartesian Meditations* to his *Logical Investigations*, we rediscover a state of phenomenology where the notions of expression and meaning, of consciousness and intentionality, of intellectual intuition, are elaborated without the 'reduction' being introduced in its idealist stage. . . . That consciousness is outside of itself, that it is *toward meaning* before meaning is for it and, above all, before consciousness is *for itself*: is this not what the central discovery of phenomenology implies" (TA, p. 39/63). Ricoeur uses even stronger language elsewhere. In "On Interpretation," he writes: "This subversion of phenomenology by hermeneutics calls for another such action: the famous 'reduction' by which Husserl separates the 'sense' from the background of existence in

double reference. Far from the subject operating a reduction of the ‘natural attitude’ to the reduced immanence of the apparition, the interpreting being encounters signs in the world which, in their capacity as poetic texts, operate a double reference which obeys a logic of displacement or distanciation through which the world of objects is bracketed in order to reveal a deeper world of meaning. Such a bracketing, however, is operated by the text in order not to return the subject to itself but, as we have seen, to lead the subject to an appropriation that is a disappropriation of itself in favour of the world of the text and possibilities presented there.³⁵ All of this, finally, is made possible in Ricoeur’s turn to a hermeneutic ontology of the ‘world’ in which human beings find themselves in a more originary way than any appeals to a pure call or a saturated phenomenon could access. Finally, to note a contrast which, by now, will have been noticed, Ricoeur’s notion of distanciation plays a crucial role in this displacement. In fact, one could frame the relation of Ricoeur and Marion in terms of the relation between the notions of ‘distanciation’ and ‘distance’. While both *seek* to displace the autarky of subjectivity, only Ricoeur passes through the mediating structures of historicity and textuality and thus withdraws the self from the subject-object oscillation. There is no doubt that Marion wishes to accomplish this as well, but without the detour by way of belonging, historical distance, and the

which natural consciousness is initially immersed can no longer be considered a primary philosophical move” (TA, p. 15/32).

³⁵ In his article on Ricoeur’s phenomenology of religion, Westphal equates Marion’s appeal to revelation as a ‘possibility’ with Ricoeur’s own understanding of possibility. I disagree with this equation: Ricoeur’s notion of possibility emerges in connection with his hermeneutic displacement of Husserlian idealism while Marion’s notion is, precisely, in keeping with that idealism. For Marion, possibility pertains to pure apparition. For Ricoeur it pertains to the descriptive power of concrete disclosure. See Westphal, “Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Phenomenology of Religion,” p. 114. For an excellent treatment of the concept of possibility in Ricoeur’s work see Richard Kearney, “Capable Man, Capable God,” in *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 49-61.

double reference of writing his notion of distance remains abstract and, therefore, fated to more and more paradoxical expressions and indefinable definitions.

4.3. The Hermeneutics of Testimony

I have just suggested that even though Marion seeks to exceed a phenomenology whose commitments to intuition, subjectivity, and the operation of the reduction block access to divine revelation he is not able to do so because his work remains defined by the deeper commitments of Husserlian idealism. In contrast to Ricoeur's displacement of intuition by interpretation, the subject by the self, and the reduction by an understanding of the poetic double-reference, Marion's thought remains unable to finally leave behind the philosophy of consciousness and its fascination with the subject-object relation. What I show in this section is that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony addresses itself to issues that are crucial to Marion's theological thought and develops them in a manner consistent with Ricoeur's hermeneutic displacement of idealistic phenomenology. In fact, what is crucial for my account of Ricoeur's understanding of revelation in relation to that of Marion, is the manner in which the notion of testimony draws Ricoeur's thought into dialogue with important theological themes identified in Marion's early work even as it provides an excellent view of the differences introduced by Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach. Thus, what is at stake with testimony is, in fact, a notion of givenness developed in relation to manifestation and, therefore, a manner of thinking selfhood in accordance with this givenness.

In an essay entitled “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” Ricoeur argues that testimony “should be a philosophical problem” and, therefore, it should be applied to “words, works, actions, and to lives which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience and history which nonetheless transcends experience and history.”³⁶ In order to provoke and achieve such a philosophical understanding of testimony, he claims, it will be necessary to develop a mode of thought in which the “the absolute . . . makes sense” for consciousness.³⁷ By this he means that the question of God must be displaced from the question of proofs and, indeed, from all onto-theology, in order to be taken up again as the question of the convergence between an “original affirmation” made by reflective consciousness and a set of “perfectly contingent acts” within the domain of history.³⁸ Such a convergence, however, is precisely the challenge for a mode of thought that wishes to preserve, on the one hand, a genuine sense of the transcendent and, on the other hand, an authentic relation of human subjectivity to that transcendence. As was the case for Marion, it is vital for Ricoeur to maintain this

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony” (1972), trans. David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan in *EBI*, pp. 119-154 (pp. 119-120).

³⁷ Ricoeur, *EBI*, p. 120.

³⁸ In this essay Ricoeur defines “original affirmation” as “the idea that the self makes of itself,” and, in the making of that idea, it is the “act which accomplishes the negation of the limitations which affect individual destiny” (p. 120). What is important about this notion, for our purposes, is the fact that this act of original affirmation opens the self to an encounter with “the contingent signs that the absolute, in its generosity, allows to appear of itself” (p. 120). The notion of original affirmation has a complex history in Ricoeur’s early work. It is a main theme in his early ‘poetics of the will’ and receives its most explicit treatment in “True and False Anguish” and “Negativity and Primary Affirmation,” published in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 287-328. The concept is further illuminated in reference to its correlative concept: reflection. According to Ricoeur, “reflection” is “nothing other than the appropriation of our act of existing by means of a critique applied to the works and the acts which are the signs of this act of existing” (“Existence and Hermeneutics,” *CI*, p. 17/21). For a treatment of the theme of testimony within Ricoeur’s work as a whole, see Jean Greisch, “Testimony and Attestation,” trans. Steve Rothnie in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), pp. 81-98.

connection. Unlike Marion, however, Ricoeur refuses the temptation to maintain this connection by interpreting revelation according to pure structures of consciousness and, in fact, subjects consciousness to a mode of phenomenality that demands, by its very appearance, interpretation.

The shift in thinking between them is signalled by Ricoeur's recognition of the audacity of his notion of testimony. He asks: "Do we have the right to invest a moment of history with an absolute character?"³⁹ He responds by arguing that it is possible to make such an investment if one assumes a hermeneutic approach, that is, if one thinks according to the double mediation of testimony. He writes: "What, in fact, is it to interpret testimony? It is a twofold act, an act of consciousness of itself and an act of historical understanding based on the signs that the absolute gives of itself. The signs of the absolute's self-disclosure are at the same time signs in which consciousness recognizes itself."⁴⁰ He approaches this twofold thinking, first, from its historical pole and, second, from its reflexive one. Historically, speaking of revelation in relation to the absolute means turning one's attention to the biblical texts. To see these texts according to the notion of testimony is to see how they *give* to interpretation a content to be interpreted precisely as they *call for* an interpretation.⁴¹ This means, first, that as a mode of access to the absolute, testimony is fundamentally related to manifestation itself. Ricoeur writes: "The absolute declares itself here and now. In testimony there is an immediacy of the absolute without which there would be nothing to interpret. This immediacy functions as

³⁹ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 143.

⁴¹ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 143.

origin, as *initium*, on this side of which we can go no further.”⁴² To speak in this way of the givenness of the absolute is to recall a manner of thinking that is also Marion’s. Ricoeur’s language of declaration and immediacy recalls Marion’s language of summons, surprise, and the surging into appearance of that which confronts us, without screen. Likewise, the factual character of the appearance, precisely its ‘here and now,’ connects Ricoeur’s thought with Marion’s appeal to the eventfulness of revelation as well as its iconic initiative. Such seeming agreement, however, hides a deeper difference.

Ricoeur writes: “Beginning [with this immediacy], interpretation will be the endless mediation of this immediacy.” That is, “at the same time that it gives something to interpretation, testimony demands to be interpreted.”⁴³ Such a demand, furthermore, is not the demand for an ‘endless hermeneutics’ applied to the given phenomenon after the fact of its autonomous appearance. This is evident from three dimensions which define this call to interpretation. First and most importantly in reference to Marion, testimony requires interpretation because of the dialectic between meaning and event that is proper to testimony itself. Ricoeur explains that “interpretation cannot be applied to testimony from without” but, rather, “is intended to be the taking up again, in a different discourse, of an internal dialectic of testimony.”⁴⁴ Not only does this claim point to the central tension between any claim and its meaning, but it registers a central feature of testimony: it is, itself, always given *as* testimony. I have already pointed to this in the Introduction,

⁴² Ricoeur, EBI, p. 144. He continues a few sentences later: “For the self-manifestation of the absolute here and now indicates the end of the infinite regress of reflection. The absolute shows itself. In this shortcut of the absolute and its presence is constituted an experience of the absolute. It is only about this that testimony testifies” (p. 144).

⁴³ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 144.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 144-145.

when I discussed Ricoeur's three circles. He also expresses it well in an essay dedicated to the thought of Rudolf Bultmann. He writes: "Only in the understanding of the text do I know the object. Faith in what the text is concerned with must be deciphered in the text that speaks of it and in the confession of faith of the primitive church which is expressed in the text. This is why there is a circle: to understand the text, it is necessary to believe in what the text announces to me; but what the text announces to me is given nowhere but in the text."⁴⁵ There is, therefore, a crucial connection to a content, a 'matter of the text' as we heard earlier. The facticity of the givenness of the absolute only heightens this privileging of content by demanding, in its reception, a response of interpretation that plays out in concert with the structure of emergence that is proper to its givenness. This structure of emergence is not, however, reducible to an 'effect,' as in the case of Marion's painting, because its emergence is articulated according to the dialectic between meaning and event, between the saying and the said. Interpretation reverses the passage from event to meaning in order to access the meaning of the event. This reversal, however, is crucial to the event itself. Interpretation is not, therefore, external to testimony but implied by its initial dialectical structure. Secondly, and once again highlighting the centrality of the content of testimony and its claim, testimony evokes a critical activity. Earlier in the essay, Ricoeur located the central importance of the juridical image of the trial for an understanding of testimony.⁴⁶ He picks this up here in reference to the question of the critical activity which must confront the question of true and false testimony. By arguing that it "is always necessary to choose between the false witness and the true witness," he

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann," trans, Peter McCormick in CI, p. 390/382.

⁴⁶ Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics of Testimony," EBI, pp. 124-128.

shows how testimony “is both a manifestation and a crisis of appearances.”⁴⁷ For Ricoeur, such a recognition introduces the important element of discernment and, therefore, offers a hermeneutic way to consider the question of idolatry. While Marion’s treatment of idolatry provided a powerful means of accessing the question of anteriority, it also lacked a commitment to the kind of content that, for Ricoeur, is crucial to a determination of appearances. Hermeneutics arises a second time, he claims, for there is “no manifestation of the absolute without the crisis of false testimony, without the decision which distinguishes between sign and idol.”⁴⁸ Finally, Ricoeur connects the content of the testimony to its enactment by the witness. As with Marion, the theme of passivity and reception is at stake. With Ricoeur, however, passivity is not a passivity to the traumatizing bedazzlement of saturation but, rather, to the claims of one’s testimony itself. One suffers the appearance of testimony by becoming, in response to it, a witness and, perhaps, a martyr.⁴⁹ Such martyrdom, however, is fundamentally connected to the content of one’s testimony and not its mode of apparition.

In order to see how this plays out on the side of the self, it is necessary to appreciate a notion that Ricoeur borrows from Jean Nabert. Employing what he calls a “criteriology of the divine,” Nabert tracks the determinate affirmation that defines the self. According to Nabert, what we are talking about here is “the expression of the greatest effort that consciousness can make in order to take away the conditions which

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 146.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 146. One recalls, here, Kearney’s critique of Marion and, I would argue, finds in Ricoeur’s thought a proposal that maintains a focus on phenomenality while preserving the vital moment of judgement.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 146-147.

prevent it from attaining complete satisfaction, when it attempts in the very core of its finitude to justify itself, to change itself into a radical purity of its intention.”⁵⁰ The logic here is actually very similar to the logic of the material idol that Marion describes. As with the criteriology of the divine, the gaze seeks an image of its highest view of itself in the idol. The idol, like the criteriology, tells us not who we are but, rather, who we want to be. What is important for Ricoeur’s account of testimony is the recognition that such a desire enters into a dialectical tension with the appropriation of our identity through the signs of the absolute’s givenness. In fact, the tension lies precisely in the fact that we evaluate the projections of the criteriology in reference to the testimony of the absolute *and* we evaluate true and false testimony of the absolute in relation to the criteriology. As a result, two forms of judgement are put in play: “the reflexive judgement which produces the criteria of the divine by an entirely interior operation, and the historical judgement which is used to group together externally the meaning of the given testimonies. The fundamental identity of this double operation becomes the stake of the hermeneutic of the absolute.”⁵¹ We recall here the important point about affirmation and reflection: it opens the self to receive the contingent givenness of the divine. The reflexive judgement of the criteriology is funded by the wisdom that comes from belonging to the world. While such wisdom can always overstep itself and must, therefore, be measured by the signs of the

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ricoeur, EBI, p. 147. Original source: Jean Nabert, *Le Désir de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1966), p. 265.

⁵¹ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 148. Elsewhere Ricoeur writes: “Between criteriology and hermeneutics, the relation is reciprocal. As the ordinary usage of the term ‘testimony,’ and even more its practical use, indicates, there where an attestation is pronounced, a challenge may arise. Every testimony is produced in a trial-like process. There are false witnesses, just as there are false gods. This is why the criteriology of the divine and the discernment of testimony go together and mutually call for each other” (Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” in FS, p. 116).

absolute in history, the critical, discerning reception of these signs is made possible by the self's affirmation of itself in the world. Only through this affirmation do the signs of the absolute 'matter' in the first place. Thus, for Nabert, like Marion, there is an important disclosive authenticity inherent to the logics of 'criteriology' and 'idolatry.' However, unlike Marion, Nabert allows the criteriology to function critically in reference to a testimony that would claim the status of the absolute. As we have seen, and as Kearney and Caputo have noted in particular, this is impossible for Marion given the unquestioned 'initiative' and, presumably, truth of God's iconic appearance. The vital consequence for thinking selfhood, however, particularly in reference to any system of thought connected to Husserlian idealism, lies in the claim made here that "consciousness, in fact, advances toward the most interior self only at the price of the most extreme attention used in looking for signs and glimpses of the absolute in its appearances."⁵² Ricoeur concludes: "To the greatest interiority of the act corresponds the greatest exteriority of the sign. . . . It is, in effect, a fact of finitude that original affirmation cannot appropriate itself in a totally intuitive reflection but that it must make a detour through an interpretation of the contingent signs that the absolute gives of itself in history."⁵³

By taking up a discussion of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony I extend his hermeneutical displacement of Marion's phenomenology beyond the domain of phenomenology itself in order to approach the specific questions of revelation. This is necessary for two reasons. First, it allows me to continue to develop the similarity of their

⁵² Ricoeur, EBI, p. 148.

⁵³ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 148-149.

concerns precisely in the midst of their significant differences. Second, it serves as the entry into Ricoeur's own explicit discussion of revelation.

4.4. Revelation: The World of the Text

In the former section I introduced and developed Ricoeur's idea of the hermeneutics of testimony. In this final section of the chapter I discuss the notion that is key to his account of divine revelation—the world of the text—and link it back to his hermeneutics of testimony. In the 'world of the text' we see a notion that fleshes out the meaning of the formation of selfhood through a discipleship to texts. Reciprocally, the hermeneutics of testimony locates the notion of the text's world in reference to a specific historical attestation. I argue, therefore, that these are the two categories which, together, constitute the core of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of revelation and which allow it to displace Marion's thought. This concept of displacement is central. In my discussion of Ricoeur's critique of Husserlian idealism I showed how a hermeneutic phenomenology emerges in connection with an ontology of the 'world'. Contrary to Marion's reading of this ontology as idolatrous, the being-in-the-world who exists understandingly and by interpretation of historical signs is a being whose connection to the world is pre-reflective and therefore prior to the relation of 'subject' and 'object.' Thus I argued that as 'radical' as Marion seeks to be in his account of an anterior horizon, his account is fundamentally informed by an idealism that cannot access this pre-reflective level of belonging. Secondly, in relation to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony, the notion of a horizon is also at stake. By focusing on testimony as a means of access to an experience of the absolute, Ricoeur

makes concrete what is suggested in his hermeneutic ontology of belonging: openness to the divine comes not in ever more purified notions of distance or givenness but in the scandal of a historical particularity that is open to the plurality of interpretation. Finally, in this section I show that as the notion of the ‘world of the text’ converges with his hermeneutics of testimony, the notion of ‘world’ and, therefore, horizon is deepened once more. For Ricoeur, that which is more originary than consciousness is not that which lies behind it, still inhabiting the transcendental shadows of some ghostly ‘conditions,’ but rather that which meets it outside of itself in the ‘world’ projected in front of the text.

In keeping with what has been advanced so far, Ricoeur argues that revelation is approached in the mode of listening.⁵⁴ In a logic exactly attuned to the hermeneutics of testimony, he suggests that in listening and, particularly, listening to Christian proclamation, thinking concerns itself with the universal precisely by taking up the contingency of individual events and the particular texts that attest them.⁵⁵ This means, however, that an account of revelation does not begin with speculative concepts but, rather, with the “discourse of faith.”⁵⁶ In “Philosophy and Religious Language,” Ricoeur explains that the goal is to “get as close as possible to the most *originary* expressions of a community of faith, to those expressions through which the members of this community have interpreted their experience for the sake of themselves or for others’ sake.”⁵⁷ The central implication of this claim is that “the very word ‘God’ primordially belongs to

⁵⁴ My analysis in what follows is based on the two essays that I take to be central to Ricoeur’s account of revelation: “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* and “Naming God” in *Figuring the Sacred*.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, “Naming God,” FS, p. 217.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” p. 74.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” in FS, p. 37.

[this] level of discourse” and not, first of all, to discourse of a “speculative, theological, or philosophical type.”⁵⁸ Listening to proclamation means, therefore, letting go of “every form of onto-theological knowledge.”⁵⁹ However, metaphysical knowledge of the ‘object’ (God) is not the only form of thinking that is knocked down by the appeal to originary discourse. Also to be overcome is the transcendental security of subjective knowledge.

Ricoeur writes:

Listening to Christian preaching also stands in the order of presuppositions, but in a sense where presupposition is no longer self-founding, the beginning of the self from and by the self, but rather the assumption of an antecedent meaning that has always preceded me. *Listening excludes founding oneself*. [It] requires, therefore, a second letting go, the abandoning of a more subtle and more tenacious pretension than that of onto-theological knowledge. It requires giving up (*dessaissement*) the human self in its will to mastery, sufficiency, and autonomy.⁶⁰

The double renunciation proper to listening “places reflection before a variety of expressions of faith, all modulated by the variety of discourses within which the faith of Israel and then of the early church is inscribed.”⁶¹ Here, Ricoeur says, “God has been named.”⁶² In these forms of discourse, therefore, “we encounter a concept of revelation

⁵⁸ Ricoeur, “Naming God,” FS, p. 223. Werner Jeanrond questions the distinction between a purely originary mode of discourse and the speculative or theological opposite that Ricoeur seems to be presupposing. In a response to Jeanrond’s paper, Ricoeur agrees with the critique and suggests that his thought has advanced to include a notion of *thought* that is proper to the biblical writings themselves. He refers Jeanrond to his book, co-written with André La Cocque, entitled *Thinking Biblically*. See Werner G. Jeanrond, “Hermeneutics and Revelation,” in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur*, eds. Maureen Junker-Kenny & Peter Kenny (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), pp. 42-57. Ricoeur’s comments follow (pp. 58-62).

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, FS, p. 223.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, FS, p. 224.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 75.

⁶² Ricoeur, “Naming God,” FS, p. 224.

that is pluralistic [and] polysemic.”⁶³ As I showed in the Introduction, this plurality and polysemy is vital to Ricoeur’s discussion of the self and its formation by the world of the text. As I also indicated there, the plurality and polysemy of revelation is tied to the various modes of discourse proper to the scriptures.

In my discussion of Ricoeur’s essay in the Introduction, I briefly discussed the connection between the modes of discourse proper to the Hebrew scriptures and the manner in which they represented a polyphonic call to which a polycentric self was the response. In “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” Ricoeur provides a detailed account of the five modes of discourse found in the Hebrew bible.⁶⁴ He argues that it is precisely in the forms of these discourses that the particularities of revelation take shape and, in turn, shape the subjects who listen to them. The “confession of faith expressed in the biblical documents is directly modulated by the forms of discourse wherein it is expressed. . . . What announces itself there is in each instance qualified by the form of the announcement. The religious ‘saying’ is only constituted in the interplay between story and prophecy, history and legislation, legislation and wisdom, and finally wisdom and lyricism.”⁶⁵ I also pointed out in the Introduction that such an account of the forms of biblical testimony points toward an understanding of the unique referent of the biblical text. It is time now to discuss that idea in more detail. In other words, if, in

⁶³ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 75.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 75-90.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 91-92.

listening to Christian preaching, one becomes subject to the “transfer from the text to life,” it is necessary to account for the logic of this transfer and the form of this life.⁶⁶

To get at the logic of this transfer it is useful to consider an objection to Ricoeur’s thought. The critical question might go like this: having argued so strongly for the relationship between the form of the testimony and its content and, therefore, having identified the meaning of the content with the form, does not Ricoeur now face the problem of having surrendered the disclosive power, not to mention truth, of revelation to a purely textual meaning, without any pragmatic force on the prescriptive or even descriptive levels of experience? Or, as he himself considers the objection, does his hermeneutics of revelation “place texts above life?”⁶⁷ He continues, entertaining this objection further: “If I make believers scribes, will it be long before I make them literary critics? Taken in the closure of their own textuality, my texts will then close in upon themselves. They will be open to other texts that they cite or that they transform, but the interplay of intertextuality will only come to be more separated and closed off from the side I have called life.”⁶⁸ It may be that this, finally, is the price that Ricoeur must pay for following structuralism and allowing the forms of discourse to determine the meaning of the discourse. Such a strategy is, of course, understandable in relation to modes of discourse that do not have a descriptive relation to the world, that is, that do not relate immediately to ordinary, historical, or even scientific description. Poetic discourse, like that found in the biblical documents, seems to need structuralism to explain its function.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, “Naming God,” FS, p. 217.

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, FS, p. 218.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, FS, p. 219.

Precisely in this need, however, is the limit: for here, within poetic discourse, “language celebrates itself.” Or, still entertaining the objection, he continues, “it if does seem to refer to something, it does so to the extent that it expresses emotions that are wholly subjective and that add nothing to the description of the world.” Thus, he concludes, according to this scenario, “naming God is, at best, a poetic activity without any bearing on description; that is, without any bearing on true knowledge of the world.”⁶⁹ Ironically, and quite unexpectedly, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of revelation seems to have arrived at precisely the same place as that of Marion: having been reduced to the ‘effect’ of an ‘apparition’ or, likewise, to the emotive play of textual signifiers in relation to each other but with no transformative relation to world, these accounts of divine revelation fail to connect to the forms of life of actual agents.

To respond to this objection, however, Ricoeur takes up the connection of divine manifestation to writing and shows how ‘textuality’ does not, in fact, limit the scope of revelation but actually becomes the condition for a new possibility of disclosure. First, as testimony passes into a mode of discourse proper to writing and assumes the status of a text, what is crucial is the transformation that occurs at the level of reference. Being no longer bound to an immediate connection with its author and speaker or with its immediate context, written discourse speaks only to its claim, to *what* it wants to say. Ricoeur writes: “Only writing can, by addressing itself to anyone who knows how to read, refer to a world that is not there between the interlocutors, a world that is the world of the text and yet is not in the text.” Following Gadamer, he continues, “I call this the ‘‘thing’

⁶⁹ Ricoeur, FS, p. 221.

or issue of the text.”⁷⁰ With this claim in place, Ricoeur is happy to grant one important point to the objection that was just considered. Poetic discourse *does* suspend the referential function of a text. However, such a suspension is not accomplished for the purpose of closing the text off from the world but, rather, in order to open a different kind of reference and, therefore, a different kind of relation to the world. He argues that the suspension of a first-order reference—a descriptive reference to the ordinary, historical, or scientific sorts of claims mentioned above—“is the wholly negative condition for the liberation of a more originary referential function, which must be called second-order only because discourse that has a descriptive function has usurped the first rank in daily life.”⁷¹ Second-order reference refers to the manner in which we belong to the world. It connects us, therefore, with that originary anteriority that is ‘world’.⁷² He writes: “My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject. Hence the function of poetic discourse is to bring about this emergence of a depth-structure of belonging-to amid the ruins of descriptive discourse.”⁷³ As I mentioned earlier, at the center of this notion of second-order reference is the second sense in which Ricoeur uses the notion of distanciation. As we saw, insofar as human beings are historical beings—beings who ‘belong’ to a world—they encounter the signs of their existence in the world. Such a discovery, however, always plays itself out historically: the signs or texts of the world present themselves to us as culturally and

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, FS, pp. 220-221.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, FS, p. 222.

⁷² Ricoeur, FS, p. 222.

⁷³ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 101.

historically distant. This first notion of distancing is doubled by the effect of these texts: insofar as they set into play a second-order reference, they place us at a distance from “everyday reality toward which ordinary discourse is directed.”⁷⁴ Thus, far from closing revelation to the world, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of revelation brings to light the redescriptive power of the poetic function of language and the manner in which divine revelation is manifest in this medium. What makes the poetic function of language *revelatory*, however, is the surprising shift that the double reference effects. To be connected to “this primordial ground of our existence,” “the originary horizon of our being-there,” is not to be returned to ourselves or our own possibilities but, rather, to be summoned by and invited into “a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities.”⁷⁵ That which is most originary to us is not, therefore, ‘behind’ us in the conditions of possibility of phenomenality, but rather it is ahead of us in the entirely contingent “proposed world that in biblical language is called a new creation, a new Covenant, the Kingdom of God.” This, for Ricoeur, “is the ‘issue’ of the biblical text unfolded in front of this text” and it is this ‘issue’ that is at stake insofar as the biblical documents are said to be revealed.⁷⁶

At the core of this ‘issue’ of the text is, precisely, the naming of God. As a result of this specific naming, we not only pass from a generic poetic function of language to an equally generic revelatory function, but we pass, furthermore, into the specific meaning of religious language and, therefore into the uniqueness of divine revelation. This is why

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, “Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics,” in TA, p. 95/140-141.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 102.

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, EBI, pp. 103-104.

it is true that, on the one hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutic of revelation is dependent upon a general hermeneutics while, on the other hand, it claims its distinction from and irreducibility to a general hermeneutics.⁷⁷ In fact, with the establishment of the notion of the double-reference, which includes both the claim that texts *say something* and the claim that what they say, their 'issue,' is the world which they project, it is possible to revisit the way in which selfhood is connected to the polyphonic call of the biblical documents. This call resides in the plurality of names of God that emerge in the plurality of biblical forms. Such a plurality means, in reference to the world of the text, that selfhood is formed by being called to inhabit not a simple sphere of abstract possibilities but a multidimensional sphere whose diversity is made concrete by the multiple ways in which God can be said to inhabit that sphere: as the "Actant of the great gesture of deliverance;" as "the voice of another behind the prophetic voice;" "as the author of the Law;" as Wisdom; and finally as the one who communicates through these 'voices' and, in so doing, disappears behind them as the "index of their incompleteness."⁷⁸ What is crucial here is the idea that "naming God, before being an act of which I am capable, is what the texts of my predilection do when they escape from their authors . . . when they deploy their world, when they poetically manifest and thereby reveal a world we might inhabit."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ For further discussion of this see "Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics," TA, pp. 89-90, 95-98/133-134, 140-145.

⁷⁸ Ricoeur, "Naming God," FS, pp. 225-228.

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, FS, p. 223.

To respond to this call is to find oneself taken up in a particular plot, a *mythos*, which is “fictional” to the precise extent to which it is redescriptive.⁸⁰ It is this notion of redescription that completes my account of Ricoeur’s discussion of revelation. I have shown how the poetic function of the text effects a second-order reference. Furthermore, I have shown how this second-order reference is revelatory by opening an anterior horizon, a ‘world’ of possibilities. Finally, I have just argued that the specificity of this ‘world’ lives in its content and that that content is organized around the naming of God. To be called by these texts, to find oneself placed within a space of disclosure that is not of one’s making, is to be given the gift of redescription. For Ricoeur, divine revelation is a revelation of a new way of being in the world, a way opened by seeing the world redescribed in reference to God. Ricoeur writes:

It is part of the essence of poetics to ‘remake’ the world following the essential intention of the poem. In this sense, the *applicatio* spoken of by the older hermeneutics is indeed the terminal moment of understanding. I prefer to use another language here, but one that I maintain is rigorously synonymous: to understand oneself in front of the text is not something that just happens in one’s head or in language. It is what the gospel calls ‘putting the word to work.’ In this regard, to understand the world and to change it are fundamentally the same thing.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ricoeur explores the redescriptive power of metaphor and narrativity at great length. Regarding metaphor see, for example, “Metaphor and the central problem of hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). This is a treatment of the main themes in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Ricoeur discusses the redescriptive power of narrative in terms of a threefold *mimesis* that emerges from a phenomenology of reading. See, particularly, his treatment of this in Vol. 3 of *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Section 2. For a recent treatment of this material, with an eye to the theological concerns contained therein, see Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁸¹ Ricoeur, FS, p. 234.

The power of this redescriptive gift—which is always simultaneously the gift of a redescription of reality given in the contingent arrival of the absolute in *these* texts and the gift of redescription, what Ricoeur just called ‘putting the word to work’—lives in the self-distanciation that takes place when the ‘subject,’ the *I*, becomes the self who disappropriates herself by appropriating herself anew in the world of the text. Thus we arrive at Ricoeur’s understanding of the third aspect of the notion of distanciation. For him, the work of appropriation / disappropriation is the work of the imagination. He writes: “The de-construction of the illusions of the subject [i.e., disappropriation] is simply the negative aspect of what must indeed be called ‘imagination.’”⁸² Drawing on Husserl’s notion of ‘imaginative variations’ as well as Gadamer’s understanding of ‘play,’ he concludes: “Imaginative variations, play, metamorphosis—all these expressions point to a fundamental phenomenon, namely, that it is in the *imagination* that this new being is first formed in me. . . . Imagination is the dimension of subjectivity that responds to the text as a *poem*. When the distanciation of the imagination answers to the distanciation hollowed out at the core of reality by the ‘thing’ of the text, a poetics of existence responds to the poetics of discourse.”⁸³

Having heard of this poetics of existence, I return, finally, to testimony. For it is testimony, Ricoeur says, that is the “most appropriate concept for making us understand what a thinking subject formed by and conforming to poetic discourse might be.”⁸⁴ The centrality of testimony here, on the other side of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of revelation, is

⁸² Ricoeur, “Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics,” TA, p. 100/147

⁸³ Ricoeur, TA, p. 101/148.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 105.

the idea of historical contingency that it reintroduces. He is aware that a poetics of the ‘world of the text’ could very easily lose its connection to history, particularly as one begins to speak of originary horizons and realms of possibility. If we are to reach a poetic mode of life, a poetics of existence, it is necessary to maintain the centrality of the “dimension of historical contingency.”⁸⁵ To do so by championing the idea of testimony is to refuse to understand the revelatory power of the world of the text as either an ‘example’ or a ‘symbol.’ He argues that if the world of the text functioned as an example its claims could be seen in terms of the relation of the particular to the universal.⁸⁶ Given the inclination of the ‘subject’ to relocate contingencies in relation to a determinable horizon, this mode of understanding the world of the text is very appealing. The world of the text would become a moralism of the text. The concrete figure of the self who emerged here would be subject to the test of universality and would precisely lose her connection to the contingent event that summoned her in the first place. The inadequacy of this way of understanding the world of the text becomes particularly clear in relation to that instance of *radical* contingency: evil.⁸⁷ Where the exemplary world of the text could express at best a theodicy to explain this contingency in light of the universality to which it would remain accountable, testimony witnesses to a counter-contingency, an equally contingent occurrence that stakes its claim against evil by overcoming it according to a

⁸⁵ Ricoeur, EBI, p. 109.

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics of Testimony,” EBI, p.121 & “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 111.

⁸⁷ Ricoeur’s concern with evil pervades his career. See, particularly, his *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: Continuum, 2004). A slightly shorter version of this is included in FS, pp. 249-261. For a good treatment of the subject in Ricoeur’s thought see Richard Kearney, “Time, Evil, and Narrative: Ricoeur on Augustine,” in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, eds. John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

different horizon of effects.⁸⁸ Secondly, the world of the text is not a symbol because, like the example, the symbol offers a way of containing its contingency. In this case, the world of the text would live symbolically as an ideal set of significations according to which the concrete would be measured not in reference to a universal (as with the example), but in reference to an abstract layer of meaning constructed intertextually. In other words, to make the world of the text a symbol would be to embrace the objection to Ricoeur that was made earlier. Such a conceptual strategy however would drive a wedge between a poetics of discourse and a poetics of existence, rendering the latter impossible or, the very least, ghostly.⁸⁹ For Ricoeur, however, it is testimony that “places reflection before the paradox which the pretension of consciousness makes a scandal of, I mean that a moment of history is invested with an absolute character.”⁹⁰ As such, a hermeneutics of testimony supports a hermeneutics of revelation and, in fact, the two appear together.

4.5. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to launch a hermeneutic intervention: to double the questions that were put to Marion’s phenomenology of revelation from within with reference to an account of revelation emerging from a different mode of thinking. The

⁸⁸ It is precisely here that Ricoeur’s work on forgiveness would be related both to his overall concern with evil, his hermeneutics of testimony, and therefore with his hermeneutics of revelation. See the epilogue to *Memory, History, Forgetting*, entitled “Difficult Forgiveness,” pp. 457-506. See also his essay, “The Difficulty to Forgive” and the discussion that followed from it in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur*, eds. Maureen Junker-Kenny & Peter Kenny (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), pp. 6-18. For a treatment of Ricoeur’s discussion of forgiveness see Gaele Fiasse, “The Golden Rule and Forgiveness,” in *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 77-89.

⁸⁹ Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics of Testimony,” pp. 121-122 & “Toward a Hermeneutic,” p. 111.

⁹⁰ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” EBI, p. 113.

‘difference’ of this mode of thinking is not, however, an incommensurable difference but, rather, the difference brought about by a hermeneutic transformation of phenomenology. As a result, while Ricoeur’s proposal certainly ‘challenges’ that of Marion, it does so more by displacing it than by assuming its starting points and contesting its conclusions. I have not, of course, developed the whole of Ricoeur’s thought on revelation. My goal has been, instead, to highlight the key moves that are made possible by a hermeneutical approach and show how the themes that are so crucial to Marion are honoured and rethought. If, for Marion, divine revelation must give itself uniquely according to its own mode of manifestation, as he describes that mode it is located in reference to a set of assumptions about phenomenality that not only evacuate revelation of its concrete appearance but remain committed to a mode of thinking unable to access the originary horizon of pre-reflective belonging to which revelation returns us. By connecting the world of the text to a hermeneutics of testimony, however, I have argued that Ricoeur’s understanding of revelation better describes what actually happens in divine disclosure *and* thinks more radically about the conditions of that happening; conditions, that is, which are located not in consciousness or in any structures of apparition that can be decided on in advance but *are given* in the contingent historical occurrence of divine revelation.

CONCLUSION

HERMENEUTICS AND THE QUESTION OF GOD

In this dissertation I take up a twofold analysis of the work of Jean-Luc Marion, beginning with his theological project launched in *The Idol and Distance* and continuing through to the completion of his ‘phenomenological trilogy’ in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. On the one hand, I argue that Marion’s notion of ‘distance’ is the operative category of his theological thought and, furthermore, that ‘donation’ (translated as ‘givenness’), which is the explicitly fundamental notion of his phenomenological thought, is crucially related to it. By bringing together ‘distance’ and ‘donation,’ I then critically locate Marion’s use of the concept of saturation in relation to a Husserlian and Kantian epistemological impulse that continues to limit his thought by compromising its horizontal stakes. This first part of my analysis of Marion’s work proceeds through a number of steps. First, in my extended Introduction, I establish Marion’s connection between religious phenomenality and the concept of revelation and, in reference to two key essays from the early 1990s, I connect his treatment of revelation to his earlier theological work and, more explicitly, to his notion of saturation. In Chapter 1, I look back to his understanding of idolatry and the horizontal logic of anteriority to which this understanding refers. In Chapter 2, I explicate Marion’s theological counter-concept of the icon, treating the notion of anteriority that emerges in reference to his studies of Hölderlin and Dionysius the Areopagite. Through these two chapters I argue that Marion’s theological notion of distance makes possible, in his view, a mode of ‘thinking God’ according to a horizontal anteriority constituted by God’s appearance-in-withdrawal.

This anteriority, furthermore, is constitutive of selfhood and thus sufficient to displace the *I* whose own anterior gaze seeks priority in idolatrous religious experience. By Marion's own admission, however, such a theological account is insufficient. What is necessary is the phenomenological development of these notions in order that they be removed from the determinacies of theological discourse in order to function in relation to thought in general.

In Chapter 3 I examine Marion's most sustained treatment of this necessary phenomenological development in *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* and *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. I argue that at the center of Marion's phenomenology of 'donation' is an implicit connection to his earlier notion of distance. I support this claim in reference to his puzzling yet crucially central notion of the 'self' of the phenomenon by pointing to the notion of separation (*l'écart*) that underlies his account of phenomenal 'selfhood'. Moreover, by making this connection, I argue that Marion's phenomenology of givenness maintains an important connection to his earlier work and, furthermore, that this connection is important because, in that earlier work, he sought primarily to displace Heidegger's notion of Being, as a horizontal concept, with the equally horizontal concept of distance. By connecting 'donation' to 'distance,' I wish to preserve the 'ontological' stakes of Marion's argument, the very stakes which would allow a notion like 'Being given' to make sense and would, in fact, draw it ever more deeply into conversation with Heidegger who, in my view, should be seen as Marion's most important philosophical interlocutor. However, I also show that Marion's notion of 'saturation' sits very uneasily with his notion of givenness. Where givenness is connected

to distance, horizontal anteriority, and even ‘ontology,’ saturation seems to emerge from a set of assumptions determined by an unquestioned Kantian and Husserlian epistemology. Stuck in the oscillation between intention and intuition and, therefore, defined as the excess of one (intuition) over the other (intention), saturation functions strictly in relation to a phenomenology of pure apparition determined, itself, by the very philosophy of consciousness from which Marion seeks liberation. I argue, in fact, that this uneasy relation achieves the level of a crisis insofar as Marion’s *phenomenology of revelation* is defined strictly in relation to his understanding of saturation. If I am right in my reading, readers are forced to choose between Marion’s phenomenology of givenness—whose real theological potential lies in its phenomenological employment of the logic of givenness and, therefore, a more rigorous ability to explicate God’s appearance as an appearance-in-withdrawal—and his phenomenology of saturation—which inverts and therefore mimics metaphysical decisions about phenomenality, continues to propagate a subject-object dichotomy, and reduces a discourse on revelation to terms that are by no means horizontal but remain, rather, entirely regional.

The first three chapters constitute a reading of Marion on revelation and, therefore, on the ‘question of God,’ in which I try to understand the stakes of his thought from within and to point to a fundamental *conceptual* ambiguity in relation to the ambiguity, suggested by Jean Grondin, of Marion’s relation to his primary ‘sources’: Husserl and Heidegger. Unsatisfied with his thought on account of this ambiguity, and convinced that even the connection of donation to distance is unable to respond adequately to Ricoeur’s challenge (discussed in the Introduction), I launch a ‘hermeneutic

intervention' intended to displace Marion's account of revelation in reference to that of Paul Ricoeur. In the context of this intervention I examine Ricoeur's assessment of and response to a form of phenomenology determined by what he calls 'Husserlian idealism'. In this treatment I find some crucial connections to Marion's own phenomenology and I argue that, unlike Ricoeur, his thought is not sufficient to escape from this phenomenological idealism because it remains tied to the very same assumptions and foundations. That is, because Marion remains committed to an understanding of phenomenality determined by the primacy of intuition, he can not access the pre-reflective level of belonging which opens an understanding of knowledge freed from the dichotomy of subject and object. Furthermore, because Marion's thought languishes in the oscillation of subject and object, his understanding of subjectivity, in order not to be tainted by that which secretly defines it, must push away from all forms of objectivity and thus define itself as ever more pure and paradoxical. This means, for Marion, that while *I* becomes *me*, this *me* never ceases to be defined by the inversion itself and, therefore, by that which it reacts against (the dominant *I*, the threatening 'object'). Finally, having allowed Husserl's thought to determine his own, and being stuck in the mire of a philosophy of consciousness, Marion's commitment to the reduction serves to reinforce his loss of the world. In Ricoeur the turn to historicity and, therefore, the detour taken by the self through the cultural signs of its own belonging, produces a notion of the double reference and inscribes the self in its relation to a world constituted beyond itself. In Marion's commitment to the reduction, however, we see a wedge driven between the

self—constituted by the ‘effect’/‘affect’ of the apparition of lived experiences of consciousness—and the world that must be bracketed.

This phenomenological engagement between Ricoeur and Marion centered on the idea of a Husserlian idealism in phenomenology constitutes the first moment of my intervention and entails a strictly philosophical displacement of Marion’s project. In other words, Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology displaces Marion’s pure phenomenology by setting out alternative terms by which the phenomenological mode of investigation can proceed in order not to be trapped by a mode of thinking with which it is fundamentally at odds. In relation to revelation this displacement is further developed through a discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of testimony and the hermeneutics of revelation made possible by it. For Ricoeur, revelation is the event of the ‘world of the text’ and its presentation to the self who is, constitutively, liberated from himself not only within the anterior world to which he belongs, but in reference to the Kingdom of God which calls him into this ‘world’ and thereby makes him a ‘disciple’ in the truest sense of the term: a witness. Where ‘distance’ passes into ‘donation’ and is lost in the ambiguities of saturation, Ricoeur’s notion of distanciation signals three important breaks with Marion’s project. First, it points to our historical belonging to an anterior world which is always already there before ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are posited; second, it points to the distance opened up between the ordinary world of descriptive discourse and the redescriptive power of the poetic, revelatory world of the text; third, it points to the space between the subject, master of its own inversions and reversals, and the self who, in imagination, lives its discipleship as a poetics of existence.

According to the ‘Preface to the English Translation’ of *God Without Being*, Jean-Luc Marion’s early efforts to confront the question of God were directed to the “obscuring of God in the indistinct haze of the ‘human sciences’” proper to France in the early 1980s.¹ At the end of this long journey through my analysis of Marion and Ricoeur, the question arises again: what does it mean to attune oneself to the question of God? Beyond all exegetical issues in relation to Marion’s work and that of Ricoeur, I seek to provide here a reading of two responses to that question. On the one hand, in the thought of Jean-Luc Marion, I show how the ‘question of God’ comes to animate an ambitious and programmatic phenomenology dedicated to passing beyond metaphysics so as to access the things themselves. On the other hand, I introduce and discuss Paul Ricoeur’s very different approach to this question, offered as a hermeneutics of revelation and, therefore, a hermeneutics of testimony. By constantly framing my discussion in terms of ‘horizon’ and ‘anteriority,’ I argue that at stake in this engagement has been the question of *radicality*: how, in thinking the question of God, can thought be opened to a mode of disclosure that gets to the root of things by rooting out the obnoxious cogito, with its vain bid for primacy and, of course, the castles of sand that it constructs to house those ambitions? But along with this question of radicality there is another, more basic, but certainly no less important question: what *is* revelation? On this question the two proposals also differ significantly. For Marion, revelation is an excessive mode of phenomenality in and through which God appears to consciousness. It overwhelms, it shocks, it summons. For Ricoeur, on the other hand, revelation is the appearance of the

¹ Marion, *GWB*, p. xix.

biblical world, Jesus' 'kingdom of God,' as it is projected in the world of the Scriptures and appropriated through a poetic imagination. It would be easy, of course, to suggest that Marion's Roman Catholic perspective is simply being compared to and criticized by Ricoeur's Protestant one. This, however, would be a mistake. One does not have to look far to find Catholic thinkers who are more in line with Ricoeur's hermeneutics than with Marion's 'mystical theology'. I am thinking not only of obvious cases like David Tracy and Francis Fiorenza, but also of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose commitment to dramatic forms of revelation and a thoroughly integrated philosophy and theology has many important connections to hermeneutical ways of thinking about God. In any case, to 'think God' requires that we stake a claim on revelation and this, in turn, means that we have to say what we think it is. Now, as I formulate these two issues in the same paragraph an interesting convergence takes place: perhaps the question of what revelation is and the question concerning the radicality of thought necessary to think it point to one single question that contains them both. Perhaps what is really at stake here is the matter of radicality itself.

I will suggest that there is a certain assumption present in some forms of philosophy and theology that would have us believe that the more 'mystical' and incomprehensible we make God the more we have thought God. That the very formulation of the matter is a paradox is perfectly in keeping with this assumption. This may, in fact, be present in the whole notion of the 'question of God' itself. As a result, radicality is associated with inaccessibility and incomprehensibility and, therefore, access to the root is assumed to concern things 'deeper' than the mere ontic matters of ordinary

life. However, for a hermeneutical way of thinking, this turn away from forms of life, from temporality and historicity, and from concrete uses of ordinary language, signals a denial not only of human concreteness but, theologically speaking, of God's Incarnation. By raising the stakes in this manner, hermeneutical thinking reopens the question of God. Is the radical that which is most abstract such that in search for it the thinker must ascend the heights of speculation, even (and perhaps especially) a phenomenological speculation? Is the radical, the originary, the anterior, to be found in the 'unspeakable immemorial of a past that is not' or some other such construction of thought, or is it to be found in the complex but very real web of human action and speech, embodied in cultures, born up by a history of effects, and bearing on our institutions, communities, and familiar rituals? This, in the end, is the question I have tried to ask in this dissertation.

Of course, by staging a 'hermeneutic intervention' and by judging Marion's thought in light of Ricoeur's, I have done more than ask the question. I have answered it: I believe that the way ahead in theology must be hermeneutical. I believe, in fact, that only a hermeneutical thinking can attune itself to the question of God. Not only does such a path reconnect Christian thought to its patristic roots, which were profoundly hermeneutical in both the textual sense and also in relation to a commitment to the concrete life-forms of the early church, its liturgy, its art, and also its politics; but it opens the way to interdisciplinary discussions with the human sciences and the natural sciences as well. In the face of speculative abstraction—whether it is a phenomenological abstraction or, perhaps, more popularly now, an embrace of the new metaphysics of Badiou and company—hermeneutics must assume the task of thinking about God, about

religion, and about revelation in the web of discussions about power and meaning, of course, but also about the material reality of our histories and the manner in which we construct our discourses themselves. It will do all of this because it is here that the roots of thought and life truly are found. Here, in the complex realities of culture and action, the question of God becomes truly pressing.

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