

**RATIONALITY, IMPOSSIBILITY, AND ANALOGY: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS AND THE
"THEOLOGICAL" TURN IN FRENCH PHENOMENOLOGY**

ANTHONY DELLA ZAZZERA

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Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa

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Anthony Della Zazzera
BA, University of Ottawa, 2010
MA, University of Victoria, 2013

SUPERVISOR:

Dr. Francisco Gonzalez, Professor of Philosophy

INTERNAL EXAMINERS:

Dr. Denis Dumas, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Jeffrey Reid, Professor of Philosophy

Dr. Sonia Sikka, Professor of Philosophy

EXTERNAL EXAMINER:

Dr. John Betz, Associate Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary, French phenomenology, a debate has arisen concerning whether phenomenology can allow for a certain kind of “theological” consideration. In particular, Jean-Luc Marion argues that the potential of the reduction has not been fully explored and that a full reduction to pure givenness in fact allows one to give an account of the paradoxical experience of the impossible beyond experience, which is described as a phenomenon of revelation and may include a Revelation of God. Marion’s claims have been considered contentious. As I interpret it, the debate plays out between **1)** those who also admit that phenomenology can occasion a form of “theological” consideration, but maintain, unlike Marion, that it remains a more existential affirmation of the impossible beyond experience, represented by Jacques Derrida and John Caputo, and **2)** those who refuse any role for this impossible beyond experience within phenomenology (and perhaps more generally), and insist that phenomenology be preserved as an essentialist science of the appearances, represented by Dominique Janicaud. I take the positions of Derrida and Caputo, on the one hand, and Janicaud, on the other, to each entail extreme consequences that ought to be avoided—the former resulting in a form of irrationalism and the latter converting phenomenology into a form of pragmatism. Furthermore, I find Marion’s basic claim, that the impossible beyond experience ought to have a role in shaping finite experience, to be worth investigating further. However, Marion concedes too much to the deconstructive position of Derrida and Caputo at the outset, and so I find that the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer provides an opportunity to correct some of the deficiencies in Marion’s position, but also argue to a similar end as he does. I find that Gadamer’s position incorporates an implicit analogical structure between rational experience and the impossible, thereby permitting one to maintain the impossible as impossible, but also affirm a certain possibility for understanding it.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis project, I investigate the relationship between rationality and impossibility in the context of the philosophical issues raised by the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology. While the debate, ostensibly, concerns whether or not phenomenology, via a reduction to a paradoxical given, can be reimagined as allowing one to admit that the phenomenon of revelation (that may include a Revelation of God) is possible, I understand the most pressing concern of the debate to be the more general discussion of what role the impossible ought to play in relation to philosophical or rational thought. The *impossible*, here, refers to that which cannot be constituted within any horizon of finite human experience, that which is radically *other* to what our experiential apparatus can express. It is generally believed, by many of those involved in this debate, that what is so radically other cannot be conceived in terms of what is intelligible to us (i.e. in terms of *being*). It is suggested, however, that it may be accessed in some other manner, if one is able to successfully overcome or temper the philosophical concern for being. At stake is whether a strict philosophical discipline can or should incorporate any concern for such impossible otherness and, if so, in what form.

The relation between this notion of impossible otherness and that to which one refers by the term “God” may not be immediately apparent; however, it comes to be largely convertible with this term, insofar as God, in the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology, comes to represent the ultimate instance of otherness or of that which it is impossible for subjectivity to assimilate. God becomes the ultimate test case for whether phenomenology is meant to reduce all experience to some ideal form or whether it must leave some elements of experience beyond the reach of the reduction. In some ways this raises the question of the relation between essentialism and existentialism in contemporary continental

philosophy generally and phenomenology in particular—where “essentialism” indicates a concern for the universal, formal, or ideal abstractions from individual experience and “existentialism,” indicates a concern for the particular, real instances and content of life, diversely, uniquely, or individualistically experienced in an ultimately incommunicable manner. When one considers two of the most significant twentieth century figures who have had the greatest role in defining phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger, one discovers a reflection of this essentialist/existentialist divide. Husserl is taken to represent the view that phenomenology is ultimately an essentialist philosophy and Heidegger that it is ultimately an existentialist one. However, there is enough evidence to make this simple division problematic; both thinkers incorporated elements of both essentialism and existentialism within their respective conceptions of phenomenology. Thus, it is worth noting that the debate regarding the “theological” turn involves serious questions about the *relation* between the essentialist and existentialist moments in phenomenology.¹ How does one navigate between moments when experience is reducible to some a priori, transcendental ground and moments when experience is dispersed into utter particularity and irreducibility? Specifically in relation to the debate regarding the “theological” turn, the question is about whether an essentialist or an existentialist grammar underlies the term “God” or “impossible” or “other,” and whether a fundamental paradox can allow one to navigate between a rational, scientific, or essentialist system and an existentialist approach characterised by the impossible experience of the other.

¹ The issue of providing an adequate account of the *relation* between essentialist and existentialist philosophy was articulated by Erich Przywara, in his essay, “Phenomenology, Realogy, Relationology,” in *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 463-479. I draw upon Przywara’s understanding of this issue throughout this project. However, it should be noted that, while I take Przywara to be a significant influence on this project, my use of Przywara’s thought is limited and remains predominantly implicit. The exploration of Przywara’s potential contribution to issues like the one considered in this thesis project ought to be continued and deepened in future works.

In what follows, I explore this issue of the relation between rationality and impossible otherness by considering several thinkers involved in the debate regarding the “theological” turn, in particular, Jacques Derrida (relying to some extent on the interpretation given of him by John D. Caputo), Jean-Luc Marion, and Dominique Janicaud. However, I also explore a common problem that I believe all of these thinkers have with respect to how they understand the relation between rationality and the impossible. The view of otherness that all of these figures take is one which rejects any conception of otherness that would reduce the other to the sameness of being. In so doing, they reject any proposed relationship between the self and the other in the realm of metaphysics, even a relationship phrased in terms of analogy. In the context of the debate, one cannot speak of otherness in terms of intelligibility at all and, therefore, one must continually affirm an insuperable rupture between oneself and the other so as not to reduce the other to oneself and one’s own possibilities. Derrida and Caputo conclude that such a rupture still allows one to note the trace of the impossible other and to pursue the impossible within a never ending discourse based, not on any analogy that may obtain between oneself and the other (i.e. being), but on the never ending desire for the other. Marion considers this position to be, essentially, a jumping off point for a further development of phenomenological discourse in which one may receive, entirely from the other, a stupefying experience of otherness that is limitless in its potential interpretations and ultimately grounded in an experience of paradox, thereby preserving the other’s otherness, but also allowing one to receive some “understanding” of the other. Marion believes that, since this does not imply a conception of the other in terms of *being*, his proposed phenomenological discourse of *givenness* successfully avoids any metaphysical determination of otherness. This claim is a principal source of contention in the debate. Janicaud sharply criticises Marion for trying to make phenomenology into an all encompassing

essentialist philosophical discourse and claims that he thereby simply reestablishes a metaphysical system—for Janicaud, essentialism is only appropriate for certain local discourses. On the other hand, Janicaud generally seems to consider Derrida's position to be one that can be pursued without overt error, but ultimately, I believe, he criticises Derrida's pursuit of the other as a fruitless endeavour and proposes a restricted focus for phenomenology that, in my view, implies a kind of pragmatism. Janicaud, therefore, relinquishes any attempt to provide an account of the relationship between rationality and the impossible.

I find Marion's proposal that there must be a way to account for an experience of the impossible within a phenomenological account of experience to be appealing. I contend, however, that his explicit acceptance of a deconstructive starting point results in some confusion and raises some questions regarding his position. Marion is generally influenced by his Catholic theological tradition, which maintains a metaphysical position founded in the *analogia entis* in order to account for the possibility of a relation and distinction between the self and the impossible other, or God. Thus, within such a tradition, metaphysics is considered a discourse that can allow both for the infinite otherness of God and for an intelligible connection between the creature and the creator. But that intelligibility does not reduce God to one's own capacities; rather, it raises one's capacities into greater and greater unknowing when fixed upon the mystery that is the unconditioned being of God. That is to say, the analogy of being operates in such a way that it provides a certain initial intellectual tie between the creaturely and the divine; however, the analogy of being also emphasises that the difference between creaturely being and divine being becomes or remains insuperable, still without negating that initial intellectual tie. Marion's position resembles the traditional Catholic one in many ways, but he takes up, explicitly, a deconstructive, anti-metaphysical position as his point of departure, thus arguing for

an understanding of God, not from within the analogy of being, but within what he takes to be the greater domain of pure givenness that encompasses and surpasses all conceptions of being. Marion believes that givenness, in contradistinction to being, overcomes the violation of otherness inherent to metaphysics, since givenness affirms, at the outset, infinite, unbridgeable distance between oneself and the impossible other.

The general aim of all those who attempt to articulate some reason for a pursuit of impossible otherness (Derrida, Caputo, Marion) is to restrict rationality with respect to its violent effects on otherness, but to also maintain some sense of otherness. The latter becomes particularly difficult, however, given that the rupture between oneself and the other presents significant issues for *affirming* anything as otherness, since such an affirmation would enclose the other within a metaphysical circle or economy of intelligibility. Indeed, by affirming this absolute rupture and total disanalogy between the self and the other, the figures of the debate open themselves to the critique of Janicaud, which substantively problematises any pursuit of the absolute other in philosophy, and particularly in phenomenology. If one cannot affirm the other philosophically or rationally, one risks losing all appreciation of otherness. This would eliminate, as it were, the philosophical concern for otherness and might lead to a form of pragmatism, or a limited focus on local discourses, as one sees in Janicaud. Derrida, Caputo, and other deconstructionists, to their credit, do not follow this path to the pragmatic. Marion believes, however that they do not go far enough. While Marion believes that total distance and rupture must be affirmed at the outset when it comes to considerations of the impossible, he also believes that the other can enact a form of return that can be affirmed universally or intersubjectively. Therefore, Marion sees the need to affirm a true paradox at the heart of phenomenological philosophy. This is the issue on which the debate centres: Is this paradoxical

return of the impossible other philosophically feasible? Many of those who have commented on this debate argue that it is not. However, those in this area of philosophy who have criticised Marion have not adequately considered, in my view, the possibilities offered by analogy with respect to offering a link between rationality and impossibility.

Thus, I argue that the impossible need not be described through an affirmation of absolute rupture in order to be preserved in its impossibility. The notion of analogy is capable of maintaining both a stable relation and distinction between the self and the other, while the positions in the debate that arise from a deconstructionist starting point lack the ability to maintain this relation and distinction. Given this lack, I propose that none of the figures involved in the debate regarding the “theological” turn offer a conception of otherness that can sufficiently provide for the pursuit of otherness that they want to secure. All of them are ultimately subject to the critique of Janicaud. Marion, however, has the advantage over Derrida and Caputo in that he appears to understand more clearly that if one is not able to receive any understanding of the other, then the pursuit of the other risks becoming irrational.

Another version of this project could have proceeded by amending Marion’s reading of the Catholic theological tradition, and reaffirming a metaphysics of the *analogia entis*; some have already begun to do so.² However, I do not believe that it will be possible, in this strictly philosophical context, to appeal directly to the Catholic theological tradition in order to resolve this issue. It seems that Marion receives a hearing only because he affirms the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology, as well as the deconstructive view of otherness, and reads the Catholic theological tradition in those terms. Marion rejects metaphysics and believes that, contrary to popular understanding, a proper reading of the classical and mediaeval Catholic philosophical

² See: John R. Betz, “After Heidegger and Marion: The Task of Christian Metaphysics Today,” *Modern Theology*, 34:4 2018, 565-597.

and theological traditions affirms such a rejection.³ Thus, I believe there is, in general, simply too much suspicion of metaphysics (and related matters) at the heart of contemporary continental philosophy to allow a proper dialogue to obtain between the contemporary continental philosopher and the theologian (Catholic or otherwise) at this time.⁴ Thus, while it comes with its own set of issues, I argue that Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology offers a perspective that allows one to reconsider this issue of the relation between rationality and the impossible other, especially as it arises in the debate regarding the “theological” turn. Gadamer’s position is internal to the contemporary continental philosophical scene and his debate with deconstruction is relevant with respect to the question of how to relate rationality and impossibility. My reading of his hermeneutics allows one to appeal to a kind of analogy between oneself and the other that may inspire a reevaluation of the main philosophical issues raised in the debate regarding the “theological” turn, as well as avoid the threat of the devolution involved in abandoning the aim of relating rationality and the impossible.

This project is divided into four chapters. The first is an overview of the project as well as an introduction to the key terms of the debate regarding the “theological” turn. I also provide, in my first chapter, my understanding of phenomenology and its relationship to philosophy generally, which serves as a conceptual basis for the rest of the project. The second chapter focuses on a significant live discussion that took place between Derrida and Marion on the topic of phenomenology and its relation to the impossible gift. The third chapter deals with Janicaud’s criticism of the “theological” turn. The fourth chapter discusses Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the

³ However, for a critique of the Heideggerian rejection of the Christian tradition of metaphysics, see: John R. Betz, “Overcoming the Forgetfulness of Metaphysics: The More Original Philosophy of William Desmond,” in *William Desmond and Contemporary Theology*, eds. Christopher Ben Simpson & Brendan Thomas Sammon (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 57-91.

⁴ However, I should be clear that I believe that such a dialogue would be fruitful, but some propaedeutic matters must be considered first.

critique of Gadamer by deconstructionists, and my interpretation of how Gadamer addresses the relationship between the rational and the impossible. The fourth chapter also deals with how I believe Gadamer's position may allow one to affirm the elements of Marion's position that are helpful with respect to allowing one to rationally pursue the impossible other.

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM AND OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS PROJECT¹

In contemporary continental philosophy, there is a fraught debate concerning whether phenomenology, which is traditionally considered to be methodologically atheistic, can provide the opportunity for a kind of “theological” consideration. That is, the question has arisen as to whether there has been or can be a “theological” turn in phenomenology.² The central concern in this debate, however, is more complicated than it might initially seem. Part of the issue is a lack of consensus concerning vocabulary, particularly regarding the word “phenomenology” itself, but also regarding the word “theological.” I will deal with the latter issue in greater detail below, but it bears mentioning that it was Dominique Janicaud who, in his lengthy criticism of this late 20th century *turn* in French phenomenology, first used the term “theological.”³ It is also worth mentioning that Janicaud’s use of the term was never meant with much specificity; in his second essay on the topic, he even questioned his own use of it:

¹ The sections of this chapter that deal with the definition of phenomenology are indebted to Simon Glendinning’s philosophical account of the history of phenomenology in his book: *In the Name of Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2007). In particular, Glendinning brings out effectively the sense in which the various forms of phenomenology that have appeared in the twentieth century (he explicitly considers those of Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Derrida) are not easily brought together under the same label (i.e. “phenomenology”); however, they are all fixed upon providing the initial impetus for engaging in philosophical thought at all. I adopt this idea from Glendinning, though the elaboration of it that follows is almost entirely my own. To further understand Glendinning’s proposal, see in particular his distinction between the two meanings of “modernist” (10-11; *et passim*).

² The debate on which I focus in this and the next two chapters of this project concerns French phenomenology in particular, and there are unique emphases that were incorporated into phenomenology after it travelled from Germany to France (via Levinas’ *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*). However, in this introduction and for most of the project, I consider phenomenology generally, especially since I will eventually redirect attention back to phenomenology as it was understood and received in Germany when I come to discuss Gadamer’s hermeneutics.

³ See: Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” in *Phenomenology and “The Theological Turn”*: *The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 3-103. [Hereafter: “TTFP”]; *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (Combas: Éditions de l’éclat, 1991). [Hereafter: *Ttpf*.]

No doubt, in all honesty, the attribution “theological” should have been placed in quotation marks since it was used ironically and almost by disregard.⁴

Janicaud even mused that perhaps he should have titled his first essay: “The Unqualifiable Turn of French Phenomenology.”⁵ Because Janicaud considers the word “theological” to be only loosely appropriate, I have chosen, throughout this thesis project, to encase the word in quotation marks, as he suggests he ought to have done. This decision is also based on considerations that it continues to be difficult to understand the meaning of a “theological” turn in phenomenology, even from the side of those who might be sympathetic to it.⁶ Nonetheless, however loosely appropriate the term is, I continue to use it. This debate concerns how to interpret limit experiences, or experiences of ambiguity; in phenomenological terms, limit experiences are experiences that cannot be fulfilled in intuition, that is, there is seemingly no intersubjective horizon or background against which one can measure what appears within the experience. The debate concerns whether those experiences of ambiguity can provide some kind of opportunity to discuss *God* or must be left ambiguous. In this context, I believe “theological” remains an appropriate term.

In any event, the primary reason why I have qualified this debate as *fraught* is because it is a debate that takes place at the intersection or along the borderline of two, closely related academic disciplines—philosophy and theology. This being the case, as one investigates the debate, it reveals itself equally as **1**) a debate concerning what kind of “theological” thinking, if

⁴ Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology: “Wide Open,” After the French Debate*, trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 2. [Hereafter: *PWO*.] [Translation altered.] French text: “Sans doute, en toute rigueur, l’épithète ‘théologique’ aurait-elle dû être placée entre guillemets, puisqu’elle était utilisée ironiquement et presque par prétériton.” (*La phénoménologie éclatée* (Paris: Éditions de l’éclat, 1998), 9. [Hereafter: *Pé*.]

⁵ Janicaud, *PWO* 4; “L’inqualifiable tournant de la phénoménologie française” (*Pé* 11).

⁶ Consider: Robyn Horner, “Jean-Luc Marion and the Possibility of Something Like Theology,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 52, (2011): 335-350.

any, may have relevance in phenomenology *and 2)* a debate concerning the very nature of phenomenology itself. However, I find that the latter issue takes priority, and my project reflects this. *What phenomenology is* is being debated here in a more than trivial sense. Confronting whether or not phenomenology can incorporate “theological” considerations questions the foundations of phenomenology as it may be generally understood. Consequently, this debate raises the very issue of whether there can be a *general* understanding of phenomenology. Asking whether phenomenological considerations lead necessarily to “theological” considerations has resulted in the revelation of a lack of scholarly consensus on what phenomenology is or can be.⁷ Still, as we will see, it may be the very nature of phenomenology itself that makes it especially prone to continual, radical revision.

The debate concerning the “theological” potential of phenomenology begins precisely because some have considered the “theological” potential of Husserl’s original definition of phenomenology to have never been fully unveiled and explored (despite his explicit desire to bracket issues having to do with God). Others respond that there is no such “theological” potential in phenomenology by definition (i.e. Husserl required that the issue of God be bracketed because the overarching aim of phenomenology was to return to the things themselves as they are given, immanently, in experience). But this is not a simple dispute over *Husserl’s intentions*. It is a debate about much more basic questions: What can *the reduction* accomplish?

⁷ In a sense, this is both the concern and the conclusion of Dominique Janicaud in *PWO*. He writes: “As we go along, we see that it is contemporary thought, in its origins and in its most lively niches, that finds itself, directly or indirectly, put into question and involved in the debate. If phenomenology, as a unified and imperial discipline, gets split wide open, phenomenology is reborn as an interrogation of its own projects, its possibilities, and its limits” (*PWO* 12). French text: “Chemin faisant, c’est la pensée centemporaine, en ses amorces et en ses entailles les plus vives, qui se trouvent directement ou indirectement mise en cause et impliquée dans ce débat. Si la phénoménologie come discipline unifiée et imériale vole alors en éclats, la phénoménologie renaît comme interrogation sur ses propres projets, ses possibilités et ses limites” (*Pé* 24). Janicaud himself maintains that phenomenology *ought* to be understood quite unambiguously as merely a methodology. I will discuss this further in Chapter 3.

What does *immanence to consciousness* mean? What are *phenomena*? What is the relation between the phenomena and *visibility*? Because of the undeniable hermeneutical difficulties in answering such questions, when considering whether phenomenology can incorporate “theological” considerations, those involved in the debate have felt free to return to the very origins of phenomenology and reimagine it or re-articulate it from the ground up, with all sides claiming to be faithful to “phenomenology.”

What is Phenomenology?

“Phenomenology” is often taken, especially by those in the continental tradition, to be essentially synonymous with “philosophy,” in the sense that phenomenology is considered to be a sufficient, though not a necessary, condition for philosophising. This is not to say that there are no other valid philosophical traditions, methodologies, etc. However, it is to say that those who follow some form of phenomenological methodology believe it bears a special relation to philosophical thinking itself. While one may or may not maintain, in an exclusive manner, that proper philosophy is phenomenological (a difficult claim to prove), all ought to understand that phenomenology takes a certain stance on philosophical thinking itself and finds itself in a special relationship to such thinking. In particular, phenomenology is set apart or gains some definition by maintaining the following: philosophical thinking must be initiated; philosophy is not a natural attitude and, therefore, one way that we have devised of engaging in philosophical inquiry itself is via phenomenological considerations.

Phenomenology, for many, comes to define the philosophy of the contemporary moment. This involves a complex issue, which has manifested itself in the twentieth century, and which is referred to as *the end of philosophy*. I read this phrase, however, in a somewhat idiosyncratic

manner. I do not wish to get sidetracked by this complex and doubtlessly disputable issue; however, the matter of *the end of philosophy* causes what I take to be an extreme equivocation in this context in regard to the term “philosophy.” This is because, while Heidegger traced the fundamental flaws of Western thinking back to the Greeks and the establishment of philosophy as metaphysics—i.e. as an obsession with the truth as correctness—he nevertheless showed many ways in which Greek philosophy also evaded metaphysical thinking, and might still allow the West the means of achieving the thought of being. Thus, one could maintain the distinction: **1) philosophy-as-metaphysics** and **2) philosophy-as-thinking**, which indicates a certain split within that special kind of analytical thought generally referred to as “philosophy.” Gadamer points out that a phrase like *the end of philosophy* is only possible in the West, where *philosophy* itself is a discipline separated from poetry, theology, natural science, etc.⁸ This is especially true in English, insofar as one takes up the continental tradition and the stark contrast that the continental tradition highlights between philosophy and natural science. Furthermore, again in this context, natural science is closely associated with metaphysical thinking—and, here, “metaphysical” is taken to mean a reduction of otherness to the sameness of being as substance, or, more generally, to the conditions of possibility of the epistemological concerns of the self.⁹ But *the end of philosophy* becomes an odd phrase, since many of those one might refer to casually as “philosophers” (especially several contemporary figures from France) would be calling *for* the end of philosophy. They would be doing so, however, only by conflating the

⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Beginning and End of Philosophy,” in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, ed. Christopher Macann (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16-28; “Heidegger und das Ende Der Philosophie,” in *Hermeneutische Entwürfe: Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 195-207.

⁹ It is absolutely crucial to note that, later in this thesis project, it will be questioned whether “metaphysics” must be taken to be an inescapably reductive discourse. However, at this stage I let this definition stand since the majority of the figures working the area of continental philosophy that is being dealt with here tends to use the term “metaphysics” somewhat uniformly in this manner. The problem being addressed by the rejection of “metaphysics” should be evocatively established before that rejection can be persuasively questioned and re-evaluated.

terms “philosophy” and “metaphysics.” Yet, philosophy is not uniformly considered merely metaphysical even on the contemporary continental scene, and in regard to the debate regarding the “theological” turn, there is still a strong distinction being made between poetry, theology, natural science, etc. and a type of *thinking* that aims not to be metaphysical. There is no other term in English to refer to this kind of thinking except “philosophy”; consequently, in what follows, I refer to this kind of thinking as *philosophy*, and distinguish it from philosophy-as-metaphysics.¹⁰

In any event, the issue of *the end of philosophy* raises another relevant question in regard to phenomenology. On the contemporary Western scene, philosophy or philosophical thinking is at some risk of being marginalised as a result of its subordination to a reductive form of scientific thinking, perhaps in view of the accomplishments and power of contemporary empirical science. Concern for this marginalisation has been an ingredient in phenomenology from the beginning. To be more precise, it is not merely scientific or, more properly, *scientistic* thinking that receives philosophic criticism from phenomenology, but a certain complex of issues revolving around the relationship between knowledge/thinking and human power/control/manipulation, often referred to, to use Heideggerian diction, as *technology* (which is also taken to be a variety of metaphysical thinking). This kind of “scientific” thinking, with some imprecision, is sometimes (mainly by figures associated with deconstruction) referred to as the core of “philosophical” thinking itself. However, it is also associated with, particularly, “modern” philosophical thinking. In its subordination to scientific thinking, philosophy of the *non-modern* variety comes to be viewed as irrelevant, at least in regard to the deepest discussion of “reality.” The arbiter of “reality” is, it is uncritically or naturally assumed, the scientific description of “the real,” a

¹⁰ Again, this is inspired by Glendinning, and his distinction between the two senses of “modernist,” but adapted to my purposes in this project.

description that stems from the modern philosophical vision. This causes a dual-layered problem: **1)** philosophical thinking of the non-modern variety is considered optional and, **2)** in being considered optional, what non-modern philosophical thinking even *is* or *does for us* is dismissed or at least devalued. This is not just a momentary loss of appreciation for philosophic thought, but a loss of a certain *capacity* for the appreciation of philosophic thought.

Phenomenology—though it is a somewhat loose term when applied to the various figures from the twentieth century who are associated with it—at its most fundamental level, presents itself as addressing the question of why it is important to do philosophy of the non-modern variety, and it addresses itself to those who may not recognise any such importance, and who view some form of the scientific description of reality as not only correct but exhaustive. Phenomenology is also judged on whether it successfully *avoids* this kind of modern thinking, and this may suggest some of the reasons why phenomenology tends to receive radical revisions and yet still retains the name “phenomenology”; its ongoing aim is to correct a metaphysical-scientific form of thinking without slipping back into such thinking.

What is significant is the initial step of phenomenology indicated by this phenomenological appraisal of philosophical thinking itself. Phenomenology, with this view of philosophical thinking as (literally) *unnatural* (i.e. not adopting a “modern” attitude), addresses itself to those who do not naturally see any importance to philosophical thinking. Furthermore, one normally sees philosophical thinking as allied to or beginning with *argument*.

Phenomenology, however, begins—that is, it *allows* or *calls for* the entrance into philosophical thinking—*not* by initially (i.e. as a first move) engaging in philosophical *argument*, but by appealing to and *describing* that on which one must already rely in ordinary thinking. While such a re-description of the field of experience takes the form of a transcendental argument—an

argument concerning the conditions of possibility of what one is experiencing — that re-description of the field itself does not depend on argument as such, but gives primacy to description. The distinction I am suggesting is that between a convincing *argument* and a convincing *description*. Argument, if valid, presents its conclusion as the necessary consequence of its premises. If one accepts the premises, one accepts the conclusion; nothing essentially new is presented in the conclusion of an argument. Description has to do with the establishment of premises themselves. What leads one to accept certain premises over others? Accepted premises, presumably, tend to describe matters more truthfully. But against what standard? One usually leaves this question somewhat open. Phenomenology recognises that philosophical thinking must begin, fundamentally, in this place, without argument, without a *logical, apodictic* basis.

Phenomenology invites one into thinking more deeply about the premises one holds, premises that lead to one's conclusions about reality, by trying to reveal the limited capacity and legitimacy of one's natural attitude. One crucial aspect of the natural attitude, which phenomenology investigates, involves the epistemological/metaphysical understanding of *transcendent* things being accessed by a *transcending* or simply *separate* human intellect; often this is glossed as the subject-object divide. Phenomenology tries to expose the assumptions involved in such an attitude in order to reveal, from within, that the scientific or natural attitude one adopts is insufficient to explain itself.¹¹ Phenomenology is meant to put one back in touch with that which appears when one brackets the natural attitude, that which will not be noticed from within the natural attitude *unless* one manages to bracket it and see all the resources one

¹¹ It bears noting that while, in current phenomenological philosophy, the effort is made to interrupt a scientific or technological worldview, this effort may be considered to be simply the historically particular instantiation of a timeless philosophical impulse.

always already has at one's disposal. It, therefore, challenges the narrowing effect of modern thought. This return to fundamental experience is the value of *philosophy*, phenomenology contends. Philosophy puts one back in touch with the world as it is, which is, initially, always *the world as it appears*. The world *can always be precisely as much as it appears to be*. Or, anticipating the issues raised in the debate regarding the "theological" turn, perhaps it can be *even more than that*, depending on what it means to *appear*.

In view of how it addresses such fundamental issues, phenomenology may inspire comparisons to the origin of Western philosophy itself—in the works Plato—as the response to the sophistic argument that mere persuasion of opinion is preferable to the concern for truth. The natural attitude may derive its persuasiveness from its practical utility. One tends to base one's engagement with the world on pragmatic considerations and then consider such pragmatic considerations sufficient for a complete understanding of the world. Such pragmatic considerations are difficult to unsettle, however, because they are not proposed as *limited* or circumscribed but rather as *exhaustive*. Unsettling them is one of the goals that the acceptance of and entrance into phenomenological thinking is meant to accomplish. In identifying the limitations of the natural attitude, however, phenomenology would have to be judged on what it reveals that such an attitude leaves hidden. This is to say, phenomenology is judged primarily *as an entrance into philosophy*, an entrance into a greater sensitivity to what might be true. Thus, it is difficult to make any "progress" in phenomenology because an overriding concern will always be with whether it has, *originarily*, managed to open *philosophical* thinking at all, as well as open it *capaciously enough* while remaining meaningful and avoiding overstatement.

Therefore, this debate about what phenomenology is or can be has become, in large part, the very field of phenomenology itself. Or, such questions are inextricable from any discussion

of phenomenological topics since there is always the option, in phenomenological works, to return to first principles, to return to what is simply given and reinterpret this given more capaciously or sensitively than previously. Phenomenology is, first and foremost, the attempt to secure a veracious sense of what is given in experience. It bears emphasising, however, that in order to do so successfully, thinkers must first establish that seeking the given is the proper starting point, rather than beginning pragmatically with the natural or scientific attitude, with one's own subjective worldview, or even with one's settled previous understanding of *phenomenology* itself. Any attempt to dispense with the need for an interpretation of the given could lead to simplistic pragmatism, unsophisticated relativism, or a narrow subjectivism, etc. To provide an interpretation of the given requires a reduction to what is given that cannot *argue* for itself, but must be accepted by others as an appropriate, captivating, or convincing description. *Then and only then* is that description of the given measured by its results, by how well it accommodates all the elements of experience. That is to say, once all accept that one ought to begin by appealing to *all* that is given in experience (no easy task), then one can begin discussing how *whatever is given* ought to be understood. In phenomenology, this is a matter of describing *the horizon* against which the various elements of experience can appear.

I take the above to be a relatively fair, if broad, description of phenomenology. Phenomenology is initially the desire to be philosophical, paired with a sense that, by and large, we fail to be philosophical because we fail to realise all the resources at our disposal in experience. Then it is a matter of trying to define the widest possible horizon of experience while not spilling over into overdetermining ambiguous or limit experiences and, thereby, becoming metaphysical in the process—i.e. “becoming metaphysical” means here projecting an interpretation onto what lies beyond one's horizon of experience and claiming it as a universal

element of experience. However, this does yet raise the question of how widely one can stretch that fundamental horizon, as well as the question of what one ought to do with what remains beyond one's fundamental horizon of experience.

Considerations having to do with particular versions of phenomenology—that is, considerations of Husserl's description of his method, Heidegger's critique of Husserl, the hermeneutic turn, deconstruction, etc.—these all complicate this matter as well as the definition of phenomenology that I have given. But, to make an important distinction, these matters belong to the *history* of phenomenology. This thesis is not concerned primarily with this history (though, of course, it will be at times relevant). The various accounts of phenomenology (Husserl's, Heidegger's, Sartre's, Merleau-Ponty's, etc.) may be described more or less faithfully, or, indeed, various accounts of how phenomenology ought to be radicalised or exceeded (Levinas', Derrida's, etc.) may be described more or less faithfully. But the debate with which I mean to engage in this thesis presupposes that phenomenology is not yet *well* defined, hence why I have given this largely formal and abstract definition. The debate regarding whether phenomenology can take a “theological” turn depends upon one's acceptance that we have, perhaps, not yet managed to properly understand phenomenology's fundamental horizon. Thus, it takes the form of arguing over descriptions of that horizon. That is to say that *it is this lack of definition*, naturally, that permits the suggestion that *phenomenology* may allow philosophy as phenomenology to incorporate properly “theological” considerations.

However, some do not accept such a radical lack of definition, leading to a significant lack of consensus, and these figures believe that proposing a “theological” turn in phenomenology, by definition, prevents one from engaging in phenomenology entirely. At the outset, it can be said that I do not agree with those who believe that phenomenology is

sufficiently *well defined* to exclude “theological” considerations. I maintain that what phenomenology is or can be remains open. The reason I maintain this will only become clearer over the course of this project, but suffice it to say for the time being that this is the conclusion to which one is drawn after having done a survey of the literature; in particular, those who maintain that phenomenology cannot be “theological” cannot themselves dispel the irreducible hermeneutical issues that I have already raised.¹² Furthermore, though it is not definitive by any means, it bears mentioning that the contemporary philosophical scene is rife with “post-” disciplines: *post*-modernism, *post*-structuralism, etc. All of these disciplines have the same basic form: From *within*, the tenets of, e.g., *modernism* are radicalised and implemented in order to interrupt one’s ability to maintain *those modern tenets*, but without *replacing* modernism with a subsequent, equivalent, contrasting *school of thought*. The prefix “post-” is added to make a certain distinction, but not a total distinction, one that comes from a discourse being *unsettled from within*. It is significant, then, that no one in this debate recommends a *post*-phenomenology but, indeed, what is always recommended is a *rediscovery* of *phenomenology itself*. This is potentially true even in the case of a figure like Derrida. That is, even when figures argue for an insufficiency in phenomenology—e.g. in Husserl’s original formulations—their tendency is to try to *save* phenomenology in pushing it to new or extreme ends, ends that renew rather than contravene or abandon its origins.¹³ Something about the horizontal structure that phenomenology recommends has strongly entrenched itself in 20th and 21st century thinking.

¹² I raised the following questions, above: What can *the reduction* accomplish? What does *immanence to consciousness* mean? What are *phenomena*? What is the relation between the phenomena and *visibility*? The hermeneutical issues involved in such questions all have to do with the notion that phenomenology is based on a foundational description rather than argument.

¹³ With the possible exception of the later Heidegger, though this is a complicated and far from settled matter.

What is “Theology”?

I will return to the issue of defining “phenomenology,” but it will be important, for the moment, to move on to the issue of defining the other central term of this contemporary debate. That is, in approaching this debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology, something that also poses an initial interpretive problem is the term “theology.” There are, no doubt, many ways to approach this term; I prefer the formulation: “account of God” (based on its etymology, *theo-logos*). Does phenomenology, then, allow one to describe the encounter with God, to give an *account* of it, and thereby maintain that such an encounter is in some sense *possible*? That is, can one give an account of how God can *phenomenalise* within our experience? Can one explain why it is possible for God to come into human experience in a way that everyone should accept (which is what it means *to give an account* of something)? This would involve a kind of essential reduction to a horizon capable of giving expression to God. This is to be distinguished from considerations of the possibility of *speaking to God*; as Janicaud writes:

I don’t deny the possibility of speaking *to* God [...]. But speaking *of* God is particularly risky in philosophy, by using ideas, concepts, and categories which might turn out to be irrelevant to God (or not worthy of Him).¹⁴

That is, Janicaud here considers a kind of existential relation to God as possible, but he does not consider it to be philosophically relevant. He implies that speaking *to* God does not require an appeal to an intersubjective horizon of experience, since the concepts and categories needed to establish such a horizon may be “irrelevant.” For Janicaud, the focus of phenomenology would be limited to an essentialist framework; thus, the existential possibility of God would simply not be something on which phenomenology would need to comment. To put it frankly, all concepts, when applied to God, are idolatrous, since God is beyond concepts; any attempt to speak of God

¹⁴ Dominique Janicaud, “Is the Possible Doing Justice to God?” *Research in Phenomenology* 34 (2004): 239-245. [Emphases in original.]

conceptually, is therefore what is referred to disparagingly as metaphysics; thus, God falls outside the philosophical realm of phenomenology, since phenomenology is concerned with establishing concepts; this merely leaves the issue of God *undecided* from within the phenomenological position. The question of the debate regarding the “theological” turn, however, is about seeing whether some version of the existential and essential accounts of God can come together without reducing God to an object of finite experience. Can some element of the incommunicable, non-conceptual, individual experience of speaking to God be *reduced to* or *converted into* some intersubjective horizon that would allow one to describe the abstract possibility of such an experience? Before proceeding any further, I will provide a preliminary sketch of the definition of “God” I will appeal to throughout what follows—a sketch that will only be more fully filled in as the project progresses.

In the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology, I find there is an inescapable, initial question as to whether all those involved mean “God” in more or less the same manner, especially in view of how the current historical moment makes such determinations inherently difficult in a philosophical context. That is, is this a matter of the place of, specifically, the Judeo-Christian God within Western philosophical discourse? Or is it a matter of a more general philosophical theism? Or, more drastically, is it an acknowledgement of the current age’s incapacity to properly understand the meaning of the word “God” at all? If we take seriously the onset of, to use Charles Taylor’s designation, *a secular age*,¹⁵ indicating that, in the West, religious affiliation has become optional, or personal, or private, this means that it is not only left to the individual to *decide* to what “belief system” one wishes to ascribe, but it is left to the individual to *define* his or her *own belief system* entirely. That is to say that *that*

¹⁵ See: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

which used to be externally determined, inherently communal, and, therefore, intellectually formative from birth, has become something one ought to decide, if ever, as a young adult, essentially in isolation. I do not believe one can overestimate the effect this has had on the preformation of our understanding in regard to issues of “theology.” If we accept this as a proper diagnosis of the current age’s understanding of matters that are, broadly speaking, “theological,” then it is undeniable that rigorous, long-standing, traditional definitions of God (for instance, as ὁ Θεός, which is identified particularly with God the Father in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as opposed to, say, God’s Spirit), are not what primarily come to mind nowadays when “God” is mentioned. This creates inherent confusion in all discussions of “God” due to the lack of common ground that such a cultural milieu provides. Even those who adhere to and espouse a certain religious tradition, when they hear “God” mentioned in a public context, even in an academic context, ought not to automatically assume that what is meant is the understanding of God provided by their tradition (even if they may take that definition to be incontrovertible). What comes to mind in a secular age when “God” is mentioned is the question: “What does this person mean by that word?” This is to say that a certain linguistic relativism is, for better or worse, our common cultural inheritance at this point in time. Thus, in order to begin, I will merely appeal to an intellectual abstraction: God as radical transcendence, God as wholly or totally other.

This notion of God is meant to indicate a conception that is found in various theological and religious traditions and not in the modern, Western *philosophical* tradition. That is to say, the recent Western philosophical tradition, particularly in the anglophone West, is more likely to think of God, even while referring to the Judeo-Christian God, in a deist formulation: a demiurge, a being understood as a single, temporally located, overpowering, technical or

efficient cause. A mind founded in the claim to knowledge of the natural sciences, such as the modern philosophical mind, can conceptualise a very powerful cause—even one sufficient to have *a cosmos, all of nature, or the universe* as its effect. Such a *god* can be conceptualised in such a framework and so the question of its essence and existence is reduced to an ordinary matter of experience, no matter how irregular such an experience may be. The deist demiurge, therefore, is not truly *transcendent* or beyond experience, as God, by definition, must be; the demiurge might exist or might not. This god could be affirmed or denied and the appearances grounded in fundamentally ordinary subjectivity could fulfil whether any statement about such a demiurge is true or false. This *god* is an entity.

God as totally other, as radically transcendent, if we follow the famous formulation of Pascal, is not the god of the philosophers but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, I make this reference with a significant qualification. I do not believe one ought to restrict the discussion here to the God specifically attested to in the Christian tradition of theology known as revealed theology, along with its historical and cultural particularities—not that one cannot make such associations, I simply do not believe that these matters are *central* in the debate regarding the “theological” turn. This is regardless of the fact that, e.g., while he is not explicit, Jean-Luc Marion (a central figure in the “theological” turn) clearly envisions a Catholic Christian conception of God and appeals largely to examples of Jesus’ miracles from the New Testament in order to illustrate his understanding of how phenomenology may incorporate “theological” considerations. Irrespective of the fact that all of the figures involved in the debate (including myself) are clearly Western philosophers, and of the fact that the only examples that are drawn on in the debate (as well as in this thesis) derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition, I believe that the central issue of the debate is not so culturally and historically specific because it concerns

only *God as potentially attested to beyond the limits of experience* (i.e. this is what I mean by “totally other” or “radically transcendent”). Furthermore, the particular question for this debate is whether or not such radical transcendence has the right to reshape phenomenology as a phenomenology of the inapparent or the *impossible* appearance—i.e. with whether the horizontal structure of phenomenology can or ought to accommodate not only what is fulfillable in experience in terms of presence or absence, but also what is not experienced as either presence or absence. The emphasis in the debate regarding the “theological” turn, then, if I may put it so, is on this God as simply *NOT the god of the philosophers*. That is, God as radically transcendent and totally other is often taken to be quintessentially other to, or incommensurate with, philosophic thought (*re* Janicaud’s comment above). And so it would seem inadvisable to try simply to integrate God into a philosophical discipline because it would appear to be futile. Yet some form of integration is precisely what is being suggested by those who recommend a “theological” turn in phenomenology. This does result in a certain quandary. This integration is dealing with God not as *an entity*, not *a being*, not even the highest being. This conception of God may be described in terms of *being*, but such *being* does not have non-being as its opposite; indeed, God would have no opposite, no equal, no counter-balance; comparison is not a coherent notion when applied to God.¹⁶ God would be considered infinite, perfect, simple (in the sense of having no parts, or not being composite and, therefore, would also be incorporeal), necessary (in the sense of non-contingent, not relying on any support for the “*God-ing*” (taken as a verb) of the Godly variety). These are all qualities that, insofar as they participate in the Godhead, typical experience cannot intuit. So how can this God be both beyond and within, transcendent and immanent to experience?

¹⁶ See: David Bentley Hart, “The Offering of Names,” in *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 3, for further discussion of this issue.

Furthermore, though it is not the proper subject of this thesis, it bears emphasising that considering God in this manner simply is not restricted to the Judeo-Christian theological tradition; it is not even restricted to the three Abrahamic monotheisms. In fact, David Bentley Hart has argued that there is a high degree of crossover even between so called “atheistic religions,” or traditions that involve no appeal to a personal God, and theistic ones, dualist or monist, with respect to “how [these traditions argue] divine transcendence should be understood.” Hart aims “to explain how the word ‘God’ functions in the intellectual traditions of the developed religions (by which [he] mean[s] faiths that include sophisticated and self-critical philosophical and contemplative schools)” and he believes that

the definition of God [that he] offer[s ...] is one that, allowing for a number of largely accidental variations, can be found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Vedantic and Bhaktic Hinduism, Sikhism, various late antique paganisms, and so forth (it even applies in many respects to various Mahayana formulations of, say, the Buddha Consciousness or the Buddha Nature, or even to the earliest Buddhist conception of the Unconditioned, or to certain aspects of the Tao.¹⁷

In particular, all these traditions understand God’s transcendent nature as never simply intuited by the human intellectual apparatus, nor ever fully expressible in language, but only properly indicated by a preeminent discourse that exceeds matters of both presence and absence to human consciousness. Nevertheless, Hart notes, God is referred to across all these traditions in surprisingly similar terms, most often those of perfect *being*, *consciousness*, and *bliss*. The import of this, for the purposes of my project, is that God is not simply *not spoken of*, *not called by any names* because of the uniqueness of divine transcendence in relation to human experience. Rather, the question is not whether or not to call God by any names, but what *any* name of God means; that is, the question is about the underlying grammar of “theological”

¹⁷ David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2-4.

pronouncements. Whatever God is called or affirmed to be, God's nature is never fully understood, even in cases of direct, visionary, mystical experience. For instance, consider that, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, to say that God is a person is to admit some analogy between something finite (human personhood) and the infinite (divine personhood). But that analogy is understood to only lead one to attend to the ever greater difference between *the way* in which humans are persons and the way in which God is a person. Hart argues that this ultimate incomprehension is a motivating force beneath the theological grammar of the traditions that he mentions. Thus, one could reformulate this point by saying that God's conceptual *impossibility* is a common, cross-cultural emphasis.

Now, to be clear, not much more is to be extrapolated from this similarity and Hart sternly warns against any kind of syncretism. Indeed, Hart does not argue the similarity as having any distinct effect on matters of religious ritual, ethics, cultural formation, etc., since this would indicate a failure to appreciate the historical diversity of expressions among various religious and cultural traditions. It is only on theoretical grounds that he argues for this cross-traditional similarity in the grammar of "God" and it is only this that is being emphasised here. There is a description of God as entirely beyond experience, as not admitting to final intuition, as wholly other, radically transcendent, that nevertheless associates God with perfect being, consciousness, and bliss, that has independently arisen across cultures and throughout history. That is to say, *I believe that the fact that God is stressed as being unlike all that is familiar and knowable and yet still named is what is relevant in the debate regarding the "theological" turn*, since the turn is primarily concerned with the relevance of *the impossible* for philosophical rationality.

It should be noted that it is nevertheless the case that the investigations of “God” and “theology” in this thesis project will skew towards a monotheistic, Creator conception—especially given the tendencies of those involved in the debate, as well as the writer of this thesis and his particular interests, background, etc. Consequently, to apply the conclusions of this thesis project more widely to other “theological” conceptions would call for further investigation and doing so far exceeds the scope of this project.

To reiterate, the kind of radical transcendence that is under discussion in these various intellectual, religious, and theological traditions is something that is generally left out of, precisely, phenomenology and recent Western philosophy. Indeed, there may be *no way* to develop this *definition* as philosophy generally develops definitions. This is because it is, by definition, impossible to contain an experience of this *God* within the confines of human thought. Therefore, (with no implicit opprobrium intended) *God* would appear, by definition to have nothing to do with *philosophy*—which concerns what is *thinkable*, of course. Thus, the fundamental questions of the “theological” turn can now be formulated in a more explicit way: Can one give a phenomenological account of the *experience of God* when *God* is understood as necessarily *beyond all possible experience*? Is there a horizon of experience that could be said to accommodate such an impossible experience? This involves considering the merits and demerits of incorporating a fundamental *paradox* into phenomenological thought.

What is Phenomenology?—Revisited

The discussion of “theology” above ought to have disclosed what is being suggested from one side of the debate regarding the “theological” turn: An experience of the impossible is paradoxically *possible* in phenomenology, depending on how one understands the fundamental

horizon of experience to be constituted. With this in place, it is necessary to deepen our sensitivity to what *phenomenology* may be before we can consider the question of whether it can provide the basis for describing the paradoxical possibility of the experience of God.

Consider, therefore, a less controversial example than that of God: Can one give an account of an encounter with a stapler (or something similar)? Certainly no one affirms that staplers or things of the same kind (i.e. objects) simply do not exist. But describing the *being* of the stapler, the *kind* of thing staplers are—can we do this? This is a question that might be given a premature answer in any historical period, but it may be an even greater temptation to do so in an historical period that takes something like materiality and the kind of subject/agent who discovers/manipulates such materiality to be definitive. Thus, the fact that no one denies the existence of staplers does not mean that one can give an account, a *philosophical* account—which here means an *exhaustive* account—of one’s encounter with a stapler or the kind of thing that a stapler is. One may not be able to explain to someone who has never encountered a stapler what is involved in the experience and how such an experience is possible. Furthermore, if one takes a scientific view, the epistemological relation between oneself and the kind of being in question can be problematic from the start because such a view, by unduly reducing the relation between oneself and the world, opens one to errors of many kinds. One may overemphasise certain elements of objects like their quantifiability, omit potentially important elements as merely “subjective,” or even consider it coherent to say that “the mind” itself is something that can be reduced to neurochemistry, etc.

One may feel ill at ease that such an encounter cannot be fully described, that the only means by which one might be able to say that an encounter with a stapler is possible is if one has had the experience oneself. But to maintain that what one might be able to consider *possible* is

only that which one has directly encountered oneself reduces what is possible to one's own history, and so this concern can be rejected. But the various people who have had encounters with staplers could not then be sure that they have all had the *same* experience unless they could find a way of giving an account of that experience. Therefore, *an account* allows one, in the absence of direct experience, to understand why such an experience *could happen to someone other than the one who directly had the experience*. Thus, if one *had never* encountered a stapler, someone else's account of *that kind of encounter* (an encounter with a household/office object), could allow one to know what to expect if one *were* ever to come into contact with a stapler. (Note, this says nothing of whether one *will* have such an encounter.) Thus, one could, through a proper account of how objects, generally, are experienced, come to understand the *possibility* of experiencing anything claimed to be an object. It is necessarily the case that I have never, myself, encountered innumerable particular objects; I cannot even give an example of an object I have not encountered, because I have never encountered it. But if someone were to say to me that he or she had once used an *x*, if he or she were to say that that *x* is an *object*, I would understand how it was possible for that person to have used it, held it, broken it, etc.—i.e. *generally experienced* it. In this way, there may be similarities in one's experience of staplers and one's experience of God. To appreciate such similarities, one would require an adequately developed concept of the kinds of things we are ourselves, of experience itself, and of how staplers, God, etc., may be seen to enter our experience.

The above is meant to offer a paradigmatically phenomenological breakdown of a philosophical problem. To pause for a moment and revisit an issue raised when I defined phenomenology above, it might be asked how this style of engaging with experience can give an implicit argument for *doing philosophy at all*. The very claim that one does not know how to

give an account of a seemingly ordinary experience ought to be our focus. Implicit in my comments above is the following: If one has never tried to give an account of a quotidian experience, one will be prone to simply adopt the prevalent ways of thinking of one's age, which, currently, tends to reinforce modern, sceptical philosophical questions: *How is it that I know that I have had an experience of a stapler (or anything else) at all?* The emphasis in the question is on the word "know." The common understanding of the word "know" implies an element of *transcendence*, i.e. transcendence of the private sphere of the mind into the *external world*. Thus, given what one normally understands by the question *can you give an account of an experience of a stapler?*, one may respond by giving the most up to date scientific description of perception and one may continue by giving the constitution of the stapler as physical science describes it. But by giving such a response, one is open to sceptical questions because inherent to the scientific description is an appeal to the object as transcending one's own mind and an assumption concerning one's entire existence as reducible to the epistemological relation to the world. Such questions can restrict philosophical discourse, unless one understands a way in which one can reveal that questions of this sort are not truly basic; they do not adequately start from the *given* in experience. To consider the subject-object relation as basic or primary implies setting aside or ignoring the expansive potential of the capacity of the most basic relation between oneself and the world, which is described in phenomenology as intentionality, and which appeals to much more than the subject-object relation. Indeed, to become aware of the subject-object relation at all (as only one relation among many, and one that is essentially limited), *to come to see things in that light*, one would already have had to have access to a much wider domain of experience.

However, as previously discussed, this *description* of the wider domain of experience to which one already has access, even though it appeals to the prior conditions of possibility of experience, is of such a unique quality that it is not itself an argument; at the most fundamental level, it is *primarily* a description. Indeed, *crucially*, to those who are not sympathetic to phenomenology, it can be so much prevarication. However, in providing such a description, I will have had to *entreat* my reader to take stock of his or her experience, to perform himself or herself similar operations as I have, in order to potentially come to the same awareness of an *expansion* of resources in the life of the mind. Indeed, I will have to (on certain days) *entreat myself* to see in the very description I myself have given more than I might be prone to see. Having been inculcated into a period of history that privileges scientific or technological thinking, my own immediate psychology or attitude is not naturally oriented towards being philosophical in this phenomenological manner. And, I maintain, in order to be properly phenomenological, one could *never*, with perfect regularity, take for granted one's ability to recognise in various descriptions this phenomenological *expansion* of resources.

Thus, that initial entreaty to see in a description of the fundamental horizon something worth investigating is not something that one defends primarily through argument. By providing a new description of how one has failed to take account of what is given in experience, phenomenology first *offers* a new way of seeing the world without arguing for it. Indeed, this may even appear to be more a personal than a philosophical entreaty. It is up to the one to whom one is speaking to *accept* that *offering*. The rationale of that *acceptance* is not something one can secure beforehand; it only reveals itself in time. Thus, it is only after the acceptance of the offering that the philosophical elaboration of the issue takes place. One must first admit the problem before one can argue about how to solve it. It is in virtue of this that, in

phenomenology, one may recognise something of philosophy's inalienable essence.

Philosophical discussion cannot begin without *the matter to be discussed* being properly communicated between all those involved in the discussion. But philosophy cannot begin by simply pointing out that matter, because (according to phenomenology) being naturally unable to see the matter is, primarily, *the matter*. One naturally thinks that the natural way in which one receives the world is sufficient for encountering any kind of thing and, therefore, that experience is always a matter of experiencing *things*. Or, posing an even greater challenge, one thinks one is *naturally able* to recognise the insufficiencies in one's natural attitude of experience. To indicate an unacknowledged lack of capacity, and then express the opportunity for an expansion of that very capacity that one did not believe could be expanded any further, is inherently difficult. It seems to me, in fact, that to be able to do so is based fundamentally on trust; that is, a willingness to adopt a new view from another person. There are no means by which one can be sure that one has sufficiently escaped the insufficiencies of one's natural attitude. Yet, when another *offers* one a captivating or even a troubling re-description of the possibilities inherent in experience, it is *trust* that allows this to present itself as a true *expansion* of experiential possibilities, and that allows one to assent to such a description rather than have one reject the description as, say, *merely of relative value*. It is invariably on *this operation*, this *trust* in the other who offers the description, that all phenomenology as entrance into philosophy is based.

It might be believed that philosophy carries on without such initial considerations when all already agree that philosophical thinking is important—i.e. among *philosophers*, it is not necessary to argue for philosophising. This is simply not the case. Proper philosophical thinking is something consistently lost, even or especially by philosophers themselves. Especially with respect to philosophical standpoints that the philosopher does not himself or herself hold, it is

very easy to reject that with which one is not familiar. Furthermore, one is always prone to lose one's connection to insights that once seemed undeniable. But all views make a claim on one. How does one argue, then, with the one who denies philosophy's relevance—especially when one denies it, on occasion, oneself? The answer is that one does not. One does not argue with oneself. One *appeals*; one *entreats*; one *re-describes* the issue in a way that one's understanding of the full extent of the problem is renewed. That is, one reinvigorates philosophy through rhetoric. This complicates the matter, given that, presumably, rhetoric is the proper domain of the sophist and argument that of the philosopher. But the philosopher can only rely on his or her version of rhetoric and trust it to prepare the proper ground in which the care for argument may take root.

In any event, I have provided this miniature prolegomena to engaging in philosophy at all because it is important to recognise how phenomenology first always takes up *this* issue of reinvigoration. This is why phenomenology is often preoccupied with the issue of origins and returning to origins. In taking up this issue, phenomenology is not understood simply as a specific method. As a method, “phenomenology” is nothing univocal. In fact, it is equivocal; it is Husserl's, or Heidegger's, or Levinas' phenomenological method, etc., which all have points of articulation and disarticulation, agreement and contradiction, etc. But this is to locate phenomenology in a moment after its proper beginning. One cannot, then, locate phenomenology primarily in its fissiparous history. Phenomenology always involves, invariably, that initial entreaty to engage in philosophical thinking at all. If one is able to recognise in phenomenological philosophy this prior entreaty, one will then have a better sense of phenomenological practice. The aim of phenomenology is to provide an account of the prototypical human-world relation and of what we may all expect to arise from it.

Those who recommend a “theological” turn in phenomenology contend that that prototypical human-world relation, devised solely on philosophical grounds, ought to lead us, given such a foundational field of experience, to admit that it would be possible to experience God. Now, before delving further into this proposal of those involved in the “theological” turn, we ought to explore how phenomenology has, more generally, tended to be revised. This ought to aid in explaining how phenomenology seems both to change drastically and yet remain “phenomenology.” As Gadamer once wrote: “It is a peculiar characteristic of Husserl’s style of thinking that self-correction and self-repetition are indistinguishable from each other.”¹⁸ This odd quality of Husserl’s self-revisions persists in the history of phenomenology when others speak, even if seemingly at cross-purposes, all in the name of phenomenology.

Husserl’s variety of phenomenology is often considered to have provided an adequate concept of objects, as well as the horizon of intentionality that goes along with such experience. That is, both the given (object) and the receiver (transcendental ego) are considered adequately constituted in Husserl’s phenomenology to explain how the experience of any object is possible. Husserlian phenomenology is able to give an account of an encounter with objects that is not metaphysical in the sense that it does not appeal beyond immanent experience, and does not seem to discount or leave out any potential object. Husserl’s phenomenology in particular is based on giving an account of experience which allows things to come to *presence*—this is, often, what it is claimed adequately constituted phenomena are: presences. The degree to which

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Science of the Lifeworld,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. & trans. David E. Linge, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 182; German text: “Denn es gehört zu dem eigentümlichen Stil des Husserlichen Denkens, daß Selbsterichtigung und Selbstwiederholung ununterscheidbar ineinanderfließen” (“Die Wissenschaft von der Lebenswelt,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 147).

things can be brought fully into presence is what *justifies* the understanding one has of things for Husserl.

This idea is articulated in many ways, but Derrida will focus on how this occurs in language,¹⁹ how all indication or signing (*Anzeigen*) can be reduced to expression (*Ausdruck*).²⁰ That is to say, what is merely indicated, but does not actually *present* or *express* itself within one's words, can eventually be brought to *expression*. When one uses a word to indicate an object, as I used the word "stapler," above, one may do so while actually looking at a stapler on one's desk—as I did. Thus, in being present to me, my intention, my indication of the stapler, was fulfilled: the object itself presented itself. Therefore, my word "stapler" was an expression of the thing; I held the thing in my mind because it provided itself for me; I intuited it in its actual presence and therefore my indication of it expressed it. Whenever I mention my stapler when I am away from my desk, the object itself is not expressed and my intention is not fulfilled, I merely indicate it; I mention it, but it is not there. However, if I refer to *my idea* of the stapler (and not the object, *the stapler*), I am able to bring that idea to presence, and therefore, that intention of the idea of a stapler is fulfilled in my mind. Thus, ideas and memories of objects are distinct from sensory experiences of objects insofar as they are fulfilled differently; however, they are the same in that they are *fulfilled* by the actual *presence* of the thing in my experience. It is precisely this element of experience, this ability to maintain presence, that Husserl will consider primary (and that Derrida, and many others, will criticise). Husserl will maintain that one can gain complete understanding of being via this operation of bringing things to presence before the transcendental ego.

¹⁹ This thesis project follows this general linguistic emphasis when discussing phenomenology.

²⁰ See: Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 3-104; *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2016).

Beginning with Heidegger, however, and growing more and more at least until one reaches Derrida, thinkers will consider it crucial for phenomenology to concern itself with elements of hiddenness or withdrawal in experience. For Heidegger, this is the case insofar as phenomenology is aimed at understanding being or is the method for fundamental ontology. Husserl's phenomenology already understood that there are aspects of a thing that do not immediately come to presence. One does not see the back of a cube when one looks at its front, for example. However, Husserl's ideal was to ultimately *bring* everything to presence; just as the back of the cube cannot come to presence *at the very same instant as the front*, the back of the cube is *the kind of thing* that can be brought to presence. For Heidegger, however, the reduction to a horizon that constitutes appearances in terms of their presence is insufficient for an understanding of *being*. Presence is the mode in which beings appear when they are *inspected*. There are many beings that we experience not through inspection and that are not, therefore, strictly speaking *present* in their being. The ready example is the one Heidegger gives of tools. Tools are not inspected, they are used. They are not understood or experienced *as tools* when we are *inspecting* them. Moreover, they are not understood or experienced *as objects* when we are *using* them. Tools only become *present* after they break—I notice that something, like a hammer, that I was *using* now resides, pointlessly, in my hand. Heidegger's phenomenology, therefore, sees it as necessary to go beyond a concern for presence. Indeed, Heidegger will determine that being itself is, par excellence, what cannot be brought to presence at all, and one manages this by preserving the withdrawal of being in the event of being coming to presence as beings. To think this withdrawal is to think the ontological difference: the difference between *being* and *the being of beings*.

Thus, what Heidegger first pointed out was an insufficiency in Husserl's phenomenology. It could not allow one to give an account of the possibility of things that are not to be understood in terms of *presence*. This is a drastic shift and it is very important when trying to understand the debate regarding the "theological" turn in phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology, in maintaining that everything could eventually be brought to presence was interpreted to be insufficient when discussing, in Heidegger's view, the meaning of being itself, which recedes, withdraws, hides, conceals itself, even as it allows *beings* to come into their presences. And so, if we consider Husserl's phenomenology, as I have already said, as capable of giving an account of the possibility of experiencing any object, and if we consider Heidegger's critique as a matter of discovering something that is left out of such an account, something whose possibility could never be given an account within such a phenomenological framework, then we may begin to see a tendency in the history of phenomenology toward a "theological" turn.

Phenomenology has maintained itself by trying to account for more and more possibilities, sometimes drastically reimagining itself from the ground up, but always maintaining the primacy of the *relation* or *co-ordination*²¹ between self and other, or mind and world, or however one chooses to describe the two poles of experience. The emphasis is on *the connection*, the two poles of experience themselves being capable of radical redefinition. It may be noted that this tendency for expansion of possibilities, eventually tending towards a discussion of *God* in the "theological" turn, may have been made an ingredient in phenomenology from Heidegger onward. Gadamer consistently describes Heidegger's philosophical aims in the

²¹ I take this term from: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2002), 236. [Hereafter: *T&M*]; in German: "Zuordnung" (*Gesammelte Werke*, Band 1: *Wahrheit und Methode, Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 248). [Hereafter: *WuM*, *GW1*].

following manner: “It is quite clear that Heidegger’s whole life was the life of a God-seeker”;²² “[for Heidegger] what mattered was to develop a conceptuality commensurate with his religious questions”;²³ “[Heidegger’s] original and constantly advancing question [...] [was:] How can one speak of God without reducing him to an object of our knowledge?”²⁴ Gadamer also indicates that Heidegger never managed to do justice to God in the way he had hoped. This trajectory, indicated by Gadamer, is being followed by those figures involved in the “theological” turn.

Now, when revising phenomenology, it appears as though what Heidegger did was identify Husserl’s fundamental horizon as a horizon out of which only objects are capable of appearing. Heidegger took this to be insufficient, in the sense that Husserl’s view projected presence, as a justificatory foundation for experience, beyond its proper ambit (which is restricted to the being of beings), or it failed to take note of how being itself exceeds presence. It bears remarking that a further element of what contemporary continental philosophy now widely views as problematic about “metaphysics” becomes evident here: Metaphysics is considered a projection into what transcends that which is immanent to experience, in the sense of directly making claims about the transcendent, *as well as extending that which presents itself in a meaningful manner in a certain segment of experience to the whole of experience*. This is a basic element of what is referred to as “the metaphysics of presence,” which takes it as necessary to

²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “A conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 26.2 (1995): 117.

²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Way Back to the Beginning,” in *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer: Volume I*, eds. and trans. Pol Vandavelde and Arun Iyer, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 256. [Hereafter: “OWBB”]; “[Heidegger.] dem es darum ging, eine seinen religiösen Fragen angemessene Begrifflichkeit zu entwickeln” (“Auf dem Rückgang zum Anfang,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 403. [Hereafter: “ARA”]).

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Being Spirit God,” in *Heidegger’s Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 194; “[Heideggers] anfängliche und alles vorwärtstreibende Frage, [war] wie man von Gott reden könne, ohne ihn zum Gegenstand unseres Wissens zu erniedrigen.” (“Sein Geist Gott” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 331.

leave elements of experience out of a phenomenological reduction, assuming that all essential reductions must ultimately result in an appeal to presence.

In any event, in reaction to Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger tried to constitute a yet more fundamental horizon of experience, one that could account for more than objects. This seems to leave in place the horizon of objectivity, the horizon against which the appearances are constituted in terms of their presence, and yet moves on to some other horizon of experience. One could, however, see this revision as one which does not leave the horizon of presence in place, but rather replacing that horizon with another, richer one. Think of all the other things that are not experienced in terms of presence or, at least, that are not experienced *only and primarily* in terms of presence—*presence* does not exhaust their identity. For instance, animals. Animals are clearly present or visible to us, they *can be inspected*, and so they share something of object existence. However, it is also clear that animals are not experienced *only or primarily* as objects. Indeed—and this is where things become somewhat difficult to define and phenomenology loses some of its previous precision—it might even be said that because of their ultimate non-objectivity, even their presence, their visibility, is cut through with non-presence or invisibility. It may be the case that even while looking at the skin, the shell, the antennae, the fur, the hooves, or the eyes of various animals, one is not *seeing* everything one is being given. If this is the case, then animals are simply not experienced like objects are experienced. Perhaps then, even objects cannot be reduced to presence and such “objectivity” is merely an ideal projection, an element of an inadequate essentialist phenomenology. However, one could say that any essentialist framework will always be inadequate. One could then suggest that the ultimate horizon of experience itself would have to be remade from the ground up in order to account for this deeper or richer kind of phenomenality, one that incorporates breaks in experience without reducing

them to a greater essential framework, and this could be considered a more *existentialist* form of phenomenology.

The difficulty here is how to interpret these breaks. Are they ingredients in a richer kind of phenomenality? If so, is this not still an essentialism? Would such “breaks” be true breaks or merely apparent breaks that are ultimately reduced to an essential horizon (i.e. a full or ruptureless horizon, much like Husserl’s that reduces everything to presence)? And so, to truly put forward an *existential* phenomenology, one would have to provide for true breaks in the horizon, without considering whatever is indicated by such breaks to be mere nothingness or something that inspires some form of irrationality. What is indicated by the breaks would have to be sufficiently different in nature so as not to be merely reabsorbed into one’s essential horizon, but also not be so otherly that it cannot be of any concern at all. This leads one to revisit the question of “God” as totally other, who cannot enter into an essentialist horizon by definition —i.e. God is transcendent. But is there a way of integrating the essential and existential such that *the true fundamental horizon* of phenomenology is not exclusively essentialist nor does it become unraveled by ruptures? If one could do so, phenomenology’s fundamental horizon would be affirmed as paradoxical, and then there may be a way of saying that the phenomenon of God is possible.

Again, by definition there is no concept nor any horizon that may contain, explain, describe, etc., God. This is because God is not only *not* an object—just as plants, animals, humans, etc., are not objects—God is not *a being*. God, strictly speaking, does not *exist*. Just to be perfectly clear, by this, of course, I do not mean something banal, such as *there is no evidence for God’s existence*, or anything of that sort. I mean that, *in principle* or *by definition*, that of which one is attempting to speak when one speaks of *God* has no mere name or conceptual

category. There is no category that captures *God*, no matter how God “*is*,” and so it has often been seen to be better to hyperbolise: to deny God *existence* in order to convey the point about how God *is* differently than we *are*, or than anything else *is*.²⁵ Therefore, God can only be experienced in a drastically different manner to *everything* else. That is to say, the tie between existence or being and presence is problematised by many of the elements of our experience; there are many things that *are* but are not *present* in experience, not even in principle. Indeed, one is able to think of some things as absences, the prototypical example being *being itself*, as Heidegger stressed. But are there things that are perhaps relevant to our experience that do not even exist, things that are not *being*? The shift from Husserl to Heidegger, and the retention of the word “phenomenology” in that shift, indicates that phenomenology can sustain the change from an essentialist reduction to pure presence (as an ideal) to an existential reduction to the fundamental withdrawal of being.²⁶ But can phenomenology sustain the change from a consideration of being (as either reducible to presence or necessarily thought as absence) to a consideration of *neither presence nor absence* and so a consideration of a certain paradoxical being/non-being beyond any category of experience? Can there still be a phenomenology—that is, a horizontal account of experience, of the experiencer, and of the thing experienced—without any recognisable *existence*? What would we (the experiencers) “be,” in that case? And what kind of thing would we be capable of experiencing? Is this intellectual endeavour, because it retains the same basic structure of considering that *co-ordination* described by intentionality, still to be considered *phenomenological*? Or are we simply playing with terms? Are all attempts to

²⁵ This issue forms the basis of the discussion between Derrida and Marion on the nature of phenomenology and its relation to “theological” considerations (particularly in relation to the issue of the *gift*), which I will consider in the next chapter.

²⁶ However, there is a question of whether Heidegger’s reduction is a true existential reduction, whether it really reduces to a true absence, or whether the withdrawal of being still represents a kind of essentialist foundation in the truth of being. I take this to be the fundamental question of deconstruction. This issue is considered further below.

put such matters into words destined to become metaphysical? Or is there a discernible, coherent grammar that underlies such declarations? These are the questions raised by the debate regarding the “theological” turn.

Another way to describe the difficulty of developing a phenomenology that admits an account of the possible experience of God—albeit the paradoxical possibility of such a thing—is the following: The relation between human experience and God is a relation, by definition, of finitude to infinity. How can a finite structure of experience, no matter how capaciously it is constituted, properly receive without *procrusteanising* (so to speak), and thereby perverting and denaturing, the infinite? Indeed, how can a finite understanding even develop a vague notion of the infinite without invoking something nonsensical? The infinite, deduced from a finite position, is simply a void, and is at once all-encompassing and absolute negation. It is merely the *negation* of finitude, *in-finitude*, and, as a negation, it would be experienced as (at best) something ambiguous. Furthermore, in its explicit appeal to immanent experience, how could phenomenology claim to give access to what is by definition transcendent (i.e. the infinite)?

Phenomenology rejects considerations of transcendence; this is because an appeal to the *outside* of the mind is viewed as an historically contingent construction of the mind-world relation; any claim about the true being of things beyond their appearances is based on such a construction and is considered, therefore, unjustified. However, the reduction to immanence which avoids this construction raises the question (significantly for this debate) of whether one can ever have a proper understanding of *otherness*. In a phenomenological framework, immanent experience need not be construed strictly in terms of *presence*, but it is construed as intelligible experience. When one considers *all* aspects of experience to be reducible to some form of intelligibility—that which one can understand or constitute without any appeal beyond

oneself—one assumes all otherness into oneself, or one does violence to true otherness. In order for otherness to be otherness, various branches of contemporary continental philosophy, but in particular deconstruction, tend to maintain that otherness must be *forever* maintained. We must *never* be able to totally reduce all otherness to the self. Consider how this reduction of otherness may be found in both Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl believed that phenomenology would ultimately be capable of reducing all otherness, all absence, all indication to the self, to presence, to expression—at least insofar as one is interested in understanding being. Heidegger’s claims regarding the ontological difference speak to the fact that if one maintains a desire for presence or to bring all things to presence, then what one desires is not an understanding of *being* but of the *being of beings*; there is something essential, namely being itself, that does not come to presence and is, in that sense, the nothing. But Heidegger still, in some sense, retains the need to make all things intelligible to oneself in experiencing the truth of being, even if it is as absence or as the nothing. Heidegger’s being is not *not experienced*; it is experienced as *the nothing*, as *no thing*, as *not* a being; it is experienced in anxiety as the negation of the whole. The transition from Husserl to Heidegger rests on a switch from a universal transcendental ego in which all experiences are grounded, and to whom being appears, to *Dasein*, the historical, factual being for whom being matters, who cannot extricate phenomena from the duality (the unconcealing and concealing) that makes up their event of truth. But both Husserl’s transcendental ego and Heidegger’s *Dasein* are experiencers to whom everything relevant in experience is still ultimately reduced.²⁷ Thus, more important (for this debate) than the critique Heidegger offers of Husserl, is the critique that comes out of France, from figures such as Levinas and Derrida.

²⁷ See the volume *What Comes after the Subject?*, especially Marion’s “L’interloqué,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Eduardo Cadava & Anne Tomiche (New York: Routledge, 1991), 236-245.

Levinas is critical of Husserl because Husserl has what Levinas takes to be an impoverished sense of the other person, as simply an alter ego—Husserl’s phenomenology can explain how the other is not experienced as an object, but it is only through empathy, through a projection of my own ego onto the other, that I can recognise the other, indirectly, as an *other self* (alter ego), another *like me*. Levinas considers phenomenology as able to give a stronger account of the other than Husserl does. However, Derrida considers Husserl’s notion of the alter ego, the other who never appears, to be a crucial notion. Levinas tries to go further than this impasse, and Derrida argues that this is inadvisable.²⁸ For Derrida, one of the most important elements of Husserl’s phenomenology is that, without it being Husserl’s aim, his phenomenological project suggests the potential to recognise that there are intentions completely void of intuition. That is, Husserl focuses on fulfilled intuition as the paradigmatic case of meaningful interaction with the world. But Derrida emphasises how unfulfilled intentions are also constitutive of something relevant beyond “meaning”; indeed, according to Derrida, one could not have meaning without such a free-play of intention. Derrida criticises the paradigmatic status that Husserl assigns to fulfilled intentions because he sees such fulfilment as depending on the reduction of all appearances to the stability, the constancy of the transcendental ego. The transcendental ego is taken to be foundational in Husserl’s phenomenology because it can itself be fully presented. But Derrida will maintain that there is always a more profound, less locatable lack of presence that undergirds the establishment of the transcendental ego. In fact, all presence depends on the break that precedes iteration, the difference that allows something to be repeated and, thereby,

²⁸ See: Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Routledge Classics, 2005), 97-192. [Hereafter: “VM”]; “Violence et métaphysique: Essai sur la pensée d’Emmanuel Levinas,” in *L’écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 117-228. [Hereafter: “Vm.”]

held in presence.²⁹ This break, difference, or lack makes presence an invalid foundation; it makes presence merely an undue limitation on what is relevant in experience. For Husserl, the *co-ordination* lies between a transcendental ego and a horizon of intentionality that allows being to appear in terms of presence, but, for Derrida, it is between, fundamentally, two *I-know-not-whats*: **1)** I am not merely a transcendental ego; I am also otherwise, because I cannot completely secure myself in a theoretical grasp, which would be required in order to define all that I am (even simply as an *all* that I do not experience directly but *must be* in order to explain that which appears to me (i.e. a *transcendental* ego)). Therefore, I can never fully ground everything in myself, even transcendently, because there is a prior condition to the transcendental, a prior condition to the prior condition, and there always will be. And that prior priority is something that cannot be fixedly defined. It deconstructs. **2)** The world is also an I-know-not-what given that my fulfillable intentions always forgo the consideration of an otherness that cannot be reached or returned to me. According to deconstruction, what can be returned to me is presence, an intention capable of fulfilment. What can also be returned to me is a certain understanding of absence, that effectively becomes presence by being understood. But my intentions can also refer to something that does not return. They can go out indefinitely, with only the promise of return.

I will deal with Derrida's position further below and in later chapters. What is of importance is to note that his critique of Husserl is taken seriously by all those involved in the debate regarding the "theological" turn. That is, a phenomenological reduction to pure intelligibility, to anything that one can understand fully, forgoes any consideration of that which is unintelligible, not in the sense of being irrational or obscure, but in the sense of being

²⁹ This is *différance*, which I consider further in subsequent chapters.

otherwise. An aspect of what is experienced must always fall into this *otherwise*. Therefore, the reduction to intelligibility is inadequate. However, it bears mentioning, that this finding is both a critique of phenomenology as well as a discovery belonging to phenomenology. Indeed, John Caputo considers the reduction, the most important tool of phenomenology, to be a fundamental act of suspicion of what is seen for the sake of what is not seen; he writes that “[p]roperly understood, the principle of all principles is a principle of suspicion which suspects that there is more to what is given than it gives itself out to be.”³⁰ Thus, what may have become more evident here is the resilience of phenomenology. Perhaps curiously, although Derrida’s deconstruction has at times been seen to be the rejection of phenomenology, it has also been seen to be a deepening of phenomenology.³¹ It was Husserl’s reduction that, in the end, reveals this inadequacy of the reduction to intelligibility. One could even say that Husserl’s reduction, in some sense, reveals this *otherwise* as a trace.

As already indicated, the very question of whether there can be a “theological” element to phenomenology has had the effect of multiplying the legitimate interpretations of the word “phenomenology.” This “theological” aspect poses a significant challenge, since phenomenology has been considered to be, by definition, a philosophical discipline that brackets anything “theological,” in that phenomenology deals with *phenomena* and God cannot be a phenomenon within finite human experience. However, in this context, “theological” tends to refer to how one ought to comport oneself towards some form of radical transcendence, that which lies beyond the *limit* of experience, to what is *other*. Therefore, *at the limit of experience as it is normally conceived* (i.e. in terms of *what is*), is there something else that can be *thought*? And

³⁰ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 40.

³¹ This is a conclusion of the debate between Derrida and Marion that will be considered in the next chapter. It is also the opinion of John D. Caputo, also considered next chapter.

can this *something else* itself be integrated into a kind of horizontal structure? Does such integration necessarily negate its otherness? Or is there something paradoxical beyond objectivity or being that truly describes what it means to *phenomenalise*? Thus, in this context, one is dealing with the difficulty of deciding whether what lies at the limit of phenomenology is able to define phenomenology or whether what lies at the limit must be left alone.

Up to this point, I have been describing, predominantly, how phenomenology has moved in the direction of *expanding* its account of finite experience with regard to the *capacity* of that experience. Naturally, the tendency towards expanding one's conception of the finite capacity of experience would logically conclude when that expansion could be expanded no further. This itself may explain why phenomenologists have again raised the issue of God, of the "theological" within a phenomenological framework. However, the question under consideration in the *debate* regarding the "theological" turn is *whether* this expansion of capacities *ought* to be pursued. Must phenomenology, to be internally consistent, admit this issue of God, admit this "ultimate" phenomenality, or is there a point before the ultimate at which one can and ought to, legitimately, stop? On the one hand, it could be maintained that, while the transcendental ego of Husserl is not a full description of our being, and while it cannot manage to reduce *everything* to its contours, *what it does describe* is described very effectively and carefully, providing us some essential insights.³² On the other hand, it could be maintained that phenomenology, in its recognition of the issue of otherness, must tend in the direction of the ultimate.³³ This is the issue at the centre of the debate regarding the "theological" turn in French phenomenology: Do phenomenology's limits indicate clearly established *limited* capacities, or

³² This, as will be described below, is the position of Dominique Janicaud.

³³ In two different ways, as I will discuss further below, this is the position of both the deconstructionists and Jean-Luc Marion.

should phenomenology continue to strive for an ever greater expansion of capacity, even if it must therefore go, paradoxically, beyond its own limits?

Positions in the “Theological” Turn and My Contribution to the Debate

In this section, I will first provide a summary of the positions of Jacques Derrida (focusing on the interpretation of him given by John Caputo), Jean-Luc Marion, and Dominique Janicaud. I will also give an overview of my assessment of these positions. I will then go on to give a summary of my main argument and how I intend to address the question of the relation between the possible and the impossible within phenomenological rationality. I do so, ultimately, by appealing to the view of otherness found in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which I interpret to be an analogical understanding of otherness. I will also give some details concerning what I take an “analogical” view of otherness to be and how it differs from the view of otherness represented in the debate regarding the “theological” turn. All of the material of this section, however, is intended to be introductory and will only be more fully elaborated and substantiated throughout the subsequent chapters of this thesis project.

Some have claimed that the conception of the “theological” offered or occasioned by phenomenology leads, essentially, to a negative experience of the totally other. Jacques Derrida’s understanding of phenomenology is that phenomenology, pursued to its logical conclusions, results in the deconstruction of its own reliance on presence and fulfilment. In bracketing the natural attitude of considering conscious experience to refer to anything beyond itself, phenomenology shows that a signifier does not require a signified in order to have significance. Intention *is fully itself* even when fulfilment or presence is *bracketed*; intention

does not *need* fulfilment. While Husserl's phenomenology was concerned with the fulfilment of intentions by intuition, with the perfect presence in consciousness of the things themselves, it also unwittingly showed that one can intend far more than can be fulfilled. John Caputo therefore argues that Derrida's understanding of phenomenology leads to a kind of negative experience of God. If intention can have significance outside of fulfilment, then one must admit the possibility of pushing such a phenomenological structure to its absolute limit and thus consider an intention that *cannot* be fulfilled, that nothing could *ever* satisfy. This, it is claimed, is a negative "experience" of God. Or, this is how the underlying grammar of the names applied to God ought to be understood: as intentions going out infinitely without return. God does not come to presence; God is that which cannot come to presence; God is that which is always beyond an intentional grasp. No horizon is constructed for God since such a horizon would violate God's otherness. Thus, one overcomes the reduction of God to an essentialist horizon by this ceaseless intention of the impossible. God is in that sense *the impossible* and as impossible God is, ceaselessly, *desired, prayed to, implored to come*; yet, God remains always only in the *to come*.

Others, like Jean-Luc Marion, have claimed that there is a somewhat positive experience of God that is possible at the limit of phenomenological experience. In making this proposal, Marion considers that there are at least three ways in which intention and fulfilment can be related to one another: **1)** intention and fulfilment can be matched; **2)** intention can exceed fulfilment; **3)** fulfilment can exceed intention. It is this third possibility that allows for the potential for a positive experience of God. Rather than indicating a ceaseless outpouring of desire for the impossible to come (Derrida/Caputo), this third possibility opens one to an already given overabundance or excess that would manifest itself in potentially unique ways, even in the

manner of, e.g., miracles. These would not be appearances one could accommodate within one's conceptual understanding; they would instead stupefy one precisely to the extent that they would overwhelm one's concepts and what one could expect to experience. These would be paradoxical appearances. What would, strictly speaking, appear would not exhaust what was given; one, in principle, could not see everything that would be given. But one might still be able to describe how what does not appear in such appearances might be real. Marion is suggesting that *phenomena* ought not to be reduced to *appearance* but rather *givenness*. The *given* in intuition is not necessarily given as *visible*, but it is nevertheless given and so may be considered a phenomenon. This allows a phenomenon to be *saturated* with givenness or given in *excess*—i.e. a form of the third possibility noted above. Marion takes this to be the most rigorous understanding of phenomenality itself: a paradoxical givenness, a givenness that can give too much and allow the invisible, still, to be considered a phenomenon. Thus, certain phenomena, if given in excess, would be their own variety of *impossible*, but an impossible that can present itself, even if it would invariably do so in ways that would overwhelm our capacities. Thus, our names for God can be understood to have an underlying grammar that is expressive of this overabundant givenness. They would not have the simple visibility of objective phenomena that are, at best, matched to our finite intentions. We, as experiencers of this givenness, Marion contends, would actually be constituted in a radical way *by* such givenness *before* we would have any ability to constitute ourselves. Thus, Marion sees himself as adhering to the *I-know-not-what* structure that Derrida's deconstruction has established, but also surpassing it. At the furthest extent, Marion believes that (with many qualifications) such a phenomenological structure could allow one to affirm the *possibility* of a phenomenon of revelation, including the possibility of a Revelation of God. By allowing that phenomenology could understand the

possibility of such a revelation, or could describe the phenomenal structure of revelation, one would allow for a “theological” element within phenomenology or provide a bridge between philosophy and theology through phenomenology.³⁴

A third position in the debate regarding the “theological” turn in phenomenology is offered by Dominique Janicaud. One of his principle contentions is that to interpret the excess of intuition (that results in a kind of stupefaction and concomitant experience of ambiguity) as something that allows *a revelation* is something only someone who desires a revelation would propose. According to Janicaud, this ability to recognise revelation as revelation comes from *within*, not from *without*; it is, therefore, not matter of strict phenomenological givenness, whatever else it might be. Janicaud believes that, if one wishes to be true to phenomenology as a science of appearances, one must remain with immanence, very strictly defined, without admitting any paradoxical elements. Any attempt to consider, after an ambiguous limit experience, the presentation of something, even a presentation that is impossible (i.e. a paradox), is not phenomenologically motivated but ideologically motivated. To acquiesce to this ideological motivation is to commit phenomenology to an explicitly metaphysical position since this determinate understanding of what is given would transcend what is deducible from the immanent ambiguity presented. Janicaud actually considers phenomenology, as a science of appearances, to be an essentially failed project and he also does not consider metaphysical

³⁴ It must be stressed that Marion does not *explicitly* argue for incorporating a “theological” element in phenomenology. However, this appears to be primarily due to the fact that after his earlier works which were written as explicit works of Catholic theology—namely, *L'idôle et la distance* and *Dieu sans l'être*—when Marion turned towards writing works that were meant to be taken as pure phenomenology, some aspects of his writing—including his tendency to draw on examples from the New Testament—often confused his readers as to the standing of his phenomenological works. For a more in depth description of this, see: Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005). [Hereafter: *J-LM: T-LI.*] Thus, Marion would not encourage a “theological” turn in the sense of encouraging a phenomenology informed by confessional, Christian faith, but he certainly is not discouraging a “theological” turn in the sense that he is maintaining that phenomenology is able, from a purely philosophical standpoint, to give an account of the possibility of the experience of God.

thinking to be something that is ever entirely avoidable. In any case, he believes that one ought to pursue phenomenology without engaging in a “theological” turn. Janicaud believes that phenomenology can be practised strictly as a methodology, without any need to push it to its limits. This allows for local phenomena to be described with genuine precision, which is itself a notable as well as a sufficient accomplishment, according to Janicaud.

The three positions just outlined make up the central positions in the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology as I understand them. Note, all focus on the question of what one is philosophically permitted to consider when dealing with phenomenological limit experiences, experiences that cannot be fulfilled in intuition, experiences of the impossible. The positions of Derrida/Caputo, Marion, and Janicaud may be, respectively, summarised as follows: **1)** A negative experience of unceasing desire for what is totally otherwise than common experience: the impossible. **2)** A positive experience of what is also otherwise, but with an emphasis on the potential of what is otherwise to show itself to us, yet in a way that nevertheless remains impossible for us to fully comprehend. **3)** A negative experience that relinquishes any desire for the impossible or to speak of what is otherwise and instead consider phenomena merely in specified local contexts. Out of the three, Marion holds the most contentious position and many believe that either his claims simply do not make sense outside of an overtly theological context or that they, at best, must collapse back into the Derridian position. I believe, however, that the most important questions that arise from this debate are occasioned by Marion’s claims. Thus, one ought to ask: Are Marion’s claims simply too strong? Do they require that one conclude too much about that which is beyond the limits of experience? And what is one to make of the criticisms directed at Marion’s proposals?

As just mentioned, some maintain that Marion's position may or ought to collapse back into Derrida's position. These critics suggest that, rather than claiming that the experience of God ought to be considered possible—in that what is given in pure givenness could be identified as paradoxically capacious enough to sustain an appearance of God—Marion ought to maintain that the experience of God is undecidable, while “God” is still worth considering as the aim of one's unceasing desire, since we are able to intend such an impossibility. Some view this basic criticism of Marion as common to *both* Derrida and Janicaud. This is Caputo's view and he maintains that Derrida's position escapes the critique of Marion that Janicaud offers.³⁵ However, I take Janicaud's critique to apply to Derrida as well. That is, while there are elements of Janicaud's criticism of Marion that Derrida would echo, I believe that Janicaud's position also problematises the Derridian unceasing desire that comes after the deconstruction of presence because Janicaud's position problematises the very idea of the *impossible*, which is precisely what is *desired* and what constitutes the “theological” element for the deconstructive side of this debate. Thus, Janicaud's position is, ultimately, that philosophical or rational thought, in providing accounts of possible experience, has nothing to do with, no relation to, or no *need* for the impossible. What is at stake here is still the identity of *phenomenology* (as a rational, philosophical discipline); its identity is being discussed with respect to its relation to potentially “theological” considerations, but those potentially “theological” considerations are only being developed and defined by a concomitant definition of the limits of *philosophical thinking* itself. Thus, the questions that this debate raises pertain primarily to philosophy itself: Does a purely *philosophical* impetus allow us to concern ourselves with the impossible, with the desire for

³⁵ See: John D. Caputo, “The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology: Two Possibilities for Religion in Recent Continental Philosophy,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 67-93. [Hereafter: “HP.”] I discuss this matter in depth in the next two chapters.

what is beyond experience? Does phenomenology in particular provide the means for describing that which is beyond experience? If one were to claim that there is a phenomenological description of experience that can (paradoxically) involve the impossible, would this result in a metaphysical position, despite the attempts to avoid it? And on what would such a determination of phenomenology depend? These questions require one to investigate the kind of relationship each figure proposes between rationality and the impossible.

Caputo argues that Derrida's deconstruction shows that the impossible is what can never be totally reduced to our understanding and so allows our understanding to be continually desirous. However, this impossibility must inspire us to be *forever* desirous; the impossible must be forever irreducible to the understanding because what is impossible cannot return to the self without a reduction to what is possible. Thus, one can never affirm that one *has*, even for an exceptional instant, in fact encountered the impossible, but one can maintain desire that one will. The risk I see here is that, simply by making the impossible forever impossible, this may lead to a kind of superstitious or irrational position: One refers to a *something* that can never become commensurate with experience, and yet, it is claimed, ought to somehow shape and direct one's desire. That is, deconstruction, in my view, has difficulty in articulating a way in which the other is both relevant to rationality *and* irreducible to, as well as irreconcilable with, rational understanding. While he is an excellent explicator of Derrida, Caputo's explications tend to lack the openness of Derrida's more suggestive formulations. As such, Caputo's accounts of the desire for the other come problematically close to irrationalism. Furthermore, when one considers this tendency in Caputo's deconstructive position, Janicaud's critique demonstrates its strongest persuasive force. Janicaud proposes that the issue of the impossible is yet more vexing than one may anticipate; the projected *impossible* of one age tends to relax into the possible of a

subsequent age, making the object of unceasing desire entirely evanescent. Janicaud says that one could, perhaps, still maintain a coherent grammar of unceasing desire, but not within a philosophical or rational discourse, since a rational discourse, even when it desires the impossible, collapses back into what it is possible to think. Therefore, because philosophical or rational discourse cannot coherently recommend such a pursuit of the impossible, one can either call for the end of philosophy as rationality—as is the tendency with some deconstructionists—or reduce rationality to the consideration of only pragmatically defined, local districts of phenomena that can be fulfilled by intention. Thus, in this context of questioning what place “theological” considerations may have relative to phenomenological rationality, I interpret these two figures as representing, or at least tending towards, two extremes: **1)** a kind of irrationalism borne out of the deconstruction of phenomenology; **2)** an overly limited rationality borne out of the desire to preserve phenomenology’s scientific leanings. It bears mentioning that these are my particular interpretations of the respective positions of Caputo and Janicaud and I explore these interpretations much further in later chapters. In any case, I believe that one ought to avoid these two extremes (irrationalism and an overly limited rationality). This breakdown of the two most extreme positions represented in the debate should allow one to fruitfully elaborate Marion’s central contentious claim in the debate.

In the light of these two positions, consider that Marion’s is an attempt to argue for the relevance, within a philosophical context, of the impossible beyond experience as something that presents itself to philosophical discourse in the form of paradox. In other words, Marion proposes that there is something real to be encountered beyond the limits of possible experience, while also trying to find a way to give an account of that which is encountered as still impossible. He is attempting to find a rational space in which one might secure a coherent relationship

between the powers of the mind and the inviolability of the totally other. Thus, from the specific issues addressed in the debate regarding the “theological” turn comes the general issue of the relationship between the *rational* (the sphere of the self, of possible experience, of finitude, of immanence, etc.) and the *impossible* (the other, all others, or what cannot be reduced to experience, infinitude transcendence, etc.).

In order to maintain, initially, a deconstructive position, Marion attempts to redefine the two poles of experience—between which one finds the horizon of experience, the *co-ordination* that is phenomenology’s perennial concern—as two respective paradoxes. Marion considers experience to issue from pure givenness and his version of the self is a figure that is installed by such givenness before it is able to constitute itself as *being*. Thus, Marion constitutes the self as, primordially, nothing but that which can respond to the call of givenness. In doing so, he believes he has secured the universality of the given as it gives itself by limiting the possible activities of this figure to the acknowledgment of givenness. This makes the fundamental horizon into one that gives rise to a paradox of something both immanent and transcendent—givenness is undeniably given to the self and so it is immanent, but it can never cease giving and so it extends infinitely, *even beyond itself*, and so it is in some sense transcendent. This allows one to conclude that it is possible to have an experience of God, since this horizon of givenness is *potentially* infinite. However, the productive paradox to which Marion reduces experience draws suspicion from his critics because it both evades a reduction to presence yet also allows for one to name something from beyond the limits of human experience (in particular, the ultimate other from beyond experience: God).

My contention is that there is a problem incurred by the way Marion adopts a deconstructive starting point. With deconstruction, one tends to consider what is other as totally

disanalogous to the self's finite understanding. As mentioned above in connection with Caputo, I believe this radical separation, in turn, favours an irrationalism, which calls into question the possibility of reconciling the rational and the impossible. It is noteworthy that, in his debate with Derrida, Marion says explicitly that his aim is to show that the philosophical concern for the impossible is still rational. Derrida is also aware of the threat of irrationalism, and he too wants to show that the concern for the impossible is an essential element in a rational pursuit, even a prior condition to any rational pursuit. However, deconstruction will not allow anything beyond the limit of experience to be named except as the object of desire. Deconstruction will not even allow the impossible other to be named by analogy with some element of possible experience, ostensibly in order to safeguard the otherness of the other. However, as I have already indicated, I believe that this fails to secure the relevance of the other. Furthermore, it may also favour the reduction of phenomenology to some form of pragmatism. Allow me to explain: If one does not allow that there is an element of otherness that can be understood (even by analogy), then otherness becomes something that has nothing to do with philosophy, since it becomes incompatible with rationality. On the other hand, if one fully immerses the other within a philosophical system, it reduces the other to presence or possibility, making the other as impossible irrelevant.

This becomes a catch-22 scenario for deconstruction: **1)** One cannot leave the other entirely outside the rational sphere, because the other must inform one's prototypical ethical response, so one must have some substantial sense of the other, but one must also not reduce the other to a metaphysical construct. Consequently, the only allowable appearance of the other within a rational system becomes the trace of the other, which is not a true appearance at all,³⁶

³⁶ I discuss the trace, in connection with *différance*, further in the next chapter.

and so the only allowable method of retention of the other is via the grammar of intention. **2)** If one only retains a sense of the other via the grammar of intention, the other that one indicates can have no effect on one's actions or comprehension without becoming, in some measure, a metaphysical determination of the other, an other that one can understand.

Thus, one cannot affirm that an understanding of the other is possible without that understanding becoming metaphysical, but one also cannot affirm that an understanding of the other is relevant (ethically) without it being possible. Hence, Derrida will say that what is required is that the impossible be considered *possible as impossible*. Janicaud, when he concludes that metaphysics (which is inherently destructive of otherness) is never entirely avoidable and ought to be simply accepted as such, essentially affirms a kind of pragmatism. That is, Janicaud relaxes the claim of phenomenology to ultimate truth and universal applicability in order to avoid the violence of metaphysical conclusions, but also relinquishes the desire to allow the impossible (or that which forever lies beyond an essentialist reach) to affect or curb philosophical rationality.

Marion seems to be trying to avoid both of these pitfalls: **1)** the loss or lack of rational connection to impossible otherness **2)** the relinquishing of the pursuit of the other that limits phenomenological inquiry to an exclusive concern with local phenomena that can be assimilated, fulfilled, and contained. Marion has tried to avoid these pitfalls while affirming the deconstructive notion of totally disanalogous otherness. I believe that this deconstructive point of departure makes the goal of integrating the rational and the impossible problematic, and this may, in part, explain why critics claim that Marion is simply expressing a bias or proceeding on the basis of ideology (that is, it is often claimed that Marion is arguing, ultimately, from his bias as a Catholic Christian theologian).

To begin discussing my contribution to this debate, I believe that the way the debate regarding the “theological” turn has proceeded requires that one investigate more carefully whether otherness is necessarily lost or distorted by its entrance into the realm of human understanding. Deconstruction creates a problem whereby what is other cannot—indeed must not—be understood. If otherness is understood, then, it is maintained that, by definition, its impossibility is sacrificed. Marion, while he professes to understand otherness as totally disanalogous to the self’s possibilities, is articulating a position in which the disclosure of otherness, even in the case of God, supports community and mutual recognition. That is, between the other and the self there is a certain capacity for recognition and connection that does not pervert or procrusteanise. It is relatively clear that providing for this possibility is intended to be the function of pure givenness. However, Marion receives the criticism that such givenness must simply be, contrary to what Marion thinks it may be, that which is ceaselessly intended by one *without* affirmation or recognition, and that one must, therefore, collapse pure givenness back into the position of deconstruction (which is Caputo’s criticism of Marion). Or, it is also maintained that such givenness is simply metaphysics reinstated; it is just *being* by another name since the other is reduced to a horizon of experience (which is Janicaud’s emphasis in his criticism of Marion).

One may mention here that the principal aim in contemporary continental philosophy that is concerned with otherness as the impossible is to maintain an *ethical* position whereby otherness is not reduced to the self. This is a kind of extreme *existential* position; any *essential* understanding is enacted by a reduction of otherness to the self, or sameness, or stability, or presence, and therefore sacrifices one’s ability to think veritable otherness, difference, movement, change etc. One may ask, at this point, whether this notion of otherness is necessary

or helpful in order to maintain this ethical position. An ethical position, in this context, would be defined as one that does not reduce the other to the self, thus allowing difference to stand.

However, I would maintain that an ethical position that does not provide a sense of the relevance of the pursuit of the other would also fail to meet its goal. Thus, I propose the following emendation to the conditions for holding an ethical position: An ethical position is defined as one that does not *ultimately* reduce the other to the self, but that provides for some initial sense of the other, while *nevertheless* allowing difference to stand. The concern in this context is usually that *any* initial understanding of the other will eventually totalise, and so one must maintain the rupture between the self and the other at the outset. But, if one maintains the rupture at the outset, as well as a refusal of the return of the other, then one is left only with an ambiguous trace of something otherwise. The trace is perhaps noteworthy, but that is all it can be. In that case, Janicaud is more likely correct: a rational discipline ought not to concern itself with the trace because that trace cannot influence one's actions without turning one's discourse, overtly, into metaphysics.

Thus, with this scheme in place—the scheme of avoiding a totalising reduction as *final* and a sense of the other as *originary*—one may see Marion as attempting to affirm the initial rupture and then conceive of the possibility of the return of the other into the realm of the self, with its impossibility intact. The general critique of this is significant, however: Why should one interpret that which returns across the initial rupture as *God* and not simply something unknown, i.e. as anything else? While there are some ways in which Marion responds to this critique, his response remains unsatisfactory.³⁷ The paradoxical appearance of pure givenness, if it does not function according to a scientific or metaphysical conception of *being as sameness* or some

³⁷ I will discuss these responses in the next two chapters.

variety of *univocal being*, operates in a similar manner to the metaphysics of the *analogia entis*: a fluctuation between knowing and unknowing within each affirmative presentation.³⁸ However, the metaphysics of the *analogia entis*, in an important sense, operates in the opposite direction from Marion's phenomenology of givenness. That is, in the *analogia entis*, there is an initial familiarity with being (initial community between entities, not rupture) that nevertheless moves one towards greater and greater incomprehension of God (who is *being* only in an analogous, and ultimately incomprehensible, sense), and subsequently moves back again towards familiarity, but never rests at one extreme or the other. Marion tries to use the paradox of givenness to effect this kind of movement of thought between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. However, because Marion appears to begin with the rupture of deconstruction, his position does result in some confusion. One may even question whether his phenomenology is truly meant to emphasise initial distance and rupture, because the initial rupture would imply the impossibility of a return and Marion posits a kind of return. One could even suggest that Marion only emphasises rupture only to placate deconstructionists and anti-metaphysical philosophers—though this is likely an unfair characterisation. It is clear enough that Marion wishes to affirm the initial rupture, while it is also clear that he wishes to allow for the motion between self and other, comprehension and incomprehension. That is, it seems to be the *bidirectional movement* between possibility and impossibility that is, primarily, being sought.

³⁸ The main 20th century, European, philosophical proponent of the *analogia entis*, Erich Przywara—who was in consistent scholarly discussions with all the principle phenomenological figures, most of all Edith Stein and Husserl, but also Max Scheler and Heidegger—described metaphysics as studying a universal *rhythm*; i.e. the movement back and forth between the mysterious nearness and unbridgeable distance taking place within the analogy of being. See: Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz & David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014). See also: John R. Betz's Translator's Introduction to *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 1-115.

Note, neither Caputo's position nor Janicaud's seems concerned with such movement: **1)** Caputo's desire for the impossible is unidirectional in the extreme; desire goes infinitely outwards with no affirmation of a return since everything depends not on God's response, but on our desire and, in fact, the undecidability of God's response; **2)** Janicaud's rationality retreats inward and never attempts to break out towards the impossible beyond experience. Caputo's position, therefore, tends towards an irrationality precisely to the degree that it undervalues the capacity for truth in the return. Janicaud's position ultimately tends towards pragmatism precisely to the degree that his version of phenomenology insulates itself from the need for any true statement concerning otherness. In both positions, one form of movement—the movement *back*, in Caputo's case, and the movement *out*, in Janicaud's case—is undervalued or suppressed. I believe Marion's position is preferable to either of these two.

Marion appears to be the most sensitive to issue that one needs to understand the other in order to have concern for the other (in order for the other to appear relevant), but one must find a way to understand the other without reducing the other to oneself (so that the other remains truly other). Furthermore, one not only needs both of these elements but *the coherent means of moving between them*. Rather than try to allow for such movement of thought by providing, as Marion does, an account of the initial rupture that then may lead to a paradoxical return that preserves otherness (and seems to depend entirely on interpretive goodwill in order to see that professed paradox as a *productive* paradox and not a mere contradiction), I believe one ought instead to attempt to find a way to affirm an initial understanding that deepens into greater incomprehension, and ultimately may shift into total incomprehension, without ever undermining what is achieved in comprehension. By doing so, one would thereby maintain difference but also give one a sense of the other that can, rationally, support the unending pursuit of the impossible.

That is, this would provide a bidirectional link between concerns for the possible and the desire for the impossible. Furthermore, this must, as is the case with all the figures in the debate, be a strictly *phenomenological* notion that may lead to something like “theological” considerations.

This allows one to restate, once again, the central question of the debate: What is phenomenology? One ought to recall the claim that deconstruction reveals phenomenology as a concern with presence that deconstructs itself; note that this still keeps phenomenology oriented towards an essentialist reduction, though with interruptions along the way. For Caputo, for instance, the sense of otherness that is possible in a phenomenological framework is only that of intention; phenomenology is the essentialist reduction *as well as* the deconstructive enterprise, which keeps that essentialism in check. However, as noted, this leaves out the possibility of any return of the other and, perhaps, the relevance of otherness. Without such relevance, one may be tempted to adopt a position like that of Janicaud, which sees phenomenology as a pluralist *set* of essential reductions, with nothing but a circumscribed, methodologically phenomenological “attitude” to unite them. This would be to conclude that phenomenology is not a unified philosophical enterprise; it is simply an attitude of concern for *what appears*, applied to pragmatically defined, local sets of appearances.³⁹ Therefore, the impossible other has nothing to do with phenomenology.⁴⁰ One should note that both of these positions require phenomenology to be interpreted, not as a philosophy concerned with ultimate truth, but as a philosophy concerned with the proper way to deal with the *problem* of the concern for truth as an invariably metaphysical endeavour. Neither tries to recover truth. Therefore, I see both Caputo’s and Janicaud’s views of phenomenology as inadequate. Caputo’s view could lead one to dispense

³⁹ This is a feature of Janicaud’s “minimalist” phenomenology which I will cover in greater detail in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Janicaud does maintain that it could be relevant for some other kind of philosophy, but he never gives examples of such philosophies. I argue that he makes this concession, ultimately, without fully intending it. Again, this matter is covered in Chapter 3.

with phenomenology entirely in order to desire an otherness one has no reason to believe in, but which one prefers to the violence against otherness that is a hallmark of rationality. Janicaud, on the other hand, posits what he sees as phenomenology's failure to be a unified, rigorous science as a kind of accomplishment in its own right by considering phenomenology to be a pluralist set of local discourses.

The view of phenomenology I described earlier in this chapter saw phenomenological principles as based in an attitude of trust towards the offering of a new description of the most basic elements of experience. That is, I have provided an ultimately positive understanding of phenomenology, in the sense that phenomenological principles are not merely in the service of critique, but are in the service of actually providing an understanding of *the things themselves*. Phenomenology is both an attempt to see the problem in one's received or assumed views of the world and the desire to reinvigorate one's sense of the human capacity for understanding. I would propose that a view of otherness that fundamentally rejects any analogical understanding would devalue the latter element of phenomenology. In my view, therefore, Marion is the only one in this debate striving for a true phenomenology, and he sees the only means of attaining such a phenomenology in terms of finding a way to affirm both rationality and the impossible, without negating either. He seeks an adequate bridge between them. His paradoxical givenness does not manage this and I venture that this happens because Marion retains the view of otherness as something fundamentally arising from rupture, rather than something one may describe by exceptionally distant and complexly established analogy.

In this project, I will pursue this analogical understanding of otherness and see whether it can accomplish the rational bridge that Marion is attempting to build between the possible and the impossible. In doing so, I will rely on my reading of Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical

hermeneutics. Based as it is on the paradigm of *conversation*, and given that Gadamer's hermeneutics is itself an elaboration of phenomenology, I consider it an eminently appropriate philosophical position from which to discuss this issue. The question, then, is ultimately whether Gadamer's hermeneutics allows one a sufficient understanding of otherness as irreducible to the self that could properly permit one to pursue the other interminably (i.e. to maintain the other's impossibility), while also providing an initial sense of otherness that could allow one to view the pursuit of the impossible other as relevant to philosophy. That is, the analogy between the self and the other can *never* be broken; it cannot be that one's understanding of the other is eventually, fundamentally, undone, denatured, or overturned as one pursues the other. In such a case, the pursuit of the other becomes individualistic, existential, and irrational. However, whatever initial understanding is provided of the other must also, itself, *never* be considered sufficient or ascertained with perfect clarity and stability—in affirming such perfect clarity and stability, one places the other under the threat of totalisation within an essentialist phenomenological system. I believe that the understanding of otherness must, therefore, be thoroughly analogical. With analogy, the emphasis is not on the ground to which one reduces, but on the relation, the community that obtains.

Phenomenology has tended to be individualistic, not relational, in its formulations. All of the figures previously considered certainly supply individualist frameworks for their versions of phenomenology; the view of otherness as instituted by a rupture between self and other entails this. However, in contradistinction to this individualist inclination, Gadamer's "phenomenology," as a hermeneutics of language, is inherently, irreducibly communal. Furthermore, Gadamer explicitly affirms that the concern for the other is a basic ingredient in his hermeneutics:

[T]he understanding of the Other possesses a fundamental significance. The way Heidegger had developed the preparation of the question of Being, and the way he had worked out the understanding of the most authentic existential structure of Dasein, the Other could only show itself in its own existence as a limiting factor. In the end, I thought, the very strengthening of the Other against myself would, for the first time, allow me to open up the real possibility of understanding. To allow the Other to be valid against oneself—and from there to let all my hermeneutic works slowly develop—is not only to recognize in principle the limitation of one’s own framework, but is also to allow [*sic*] one to go beyond one’s own possibilities, precisely in a dialogical, communicative, hermeneutic process.⁴¹

Gadamer indicates that to consider the other to be a mere limiting factor is, precisely, to refuse an understanding of the other, thereby leaving the other, *in itself*, as an object of sheer ambiguity, determinable, with limited justification, only from an individualistic standpoint. That is, an individual is allowed to project into otherness a sense of God, or anything else he or she pleases, but there is no intersubjective horizon to which one could appeal that would secure the affirmative presentation of the other for everyone. Thus, there is no rational justification to affirm God outside of an explicitly theological or metaphysical context. The deconstructive claim, however, is that there is (with some equivocation) *reason* to unite in our *desire* for an unknown other. However, if one receives *no sense of the other*, then one does better to jettison this whole enterprise, at least within philosophy that rejects metaphysics. Again, the catch-22 asserts itself. Gadamer sees the need to surpass the notion of the *other-as-existential-limit* and instead tries to find a way in which the other changes one (is valid against one). Thus, I believe

⁴¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity, Subject and Person,” trans. Peter Adamson & David Vessey, *Continental Philosophy Review* 33, (2000): 284. [Hereafter: “SaISaP”]; “das Verstehen des Anderen eine grundsätzliche Bedeutung besitze. Wie Heidegger in der Vorbereitung der Seinsfrage es entwickelt hatte und wie er damit das Verstehen als die eigentlichste Existenzialstruktur des Daseins herausgearbeitet hatte, konnte der Andere sich in seiner eigenen Existenz nur als eine Begrenzung zeigen. Am Ende, so meinte ich, wird aber gerade das Starkmachen des Anderen gegen mich selbst mir erst die eigentliche Möglichkeit des Verstehens aufschließen. Den Anderen gegen sich selbst gelten zu lassen—und von da aus sind alle meine hermeneutischen Arbeiten langsam herausgewachsen—heißt nicht nur, die Begrenztheit des eigenen Entwurfs im Prinzip anerkennen, sondern verlangt geradezu im dialogischen, kommunikativen, hermeneutischen Prozeß über die eigenen Möglichkeiten hinauszukommen” (“Subjektivität und Intersubjektivität, Subjekt und Person,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 97. [Hereafter: “SuISuP”]).

Gadamer implicitly takes into account the problem of the reduction of phenomenology to irrationalism or pragmatism, with respect to the issue of impossible otherness, as I have explicated it.

However, this approach leaves one open to the criticism, lodged at Gadamer by Derrida and Caputo, that hermeneutics falls back into metaphysics as *logocentrism*: the essentialist reduction of all experience to the truth of the word.⁴² In my view, Gadamer effectively addressed such criticism. Gadamer once wrote that the ruptures that deconstruction reveals within stable meanings ought not to become the primary focus of one's attention and so Gadamer took the purpose of deconstruction to be encompassed by the hermeneutical enterprise: "deconstruction clearly falls within the realm of hermeneutics."⁴³ He writes that, even for deconstruction, "the violence of the breaks ultimately points to an inner framework"; however, Gadamer was also careful not to completely erase the novelty of deconstruction: "Certainly [the inner framework to which deconstruction points is] not a framework of truth statements, and certainly not something like a system of philosophy."⁴⁴ That is, deconstruction is a corrective for philosophy; it provides a reason to stop short of any kind of scientific, ideological, metaphysical, essentialist, etc. totalisation of the world. However, this still leaves the question of *what* does the interrupting.

The other, as interruption, cannot be simply a *nothing*, since the interruption is seen to be

⁴² There is a difference between Derrida's considerations and criticisms of Gadamer's hermeneutics and Caputo's much more severe criticisms. In particular, Caputo has the disadvantage of writing in a much clearer style than Derrida, thereby quelling some of the pregnant ambiguities inherent in Derrida's prose. This is the disadvantage of being a talented exegete. Questions that remain questions in Derrida's texts tend to become more firmly answered in Caputo's, which always allows one to wonder if one could have taken Derrida in another direction.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace [On Derrida]," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. & trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 376. [Hereafter: "HTT"]; "der Dekonstruktion fällt gewiß in den Bereich der Hermeneutik" ("Hermeneutic auf der Spur," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 148. [Hereafter: "Spur"]).

⁴⁴ Gadamer, "HTT" 383; "Aber gerade die Gewaltbarkeit der Brüche weist am Ende auf ein inneres Gefüge. Gewiß nicht wie aus Satz Wahrheiten, und nicht wie ein System der Philosophie" ("Spur," *GW10*, 154).

productive of something. But how does one *not* maintain that the other is nothing, when one is allowed no true *sense* of the other? The other *must be*, but also *cannot be*. This raises the question of whether there is simply too much suspicion aimed at Gadamer's hermeneutics. I cover this issue further in Chapter 4, but consider for the moment that Caputo writes: "however much I [Caputo] am indebted to Gadamer, I remain a little suspicious of his version of hermeneutics."⁴⁵ The primary reason for this suspicion is that, as Caputo writes elsewhere, Gadamer's "*Stimmung*" is that of "trust," "[b]ut deconstruction has a more suspicious eye."⁴⁶ Clearly, what Caputo means by "trust" is an attitude or mood in which one is too accepting of the capacity of *being* (through conversation) to receive the other without distorting the other. The suspicion that arises from deconstruction that Caputo mentions is suspicion enacted for the sake of an other that is not *affirmed* to be or not to be. But this arguably amounts to claiming that the other *is not*, while still discussing the other as though the other *is*. Therefore, it seems prudent to explore the ways in which one might affirm the other *to be*. Owing to this, I believe that Gadamer's pursuit of the other, which results in some kind of experience of the other, ought not to be rejected. Gadamer seems to understand—as I have argued that Marion does—that one needs a sense of the other for the other to be relevant.

The issue always returns to the question of what the proper sense of the other is. However, in the ensuing chapters of this thesis project, I prefer to frame the issue in terms of the question of what kind of *community* can be established between the self and the other. Is it a kind of community instituted by suspicion and rupture, ostensibly to keep the other "safe," even

⁴⁵ John D. Caputo, "How to Prepare for the Coming of the Other: Gadamer and Derrida" in *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 42. [Hereafter: "Gadamer and Derrida."]

⁴⁶ John D. Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism," in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 262. [Hereafter: "GCE"]

from an analogical understanding? Does this not involve an outright rejection of all community? Or, does the community of self and other involve some imperfect understanding of the other intended to both ward off a pragmatic rejection of impossible otherness and avoid the reduction of the other to a totalised understanding? I find that Caputo reads Derrida only according to the rejection of community, which is problematic.⁴⁷ In any event, Gadamer's understanding of the other as the one who is potentially "valid against oneself" establishes a community in which the self and the other can meet. I believe that this kind of community can be given a reading that can allow for the bidirectional bridge between the rational and the impossible that Marion attempts to provide, but which, I argue, he fails to do. However, since Gadamer generally is charged with being metaphysical, the emphasis, in my account, will obviously be on showing that Gadamer does not reduce the other to any form of presence; i.e. that Gadamer's view is capable of truly sustaining otherness.

The foundation of Gadamer's conception of philosophical understanding is conversation. The other encountered in conversation is one who can be valid, or, as Gadamer also puts it, can be *right* against oneself. Does this reduce to logocentrism? Does it make the only avenue to otherness a predetermined avenue of truth? Gadamer's is clearly not a reduction to truth, narrowly conceived. It is, however, a reduction to *meaning*. The other is the one who, besides oneself, says meaningful things. And these meaningful things are precisely those kinds of things that one may wish to accept into one's own understanding of the world. In conversation, both interlocutors are trying to say something meaningful. There are no standards, however, for this meaningful statement outside of the conversation itself. When one offers a word, it finds meaning by being listened to and returned. Gadamer often speaks of the reaction of surprise in

⁴⁷ I discuss this further towards the end of Chapter 2, as well as in Chapter 4.

conversation: “Aha! I know what you mean!” which is to say, “I know what you *want* to say.” All solitary saying, for Gadamer, is a mere wanting to say, a mere intention to say, but perhaps even more strongly, it is not even a proper intention, because *what one ultimately can say* is determined by the other. One cannot know what meaning one will stumble upon until the other allows one’s word to be a true word. And one performs this same action for others, supporting their words by allowing them to be meaningful. This is achieved through what Gadamer calls “lenience.”

Gadamer’s lenience has a structural function similar to the initial rupture of deconstruction; that is, it is a constituting non-presence. Lenience is the means by which we enter into the meaning on offer in conversation. But showing lenience does not necessarily imply something preconceived—i.e. showing lenience to that with which one already agrees. Precisely in order to let *that which has never before been said* to enter into speech, one requires lenience. And such lenience is shown towards that which one *does not understand*. Thus, lenience is a prior, constituting non-presence, but clearly enacted for the sake of a translation of what is other than being into being. When whatever is the subject matter of conversation enters being by entering into speech, surely, it takes on the capacity for affirmation. This is because the attitude of lenience is distinct from that of the recognition of rupture. A rupture implies disintegration and destruction—hope for understanding is dashed for the sake of the impossible other. But lenience implies surrender, though not entirely selfless surrender—the hope for the other to be accepted and to accept one in turn.

Gadamer’s lenience, I will argue, has the capacity to affirm the other that deconstruction requires, but that deconstruction cannot affirm out of fear of reducing the other’s impossibility to possibility. Lenience manages this, crucially, by making all meaning constituted in conversation

into an acceptance of what the other says, an acceptance of the other into being, while never fully understanding what *being* itself is, i.e. the being that can admit the other. The entire context of conversation and the capacity of being itself becomes mysterious, even paradoxical. However, it can still be described as an interval of analogies. That is, the space of conversation is a space in which the self and the other meet; therefore, is it a space whose substance is the non-univocal substance of analogical being, being that is itself only understood through relations, like the relation of the self to the other. Being itself is never brought into presence, nor dispelled from it. Being is understood only in reference to what is understood, but the mystery of being in fact rebounds upon one's initial understanding making it appear newly mysterious itself. Thus, the community that obtains between the self and the other is a community of being, but being itself is revealed by the other to be an impossible capacity occasioned by lenience; it is the space where one expresses the impossible capacity to let meaning occur. This is what being is shown capable of sustaining. This provides for an incomprehensibility, not only of the other, but of the self, and of being as well. An initial understanding results in ultimate incomprehension, but while still retaining community, intimacy, between self and other.

This is the picture of otherness that one finds within Gadamer's hermeneutics and I believe it may allow one to accept Marion's proposal that "revelation" is a possible phenomenon, if we apply the paradigm of conversation to an overtly theological construct, such as, *creatio ex nihilo*. The relation between the creator who creates out of nothing and the creation that is created from nothing is a relation, viewed from a phenomenological perspective, between the impossible and the possible, respectively. Thus, in the conclusion of Chapter 4, I will apply Gadamer's understanding of the relation that obtains in conversation to the relation between the creator and creation, and see if the two relations can be considered analogous—offering an initial

understanding that deepens into ultimate incomprehension. The ultimate goal is to find incomprehension in being and, still, being in incomprehension, thereby permitting the bidirectional movement within phenomenological rationality that allows the impossible to be both preserved and remain relevant.

CHAPTER 2: “THEOLOGICAL” PHENOMENOLOGY

My aim in this chapter is, primarily, to provide a selective exegesis of the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology, from the side of the debate that recommends such a turn. I will focus on a discussion between Derrida and Marion who, broadly speaking, both recommend taking such a turn and, therefore, see phenomenology as a discipline defined by the relevance that may be ascribed to limit experiences. That is, both see phenomenology as a philosophical discipline that ought to inspire one to pursue the impossible. However, the conclusions they draw from this characterisation of phenomenology are distinct; therefore, I will also describe some of the differences between Derrida and Marion in regard to how such limit experiences are to be interpreted. I will end by considering the critique of Marion offered by Derrida and Caputo.

There is a certain split within the group of those who recommend taking a “theological” turn in phenomenology. Some of those who recommend the turn have been referred to as the “new phenomenologists.” This term refers, most commonly, to figures such as Jean-Luc-Marion, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and occasionally a few others like Levinas and Ricoeur. In what follows, I consider only the work of Marion, partially because of length-restrictions, but also because Marion generally has received the majority of the attention with respect to whether, through phenomenology, philosophy and revealed theology can be said to have between them a strong point of contact. Marion is considered to emphasise, *ultimately*, a potential appearance of God in a phenomenological framework. At the very least, he sees

something of a “theological” nature arising out of a consistent and thorough application of phenomenological principles.¹

Though it is not quite standard, there is an option here to include Jacques Derrida under the designation “new phenomenologist.” This option arises due to the fact that, while there are many interpretations of Derrida, I largely follow the reading of Derrida that understands deconstruction to push phenomenology in a “theological” direction—a reading spearheaded by John D. Caputo—rather than any reading that sees deconstruction encouraging one to abandon phenomenology or to show phenomenology to be untenable. This reading is supported by the fact that Derrida often commented that Caputo reads him the way he enjoys being read, which may indicate that Caputo says things that Derrida does not (perhaps would not), himself, simply state outright.² Caputo has also explicitly linked Derrida and Marion, writing that phenomenology, through these two contemporary figures, has experienced the potential to “turn religious.”³ That is, Caputo argues that Derrida and Marion deal with the potential for an

¹ The evasive language that I use here is intentional; it is not entirely clear what the nature of the relation between phenomenology and the “theological” is, for Marion. See: Robyn Horner’s works listed in my bibliography, but especially: “Jean-Luc Marion and the Possibility of Something Like Theology.”

² See: Mark Dooley, “The Becoming Possible of the Impossible: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, ed. Mark Dooley (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 21. For a full explication of what Caputo calls the “religious” view of Derrida, see: John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Indianapolis: Indiana State University Press, 1997). As far as this project is concerned, “religious” and “theological” are taken to have the same or a similar meaning. I discuss this further in the next footnote.

³ This is not a helpful formulation since “theological” is already an imprecise term, as I mentioned last chapter. Caputo’s use of “religion” in this context is, also, quite imprecise, if not simply improper. While Caputo would make a distinction between “theological” and “religious,” that distinction assumes the very question that the discussion between Derrida and Marion tries to answer; namely, whether one can give an *account* or a *philosophical description* of what one could expect in an experience of God (“theology”) or whether one must simply leave the extreme possibility of the experience open without describing or determining anything about it (“religious”). Nevertheless, both terms refer to the radical possibility of the experience of God in some sense; this is the element that Janicaud disputes as having no place in phenomenology, and, therefore, it is the crucial question of the greater debate surrounding the “theological” turn. In any case, see: Caputo, “HP”; see also: John D. Caputo, “Apostles of the Impossible: ‘On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion,’” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 185-222. [Hereafter: “AI.”]

experience of God, in two ways. While Derrida does not consider the “experience” of God in the “positive” sense of Marion, he does believe that phenomenology, pursued to its logical conclusions, results in a kind of limit experience, an aporetic experience of the impossible that is interpretable in a mystical fashion, or may be interpretable as a kind of negative experience that allows for the impossibility of God to be indicated, though not understood or recognised as such.

Derrida is often separated from the aforementioned new phenomenologists for two reasons. The first is that Derrida generally did attempt to distance himself and deconstruction from phenomenology; however, for the reasons already mentioned, and because of some of his comments in his debate with Marion that I will discuss at length below, I do not believe this is the best interpretation of Derrida. In short, Derrida radicalises phenomenology, he does not break with it. Deconstruction needs something to deconstruct; thus, it must always begin within an already established philosophical or scientific discourse. Furthermore, historically, deconstruction arose out of, specifically, Husserlian phenomenology, and through it remains tied to phenomenology. The second reason that Derrida is separated from the new phenomenologists is that Derrida’s more negative understanding of the “theological” sense of phenomenology is understood as escaping the critique of the “theological” turn offered by Dominique Janicaud, which, it must be said, is explicitly directed at Marion and not Derrida.⁴ That is, the “theological” turn is seen to be an evolution of phenomenology wherein one posits some definitive interpretation of what is encountered in a limit experience—i.e. an experience that occurs beyond any typical phenomenological horizon and therefore cannot be fulfilled in intuition. Derrida’s deconstruction certainly eschews the fulfilment of intuition as the paradigmatic case of world-engagement or language-use, and instead emphasises what occurs in

⁴ With the exception of one instance where Janicaud explicitly directs his critique at Derrida that I will discuss when I come to discuss Janicaud in the next chapter.

the free-play of signification—i.e. pure indication or reference, without fulfilment. Therefore, Derrida does not posit any definitive interpretation of what may be encountered in a limit experience, because deconstruction focuses on one’s limitless ability to indicate what is otherwise, but never definitively *receive back* a “sense” or “meaning” (or *fulfilment*) of whatever has been indicated. However, as I will begin to argue at the conclusion of this chapter, and more extensively in the next, Janicaud’s critique of the “theological” turn, even given Derrida’s negative stance, still applies to Derrida. This is because Janicaud’s critique of Marion, while it is only directed at the fact that Marion posits some definitive interpretation of that which is experienced beyond all horizontal structures, leaves many significant questions regarding Janicaud’s understanding of the significance of limit experiences unanswered. When one pursues Janicaud’s answers to such questions in some of his other works, one finds a more definite rejection of a phenomenological or philosophical position that argues for the relevance of the pursuit of the impossible.

It bears mentioning that there is no scholarly consensus on what it is that Marion’s “bridge” between philosophy and theology (i.e. the saturated phenomenon) represents. In fact, both Caputo and Horner interpret Marion as collapsing back into Derrida’s position, even though Marion insists that he has gone beyond it.⁵ The final aim of this chapter, then, will be to provide a description of the element of Marion’s phenomenology that I take to be causing the confusion; namely, his understanding of the phenomenon of *revelation* (minuscule “r”) which, in a complex fashion, is able to supply the means of describing the possibility of a *Revelation* (capital “R”)⁶ of God within phenomenology—though, it is not able to accredit or compel belief in that

⁵ See: Caputo, “HP”; “AI.” See also: Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), particularly her Epilogue, 241-7. [Hereafter: *RGG*.]

⁶ The distinction between minuscule “r” revelation and capital “R” Revelation will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Revelation, which is the domain of Christian revealed theology (which Marion understands as having access to a hermeneutic illumined by faith, which is itself dogmatically defined as a gift of God's grace).

In order to accomplish the aforementioned aims, my efforts will be focused on interpreting two live discussions that took place between Derrida and Marion, in late September of 1997, at a conference held at Villanova University.⁷ I focus on these two discussions because the issue of how to define phenomenology is emphasised in them. I will pay particular attention to how Derrida and Marion agree to a large extent on this issue, but also to how their views diverge. In particular, Derrida and Marion agree that Husserl's phenomenology can be pushed to a certain radical limit, resulting in a philosophical discourse dedicated to studying whatever is beyond or otherwise than considerations of presence and absence. However, Derrida and Marion disagree with respect to how one ought to interpret that *beyond* or *otherwise* and the effect it is able to have on human beings *qua* rational thinkers. Note, my reading of this encounter will not be exhaustive and will focus on the elements of the discussion pertinent to my project.⁸

In addition to the exchange between Derrida and Marion, I will consider some of the main texts that are relied upon in that discussion. Primarily, I consider Derrida's "Comment ne pas parler. Dénégations," which was originally published, in French, in 1987, though it was first

⁷ It is worth noting that both of these discussions took place in English. For the first discussion, see the version of Marion's essay, "In the Name," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), which includes the appended discussion: "Derrida's Response to Jean-Luc Marion," 42-47; hereafter, in the footnotes, this is referred to by: "Response." For the second discussion, see: "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 54-78. The reference for Derrida and Marion's second discussion is listed in my bibliography under "Kearney, Richard," since he acted as moderator. However, in the footnotes, I will, hereafter, refer to the debate only by a shortened version of its title: "On the Gift."

⁸ For a thoroughly detailed and excellently written discussion of Derrida and Marion's discussion, see Horner's *RGG*.

delivered as a lecture, in English, in 1986.⁹ Afterwards, I will consider Marion's critique of Derrida's paper in "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of Negative Theology," which was first delivered at the very conference in question, at Villanova, in 1997, and was followed by their first live discussion. However, *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*,¹⁰ the volume containing Marion's "In the Name," as well as the transcript of Derrida and Marion's two discussions, was not published until 1999 (the French publication, "Au nom: Comment ne pas parler de 'théologie négative'" also appeared in 1999). However, it also bears mentioning that Marion later republished this article as the fifth chapter of *In Excess* (published, in French, in 2001),¹¹ which Marion takes to be his fullest expression of his notion of the saturated phenomenon.¹² I will also give some consideration, in this chapter, to Marion's *Réduction et donation*, which was first published in 1989,¹³ as well as Marion's "Le phénomène saturé," published in 1992, in a volume

⁹ Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. Ken Frieden (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 73-142. [Hereafter: "Denials"]; "Comment ne pas parler—Dénégations," in *Psyché: L'invention de l'autre, Tome 2* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), 535-595 [Hereafter: "Dénégations."]

¹⁰ John Caputo & Michael Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 20-53. [Hereafter "IN"]. For the French version of the essay, I refer to the chapter from *De surcroît* (renamed: "Au nom ou comment le taire,") referred to in my footnotes, hereafter, as: "Au nom"; *De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: PUF, 2010) Kindle Edition. See also: Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). See also: Jean-Luc Marion, "Au nom: Comment ne pas parler de 'théologie négative,'" *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 55 no. 3, (1999): 339–363.

¹² Jean-Luc Marion "The Banality of Saturation," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 176, fn. 17. [Hereafter: "Banality"]; "La banalité de la saturation," in *Le visible et le révélé*, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2005), 153, fn. 3. [Hereafter: "Banalité."]

¹³ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998) [Hereafter: *RD*]; *Réduction et donation: Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*, 2ième édition (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989) [Hereafter *Rd*].

inspired by Janicaud's criticism,¹⁴ and Marion's *Étant donné*, which was published in 1997.¹⁵ I consider these texts in order to give a fuller sense of Marion's view of phenomenology and how he believes that faithfulness to phenomenology requires going beyond its traditionally understood limits.

Beyond Affirmation and Negation; Beyond Presence and Absence

The discussion between Derrida and Marion was organised by thinkers with an explicitly religious interest in both Marion's phenomenological investigations and Derrida's deconstruction.¹⁶ It began with Marion delivering his essay, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" whose title is a direct reference to Derrida's critique of negative theology in his essay, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denegations."¹⁷ In his essay, Marion is trying to correct what he sees as a popular misunderstanding of the term "negative theology." Negative theology is often considered to be its own discourse, privileged in regard to how it speaks of God because it speaks only to deny knowledge of God. However, Derrida presents an argument in his essay that aims to show that such a discourse is still reliant on presence and is still, therefore, metaphysical. Marion, on the other hand, is trying to correct the view of negative theology—and theology in general—as invariably participating in the metaphysics of presence.

Drawing on his own Catholic tradition, Marion writes that the meaning of the term "negative

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, "The Saturated Phenomenon," in *Phenomenology and "The Theological Turn": The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud, et al., trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 176-216. [Hereafter: "SP"]; "Le phénomène saturé," in *Phénoménologie et théologie*, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Ricoeur (Paris: Criterion, 1992), 79-129. [Hereafter: "Ps."]

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2002). [Hereafter: BG]; *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013). [Hereafter: *Éd.*]

¹⁶ See: John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, editor's introduction to *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1-19.

¹⁷ Alternatively translated as: "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." See above.

theology,” in the sense of an autonomous or self-sufficient discourse concerning the divine, is a modern connotation, not ancient or mediaeval.¹⁸ According to Marion’s reading of the theology of Catholic Church fathers and doctors, “negative theology” was viewed as part of (or a stage in) the Catholic tradition’s always tripartite way of approaching God. The three parts include cataphasis (or affirmation), apophasis (or negation), and a third way (de-nomination). Part of Marion’s critique of Derrida is that Derrida denies or is unaware of the fact that the third way is represented in Christian theological history. Instead, Derrida insists on there being only two ways, affirmation and negation, and he sees both ultimately amounting to the same thing (that is, affirmation). Furthermore, Marion considers Derrida to hold that *a* third way, beyond both affirmation and negation, is offered only by deconstruction. Marion sees this as a result of Derrida’s desire to maintain deconstruction’s “originality and its final pre-eminence.”¹⁹ However, Derrida will eventually indicate that he takes this aspect of Marion’s reading to be unfair.²⁰ Derrida will say that he intended, in his essay, to problematise the univocal view of negative theology as Marion did,²¹ and, what is more, that he does not deny that the Christian tradition prefigured deconstruction.²²

Brief Excursus on Derrida’s Style

Something relevant, with respect to reading Derrida in general, is expressed by the following comment that he made in his response to Marion’s paper: “[I]f time permitted I [Derrida] could show that my texts on the subject [of negative theology] are written texts, by which I mean that they are not a thesis on a theme. They have a pragmatic aspect, a performative aspect that would

¹⁸ Marion, “IN” 21; “Au nom” n. pag.

¹⁹ Marion, “IN” 22; “originalité et de sa prééminence finale” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

²⁰ “Response” 44-45.

²¹ “Response” 43.

²² “Response” 47.

require another kind of analysis.”²³ The implication is that Marion’s critique does not quite apply to Derrida’s essay, since Derrida’s essay was attempting to make a performative point, and inherent to a performance is its resulting in a more open-ended conclusion regarding the performance’s *meaning*. The *meaning* of a performance is less reducible to propositional form than a thesis on a theme is. Generally, I believe that Derrida’s essays always require one to privilege this performative aspect above the more straightforward, somewhat thetic reading he sometimes receives. When Derrida receives these more typical, academic analyses, they appear predicated on the idea that his style is covering up a complex but fundamentally presentable point and does not constitute a singular manner of presentation of something necessarily singular or peculiar—i.e. difficult to generalise and, therefore, difficult to communicate. Indeed, though I follow Caputo’s “religious” or “theological” reading of Derrida in this chapter, overall I would argue that it also goes too far in defining Derrida’s *position* on certain topics, like negative theology. Nevertheless, while I try, in my considerations of Derrida, to leave Derrida’s intended meanings open-ended, when I deal with his position *in the context of this debate*, the thetic reading of him is emphasised in order to make more sense of how the debate progresses and to align my reading more closely with the way in which the literature on the debate construes its results.

End of Excursus

It is important to keep in mind that, at the stage in their debate when Marion presents his essay, there is some confusion at work, on both sides. Derrida and Marion agree on many issues, and their first discussion, after Marion’s delivery of his paper, is aimed at sorting through the many false disagreements they appear to have, in order to finally find that point at which they truly

²³ “Response” 43.

diverge. In order to demonstrate this, I will first consider, as Derrida deals with it in his essay, the issue of “negative theology.” Then I will consider, as Marion deals with it in his essay, the issue of the Name and de-nomination and the effect that the notion of de-nomination might have on one’s conception of “negative theology.” Following that, I will consider, looking to Derrida and Marion’s two discussions themselves, the points they raise pertaining to the surpassing or radicalising of phenomenology.

Derrida’s paper is typically lengthy and, indeed, speaks to a multitude of issues, but he very consistently returns to the question of his title (though it may be offered, not as a question, but as advice: “How to avoid...”). On my reading, the question “How to avoid speaking?” is conveyed with a genuine sense of concern: How *does* one avoid speaking? Derrida means this non-rhetorically: How is it possible not to speak? Does one ever succeed in saying *nothing*? Does one ever succeed in a counter-saying that speaks *the nothing*? Derrida’s view on this is complex, and while he would not encourage a complete rejection of speech, he is interested in successfully countering speech with some kind of helpful silence.

One way in which Derrida analyses this issue of non-speaking and silence is by using the structure of the secret: How does one keep a secret? Does a secret’s existence not get revealed precisely when one denies one holds something secret? In avoiding it, one will give it away; one will already speak of it. If a secret (a negation) appears as secret (if the negation appears as negation), it “denegates” itself.²⁴ The secret does not necessarily speak what it keeps secret (though it may; one may guess what is hidden if one knows something is hidden), but it does speak itself. Is it ever truly possible, then, to say *nothing*, and by that nothing properly attest to

²⁴ Derrida, “Denials” 94-95; “Dénégations” 164-166.

what is totally other? To properly attest to what cannot be said? Derrida is asking this question continually, and addressing it *to* negative theology, since negative theology is an attempt to speak without speaking the unsayable name of God. It bears noting that Derrida does not ultimately answer the question, neither for negative theology, nor for himself; in fact, he writes: “I [Derrida] let you answer this question. It is always entrusted to the other.”²⁵ I interpret this as Derrida in part trying to avoid a simple performative fallacy; he allows the question to remain open, and this is what gives “Dénégations” an element of true concern or earnestness that it would not otherwise have. In not merely *saying* (affirming) that the answer is unreachable, but in providing the question to the other, allowing Derrida’s own answer—whatever he maintains on the matter—to be ultimately *silenced*, Derrida is making an earnest attempt *not to speak*. This accords with the statement he makes elsewhere: “[I]nvent in *your* language if you can or want to hear mine.”²⁶ His success with respect to getting his reader to invent that which would allow him or her to hear Derrida’s silence is obviously left uncertain—again, it is up to the other. Furthermore, it must be left uncertain because *hearing a silence* is a paradox, of course, but Derrida’s language, given that Derrida is *other* to his reader, *could* be heard only in the silences (inventions, digressions, divergences, *negations*) of the reader’s own language. Finally, his success is uncertain not least of all because of the many philosophical issues surrounding silence and otherness that Derrida himself raises elsewhere in “Dénégations.”²⁷ Adequately raising the question of the success of

²⁵ Derrida, “Denials” 122; “Je vous laisse répondre à cette question. Elle est toujours livrée à l’autre” (“Dénégations” 190).

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 57 [emphasis in original]; “invente donc dans *ta* langue si tu peux ou veux entendre la mienne” (*Le monolinguisme de l’autre: ou la prothèse d’origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 106) [emphasis in original].

²⁷ Not to mention his entire corpus of work.

his own silence may itself be the complete performative goal of the essay. In any event, one must consider those many other issues that the essay raises.

Derrida's open-ended question implies most powerfully that if one cannot truly *not speak*, then what deconstruction aims to accomplish is never accomplished. Derrida sees negative theology as having the same aim as deconstruction, but not going as far as deconstruction because it re-institutes presence after its process of negation. The risk of simply conflating deconstruction with negative theology is as follows: If one is attempting to reach the other by a negation, then it would be an even greater calamity if one's negations—the other is not this, neither this; the other is nothing I can, strictly speaking, describe—causes the other to reappear as a “hyperessentialised” being,²⁸ distinct from one's erstwhile sense of being, but still lodged within a metaphysics of presence. In connection with this, Derrida does explicitly distance himself and deconstruction from an association with negative theology: “[n]o, what I write is not ‘negative theology’”;²⁹ “[n]o, I would hesitate to inscribe what I put forward under the familiar heading of negative theology.”³⁰ Derrida's insistence here is motivated by his desire to succeed where he sees negative theology as failing.

However, the status of Derrida's denials that he is doing negative theology are brought into question by the very problem that Derrida establishes in the paper: By denying that he is doing negative theology, what is Derrida accomplishing? The explicit “no” that prefaces each of the quotations above is somewhat startling³¹ because Derrida puts forward the possibility that, on

²⁸ Derrida, “Denials” 78; “Dénégations” 150.

²⁹ Derrida, “Denials” 77; “Non, ce que j'écris ne relève pas de la ‘théologie négative’” (“Dénégations” 150).

³⁰ Derrida, “Denials” 78; “non, j'hésiterai à inscrire ce que j'avance sous le titre courant de la théologie négative” (“Dénégations” 150).

³¹ Though, this is perhaps just an artefact of the paper's origin as a lecture (Derrida, “Denials” 73; “Dénégations” 145).

a certain diffuse understanding, everything is negative theology, because all words fail to say: “[We are perhaps led] to consider the becoming theological of all discourse.”³² That is, Derrida entertains the notion—and in fact he finds it impossible not to entertain—that what we consistently do is negate, even when we believe we consistently articulate and present things, in speaking. All presencing is made possible by a horizon of impurity; a presence is always made present by occluding the opposite of presence, but in that sense presence relies on its opposite to present anything. But if we were to try to present what presence occludes, if we were to try to *say* what is *unsayable*, we would only manage to present presence again, and, once again, at the expense of that which presence occludes in order to present. Thus, all we are effective in doing is gesturing toward what does not come to presence, what is covered over by speech, consistently. And so, in refusing the association with negative theology, is Derrida not then, at another level of thinking, inviting us to make the association? Is this not what is achieved by his inevitable failure—with his “no”—to perfectly untwist all the associations between deconstruction and negative theology? And so, is not the distinction he means to establish by his “no” left undecidable?

It may be tempting to interpret Derrida as enacting, here, a demonstration of exactly what he claims, in this very essay, that for which people criticise deconstructionists—being pernickety; to “speak only for the sake of speaking”;³³ and to “respond ‘no, it’s not that, it’s not so simple’ to all questions.”³⁴ This would, of course, be one way of not speaking. But Derrida is against the interpretation of deconstruction as obscurantist and nihilistic. And the open questions

³² Derrida, “Denials” 76; “le discours apophasique [...] nous donne peut-être à penser le devenir-théologique de tout discours” (“Dénégations” 147).

³³ Derrida, “Denials” 75; “Vous parlez seulement pour parler” (“Dénégations” 147).

³⁴ Derrida, “Denials” 88; “répondent ‘non, ce n’est pas ça , ce n’est pas si simple’ à toutes les questions” (“Dénégations” 160).

concerning negativity that Derrida's essay raises are not meant nihilistically, nor do they have the effect of obscuring what Derrida is intending to discuss. It is by means of inspiring these kinds of questions that Derrida believes he will have clarified, in the other (his reader), the issue of silence, the impossible possibility of not speaking. Thus, by failing to untwist the association between deconstruction and negative theology, Derrida has perhaps communicated the issue quite clearly, through the performance that his essay enacts. Therefore, once again, the indecision these considerations inspire leaves the matter quite open ended; and, again, this does seem to be Derrida's principal intention. Where others might provide a conclusion, Derrida maintains a silence that inspires undecidability. But the silence, on his part, the rupture at the origin or source, the distance and disconnection between himself and his audience that allows him to indicate a meaning that is *not immediately present and expressed isometrically* in himself and in the other (which is to say, *différance*), *this* is what causes understanding in the other, impossibly. An impossibility leads to an uncertain possibility. This calls to mind what Caputo calls Derrida's consistent emphasis across his works, which originated in his critique of Husserl: "the constitutive value of nonpresence."³⁵

In any event, while Derrida finds this prospect of a universal negative theology intriguing, a significant element of his essay is devoted to straightforwardly illustrating a distinction he genuinely sees between deconstruction and negative theology—and it is on this that Marion's essay will focus. Derrida's concern is with whether any definite result, no matter how difficult of access, does not indicate a metaphysical reduction to presence. If deconstruction is not negative theology, it is because, writes Derrida, theological figures like Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite re-posit a presence—albeit one that is implicit, or surreptitious, as well as

³⁵ Caputo, "HP" 72, see also: 70; cf. Derrida, *SP* 6.

transformed and hyperessential—after the denial: “God (is) beyond being but as such is more (being) than being: *ni plus l’être et plus l’être que l’être: être plus.*”³⁶ The worry is that “not being” is ultimately “more being,” that precisely *negation* produces another, higher form of presence; or, in moving beyond being, one is still appealing to a metaphysical substructure in order to create hyperessential *being*. Consider: “[i]t *situates* itself, then. It situates itself *beyond* all position.”³⁷ The emphases in this quotation are Derrida’s; the choice is clear: emphasise “*beyond*,” surely, but emphasise “*situates*” more strongly.

At the risk of oversimplifying, let me provide an example that I believe illustrates what I take to be the substance of Derrida’s argument. If I look at my couch cushion—which is a particularly rich shade of yellow—and I say it is *perfect* yellow, I would be affirming a quality of that thing, the cushion. But my affirmation of it would depend upon a metaphysical presupposition. My understanding of the cushion would imply that the substance of the cushion,

³⁶ Derrida, “Denials” 90; I have altered the translation here; the translation I have consulted has the phrase occurring entirely in English: “God (is) beyond Being but as such is more (being) than Being: *no more being and more being than Being: being more*” (note, the translation alters the italicisation and capitalises certain instances of “Being”; see subsequent citation of French text). In the French text, the passage is as follows: “Dieu (est) au-delà de l’être, mais en cela plus (être) que l’être: *no more being and being more than being: being more*” (“Dénégations” 161). I have altered the translation to indicate that the French version retains the English for the phrase in italics; however, this is a complex decision. This essay appeared originally as a speech delivered in English, but Derrida, who presumably wrote it in French, since there is a French publication, used an English phrase in the French publication of his essay. The English version that I have consulted indicates that it is a translation of the French publication. I alter the translation for two reasons: **1)** I believe Derrida’s decision to switch languages (from French to English) ought to be at least partially evident in the passage (English to French); I do this with full knowledge that Derrida believed that the switch between languages is impossible to translate—I am only trying to indicate a switch, not the full quality of the switch. However, then one could say I ought to have simply cited the original French phrase, but I believe there is a benefit in switching the languages of the phrase, which allows us to see how Derrida is using the word “being” and this leads me to my second reason. **2)** The French allows one to immediately see the shift in meaning between the uses of the word “being” by having the article (“le”) to distinguish between “l’être,” the substantive or noun, and “être,” the verb (this shift is indicated in the first, non-italicised phrase, but this is not captured well by the use of the capital “B”—for “Being” as a substantive—especially since, while Derrida uses parentheses as the translator does, even in his English phrase he does not capitalise “Being”). However, I recognise that this is my reading of the passage and others are possible, though, owing to the reasons I have given, I recommend this reading.

³⁷ Derrida, “Denials” 91 (emphasis in original); “Elle se *situe*, donc. Elle se situe *au-delà* de toute position” (“Dénégations” 161).

the being of the cushion, can contain *perfection*. But perfection would seem to appeal to a quality that is beyond what the being of the cushion could sustain; *being* would not be adequate to support *perfection*. Being itself, everything that appears out of the horizon of being, would seem to be imperfect. And so, I might say, in order to correct this mistake, that the yellow of the cushion is so wonderful, so beautiful that it would be better to say that it is *not* yellow. I would say this in the sense that it is not *just* yellow, not merely *some* yellow among others. It is *not yellow* so that it is *more than yellow*, more than the imperfect yellow we normally see. Again, this would say the same thing as before. It would deny a quality of an object, but still to affirm its perfection, to reaffirm perfection as being possibly contained in the underlying substance of the cushion. Such a negation would not affect the attribution I am making to the underlying substance, the being, the constant presence that I am saying can contain a perfect quality. This is analogous to what Derrida sees as being done in the case of negative theology, in regard to God. God is said to have no being in order to hyperessentialise the being of God. This hyperessential being, however, is still lodged within some further, some deeper kind of presence that can contain the hyperessential being and allow it to be said. The *say-ability* of the hyperessential being takes precedence over its *hyper-ness*. This denies any constituting role to a foundational lack of presence and insists that one can in some sense intuit the hyperessential being of God; one can hold that hyperessential being in place in one's thoughts without any gaps in its constitution, making it *sayable*. Metaphysical thinking always considers something impossible, like perfect yellow, or God, to be explained by something possible, something we can fundamentally, thoroughly understand. This is generally what Derrida sees as problematic in Husserlian phenomenology: the presence of things is constituted through the constancy of the transcendental ego; the transcendental ego is that to which all appearances are reduced in order

to, themselves, gain constancy in their presence. Precisely insofar as we maintain this reliance on affirming qualities and negating qualities (even hyperessential qualities) we cannot evade making claims that are confined to a metaphysics of presence. To correct this, we would have to refuse to comment on the binary entirely. We would have to find some other means of indicating what is meant to be indicated by hyperessential being, but without *describing* it, without *saying* it, i.e. by remaining *silent*. But, as Derrida has already tried to demonstrate, it is never clear that such silence is in fact possible. Nevertheless, the implication is that it is that for which we ought to strive.

This is not a full reading of Derrida's paper; as Derrida says himself, his writings on "what one calls negative theologies"³⁸ say more than it is possible to summarise. Indeed, I do not actually see the portrayal of negative theology as being Derrida's primary focus in his paper. The paper appears to me to be more an exercise—an experiment in silence, if you will—than a historical-philosophical study of early mediaeval Christian thought (though, again, it is necessary to read Derrida as making such a commentary in order to understand his two discussions with Marion). Derrida uses the methods of deconstruction to secure the hope of pragmatically gesturing towards the absolutely other and thereby ambiguously "surpassing" our metaphysically constituted subjectivity, while Marion considers there to be a much more concrete possibility in such matters. Derrida's foray into matters of "theology" is unendingly open-ended. Derrida is concerned with the riddle of how to negate even negation, so as to truly say nothing and gesture beyond presence, but what one may encounter after the successful gesture is deliberately left *entirely undescribed* in order to preserve the *impossibility, unpredictability, and rupture of the ordinary* of what is otherwise. This accords with Derrida's consistent desire "more and more

³⁸ "Response" 43.

systematically to find a non-site, or a non-philosophical site, from which to question philosophy”³⁹ and so push philosophical considerations in what he takes to be a virtuous direction.

In this sense, Derrida, in “Dénégations,” does not *argue*; he locates himself *in* the beyond of philosophy and calls; he, precisely, reverses the direction of argument through a certain *performance* of the problem, by performing the role of the other more consciously than those who write with the principal aim of making their point *clear*, those who write in plain prose.⁴⁰ If Derrida is heard, if his paper is well-interpreted, if his reader manages to understand his language, he has succeeded. He has achieved a silence that the other has heard. But *can* this be heard? *Have* we heard him? And *if we believe we can hear him*, are we more than we believe we are? Are we more than we *can* believe we are? Would we, indeed, be something *impossible*? Something that *can hear a silence*? *Can* Derrida’s language cross the gap between us and him and find its adequate expression within *our* language? If this could happen, it would happen on an entirely *unpredictable* basis. These sorts of general questions express what I take to be the “meaning” of “Dénégations.”

Nevertheless, Derrida does discuss the issue of how to understand the Christian apophatic tradition, the tradition of negating speech in order to *speak* (paradoxically) God’s name. And it is on this particular issue that Marion will criticise what he takes Derrida’s position on this tradition to be. I do not believe, however, that Derrida’s position on that tradition is at all clear, nor could it be made clearer. I believe that *that* is Derrida’s point—the possibility of *not speaking* is simply

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Deconstruction and the Other,” in *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 159.

⁴⁰ The implication being: *clear* to the one writing, therefore based on what one can present to oneself and not on the performative, distal effect one might have on the other (one’s reader), i.e. the effect one may have as a figure (author) hidden irretrievably behind the free-play of signifiers—and a free-play of signifiers is what the text presents as (to the reader).

open, for negative theology, for deconstruction, etc. Thus, I have trouble understanding why it is that Marion appears so certain that Derrida simply rejects “negative theology.” Derrida initially raises the protest that Marion has misinterpreted him, but then clearly enough *lets Marion speak for him*, and engages Marion in the terms Marion sets. Indeed, given the interests of those who organised the conference at Villanova, it seems as though Derrida lets all the “religious” or “theological” interests of those organising the conference to speak for him. This itself is an interesting tactic on Derrida’s part. Though it also seems to be more than a *tactic*.

In any event, Derrida believes that deconstruction goes beyond the hyper-presence of negative theology because deconstruction does not commit itself to any reappearance that would require a metaphysical substructure in order to contain it.⁴¹ Derrida will, nevertheless, focus on the *impossibility* of such a reappearance and he will pursue that *impossibility*. With this conclusion in place, let us now discuss Marion’s critique of Derrida’s essay because pursuing and interpreting the *impossible* is something Derrida and Marion have in common. However, the issue of the hyperessentiality of what is *re-presented* after the negation of negative theology is, in this debate, interpretively complex and so it initially causes the greatest confusion in their discussion.

Marion, in “In the Name,” offers an understanding of negative theology that he believes accords better with what the figures of the Christian theological tradition propose than Derrida’s reading of them.⁴² Marion makes clear that Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite does assert the superiority, when speaking of God or divine qualities, of negation over affirmation. Affirmation is

⁴¹ Marion sees this as Derrida’s principal point, that deconstruction simply does not recreate this representation; see: “IN” 22; “Au nom” n. pag.

⁴² Marion, “IN” 25; “Au nom” n. pag.

potentially compromised since affirming a quality—say, God’s goodness—may give one the sense of having grasped the divine essence, which is simply impossible. However, Pseudo-Dionysius does not conclude with that position. Indeed, Aquinas, by complete contrast, asserts the superiority of the affirmative statements about God over the negative ones, but himself does not conclude with that position either.⁴³ Marion says, for both of these figures, and numerous other examples from the Christian tradition, it is clear that the aim is to surpass both cataphasis and apophasis; “negation itself submits its very own operation, and above all its duel with affirmation, to final transgression.”⁴⁴ Marion quotes Pseudo-Dionysius, saying that he “still and always aims at what remains ‘above every negation and affirmation.’”⁴⁵ Thus, Marion is claiming that the Christian theological tradition recognised the same problem of metaphysics as deconstruction did and addressed it in the same way. That is, when Derrida critiques negative theology for only dealing with a kind of negation that re-presents God’s being as simply a higher and deeper (and more surreptitious) form of presence, the initial point Marion makes is that Derrida has not considered the tradition closely enough. The desire of both Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas to move beyond both affirmation and negation when speaking of God is a desire, essentially, to deconstruct discourse concerning God.

However, Marion writes that, for Derrida, “[the] quasi-deconstruction [of negative theology] cannot be said simply to anticipate, unknowingly, the authentic deconstruction, that of *différance*, since it claims to reach *in fine* what it deconstructs: It claims to put us in the presence

⁴³ Marion, “IN” 24; “Au nom” n. pag.

⁴⁴ Marion, “IN” 26; “la négation elle-même soumet sa fonction et surtout son duel avec l’affirmation à la transgression finale” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁴⁵ Marion, “IN” 26; “Denys vise encore et toujours ce qui demeure ‘au-dessus de toutes négation et affirmation’” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

of God in the very degree to which it denies all presence.”⁴⁶ As established above, for Derrida, the denial performed by negative theology is always “quasi-affirmation.”⁴⁷ The process of denying God any attribute—or, strictly speaking, even a non-attribute, like being itself—discloses his being as something radical. But then it is, precisely, God’s being that is disclosed; God reappears. This reappearance, this naming of God is ultimately no better, no more explicable, no less metaphysical than the mere affirmation of some definite attribute of God’s nature because one has not explained how such a thing as *God* can appear; one has seemingly appealed straightaway to something transcendent, grounding it in one’s own horizon of appearance. For Derrida, if “God” can be said, then God can appear, and God must be a being. But God is not a being, he is beyond being. But is “beyond being” not still ruled by the grammar of the statement or predication, that is, affirmations and negations of certain qualities?

Marion is arguing that Derrida has misconstrued the “result” of the third way, which is reached through what is called *de-nomination*, wherein one, indeed, does provide a *Name* for God.⁴⁸ But Marion is attempting to present what this Name actually meant for the figures in his tradition.⁴⁹ Marion focuses on the idea that, if cataphasis and apophasis are both beholden to the logic of statements, that is, they are judged according to whether “they speak the truth (and spurn

⁴⁶ Marion, “IN” 22. [Translated altered]; “cette quasi-déconstruction ne saurait être dite simplement anticiper, sans le bien savoir, sur la déconstruction authentique, celle de la différence, puisqu'elle prétend au contraire atteindre *in fine* ce qu'elle déconstruit: elle revendique de nous mettre en présence de Dieu, dans la mesure même où elle en dénie toute présence” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁴⁷ Marion, “IN” 23; “Au nom” n. pag.

⁴⁸ The tendency of the edition of Marion’s essay that I have consulted is to capitalise “Name” when it is construed as the result of denomination. I follow that tendency here.

⁴⁹ It bears mentioning that the issue of the tripartite way in Christian theology is quite complicated. Rocca argues that there is no one way of construing it, at least in Aquinas. Also, Marion’s reading of this matter has a distinctly phenomenological flavour and perhaps bears some contortive marks of being posed as a response to Derrida. This is not itself a problem; however, for an alternative reading of the matter, refer to Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas and the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004). I myself have drawn on Rocca’s account in what follows, supplementing Marion’s account where I found it necessary, for the sake of clarity.

the false),”⁵⁰ then de-nomination, the Name which comes after affirmation and negation, “would transgress nothing less than the two truth values, between which the entire logic of metaphysics is carried out.”⁵¹ When the Catholic tradition, when Pseudo-Dionysius or Aquinas, for instance, dealt with God as *cause*, this was not a matter of metaphysics, according to Marion; this term was de-nominative; it had already deconstructed affirmations and negations of God’s essential qualities. *Cause* must not, strictly understood, speak or unspeak God; it must go beyond *both* speaking about God and denying one’s ability to speak of God because God is beyond words. Already in affirming that God is cause of *all*, one is admitting that God is simply beyond or transcendent and no name from below, therefore, can properly apply to God’s essence. Marion explains himself further when he writes that exceeding both possible truth values, going beyond affirmation and negation, is a matter of delving into the “new pragmatic function of language.”⁵² Once one is no longer preoccupied with the truth or falsity of statements about God, the meaning of one’s statements is determined by their *pure reference*. That is, the purpose of de-nomination is “to refer names and their speaker to the unattainable yet inescapable interlocutor beyond every name and every denegation of names.”⁵³ All affirmations and negations are purely referential *because* they are based in the always pre-eminent recognition of God’s transcendence of all as cause of all—God transcends (is higher than) even the names of the highest things one can

⁵⁰ Marion “IN” 26; “de dire le vrai (et d’écarter le faux)” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁵¹ Marion, “IN” 26; “la troisième voie transgresserait rien de moins que les deux valeurs de vérités, entre lesquelles s’exerce toute la logique de la métaphysique” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁵² Marion, “IN” 27; “[la] nouvelle fonction pragmatique du langage” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁵³ Marion, “IN” 27; “référer les noms et leur locuteur à l’interlocuteur inatteignable et inesquivable, au-delà de tout nom et de toute dénégation de nom” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

imagine *as well as* one's most pious denials of the insufficiency of all names one might give to God.⁵⁴

The grammar of predication relies on the notions of sentential truth and falsity and their ties to presence and absence. The subject predicated must appear as predicated— must be *present*—for the sentence that contains the subject and predicate to be judged true. If the subject does not appear as it was predicated, it is because of an alternative presentation to what was described—the subject, as predicated, is *absent* from the presentation. Both affirmations and negations, therefore, are understood by the rules of predication. But Marion's argument is that the hyperessentialisation under discussion in the case of God does not operate in terms of the grammar of predication. Thus, to say that God is hyperessentialised, God is *hyper-being*, is to say God is not being at all, not even the highest being.⁵⁵ But it is this that, according to Derrida in “Dénégations,” still *situates* what is being discussed, still operates within the realm of a metaphysics of presence because it still *says*. Apophasis denies God's being, not in the sense of saying *God is nothing*—i.e. by simply and immediately making an *alternative* affirmation—but by negating being in order to hyperessentialise Being. This is the aspect of apophasis that concerns Derrida: Is this not just another kind of *saying*? Marion counters that this, in itself, is

⁵⁴ Rocca deals helpfully with the three kinds of negation one tends to find in Aquinas, which may be somewhat relevant here: 1) qualitative negation, 2) objective modal negation, and 3) subjective modal negation. Qualitative negation deals with absolute denials of qualities that simply do not have anything to do with God's essence, such as corporeality. Objective modal negation deals with the insufficiencies of our ability to understand what God is without imputing some good creaturely aspect to God's being, which, though an imputation of something good, is still not a *good* sufficient for God. Thus, in objective modal negation, one is denying that certain goods are found in God in order to raise God ever higher, beyond the creaturely. Subjective modal negation deals with our incapacity to understand even our words' insufficiency to refer to God. Thus, in subjective modal negation, one is denying that our mode of understanding could ever understand the very ways in which God totally surpasses that very understanding. See: Rocca, 58-62. Subjective modal negation may come to be important in understanding how Marion considers the Name of God not to be elicited by one's reference, but to call to one of its own accord. I deal with this below.

⁵⁵ Marion “IN” 27; “Au nom” n. pag.

true—this is how apophasis functions—but that the tradition has already recognised this. De-nomination, the third step, Marion claims, goes beyond and, indeed, “says” something of God, but only by denying that God is any *thing*; thus, what de-nomination *strictly* “says” of God is nothing because it is not truly a matter of *saying* at all.

Marion refers to John Scotus Eriugena whom Marion believes responded explicitly to what is in essence the deconstructive critique.⁵⁶ Eriugena noted that a simple affirmation is always also a negation, and a simple negation is always also an affirmation. But he then notes that his declarations concerning God belong to neither of these categories. *Affirming* that God is beyond essence is to say that he is *not* essence; such a statement, then, is both affirmative and negative. But, then, such a statement is neither affirmative nor negative in regard to the *what* to which it is referring; in such a “statement,” one is referring to that which is beyond essence, that which is a denial of essentiality *without* being a mere affirmation of non-essentiality. This hyperessentiality is a cue, but not merely towards *more being*, as Derrida writes. It is a pure reference beyond the realm of binaries, presence, speaking, etc. One holds no conceptualisation of something that is a pure reference. It, precisely, *does not appear, nor is it strictly speaking disclosed in its not appearing*, otherwise it would not be felt as imperative to gesture blindly towards it, because it would already be perceived to be *here*, rather than, so to speak, *nowhere* or *everywhere*. Thus, pure reference does not capture anything of its “object”; it indicates the lack of object and, therefore, it is not a *statement*; it has a totally different grammar. Pure reference has nothing to affirm or deny; it is uttered in the stead of any potential for statement. In this way, Marion maintains, Derrida’s emphasis on the effect of *situating* the divine after the act of denial is unfounded.

⁵⁶ Marion, “IN” 28; “Au nom” n. pag.

However, one may see that the possible gesture to the totally other in the (im)possibility of silence that Derrida was seeking is clearly being described here. And indeed, that is Marion's claim. Deconstruction wishes to negate our reliance on metaphysical thinking. That is, the negation at work in deconstruction is a negation of the very grammar of statements. Thus, what could one *say* if one could not *state*, not *predicate*? This would be a variety of silence. But Marion is saying that Catholic mystical theology, stemming from Pseudo-Dionysius, *maintains* this silence while it provides a Name for God; “[t]o know [God] by not knowing is obviously not the same thing as not knowing, nor is it the same as not knowing with the intention of knowing more (and not confessing as much) [... it is] knowledge of another type.”⁵⁷

Thus, while they, at this stage, seem to consider themselves in disagreement, both Derrida and Marion understand and support what Derrida refers to as a kind of gesture or indication of *silence* and what Marion refers to as a purely pragmatic aspect of the Name, the pure reference. They both understand that such indication or reference escapes the metaphysical use of language and, thus, is potentially appropriate for “theological” considerations. However, Marion will go on to describe a way in which the realm beyond affirmation-negation need not rely on silence in quite the same way as Derrida does. The primary difference between Derrida and Marion is that, in Marion's view, one still provides a Name after one has deconstructed the discourse of affirmation-negation. But it is a Name like no other. The Name one utters, if it is not a statement borne out of one's subjective attempts to capture objects within one's own capacity for objective constitution, is a declaration of receptivity to that which may arrive from beyond being. It is a declaration of having recognised that beyond, which one could not hope to name in any way

⁵⁷ Marion, “IN” 36; “Le connaître comme ne le connaissant pas n'équivaut évidemment ni à ne pas connaître, ni surtout à ne pas connaître dans l'intention de connaître encore (et sans l'avouer) [... c'est] une connaissance d'un autre type” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

oneself, but that can only be reached if the beyond were to condescend to *giving one* a Name, a Name that exceeds our possibilities and, therefore, is an *impossible* Name. Thus, the grammar has been inverted; de-nomination is not a matter of offering a name derived from one's own subjective conceptualisations, that is, from an underlying sense of what it is possible for one to understand *grounding* what is *impossible* for one to understand. Activity and checking for presences, for something that is *possible* for us to conceive, is replaced with receptivity and waiting for *one knows not what*. Indeed, as Derrida and Marion will discuss, it is a matter of turning towards what is *impossible* for us to conceive *as still impossible*. But Marion considers the impossible to have a certain potency for *giving* that does not fall under any metaphysical grammar of the statement, and that is the principal difference between him and Derrida. Marion summarises himself aptly when he writes: "The theologian has as a job to silence the Name and in this way let it give us one—while the metaphysician has as obsession the reduction of the Name to presence, and so to defeat the Name."⁵⁸ In connection with this, Marion writes that the third way is not "a matter of saying but of hearing"⁵⁹ and the Name that is the result of de-nomination "is not said, it calls."⁶⁰

While Marion goes on to discuss, in his essay, how his understanding of the Christian theological tradition and the discourse that goes beyond presence and absence can be explicated in explicitly phenomenological terms, before delving into this issue directly it will be helpful to consider Derrida and Marion's discussion of the gift. This will provide a smoother transition between this discussion of negative theology and the issue of whether phenomenology can be

⁵⁸ Marion, "IN" 39 [translation altered]; "Le théologien a pour fonction de taire le Nom et ainsi de le laisser nous en donner un—tandis que le métaphysicien a pour obsession de réduire le Nom à la présence, afin de le défaire" ("Au nom n. pag.).

⁵⁹ Marion, "IN" 33; "Il ne s'agit plus, en effet [...] de dire, mais d'écouter" ("Au nom" n. pag.).

⁶⁰ Marion, "IN" 42; "Le Nom ne se dit pas par nous, mais c'est lui qui nous appelle" ("Au nom" n. pag.).

used in order to describe a kind of impossible appearance that cannot be reduced to presence, or to what is sayable.

The Gift and the Impossible

Considering the phenomenological problem of the gift can permit one a deeper insight into the difficulties associated with the issue that Derrida and Marion are discussing. In general, Derrida and Marion are trying to determine the proper way of discussing, or comporting oneself towards, that which is *impossible* and the gift is considered, by both thinkers, to be impossible. However, there are significant distinctions between them with regard to how the impossibility of the gift is constituted and what one can derive from that impossibility. Both believe that the gift is not to be understood in terms of presence—the gift does not appear in any typical phenomenological horizon. Part of their discussion, therefore, surrounds whether there can be any horizon that can allow one to speak of the gift, or allow the gift to appear, even *paradoxically*. Marion will maintain that there is the horizon of pure givenness, which is perhaps also a negation of horizons, beyond all horizontal thinking.⁶¹ Derrida's understanding of the gift makes him hesitate to conclude as Marion does, in that Derrida considers the matter more undecidable and aporetic. Nevertheless, one can see here the analogy with the Name; the appearance Marion wants to describe is a paradoxical appearance, one that does not come from oneself, but calls to one, that is not determined by oneself, but is determined by *itself* and *given* to one. Derrida wonders whether, to preserve the impossibility of the Name, one must relinquish any description or account of how one can name what is totally other (even through paradox) and leave it undecidable whether one has or will ever manage to provide a proper name for the totally other.

⁶¹ Marion will associate this surpassing of horizons with the Christian theological debate about whether *being* or the *good* is the highest name for God—Marion considers the good to be higher, and therefore beyond being.

Nevertheless, both thinkers maintain the importance of that which is *referred to*; i.e. the impossible itself.

Derrida's discussion of the gift in his earlier works⁶² was meant to show that a gift is something that is impossible in the sense that it is incompatible with *recognition* of the gift *as such*. If a gift appears as gift, it is no longer a gift. A gift cannot be reduced to consciousness, in other words. The gift that cannot appear and cannot be reduced is the gift defined as *something given without any expectation of recompense*. So, if something is *given* and anything is *given back* as a result of its being given, then what was given is proven *not* to have been a *gift* precisely because the gift will have to have been recognised *as such* for there to have been a giving back, a *return*. But this implies that, since whenever one receives a "gift" there is a recognition of that item as a "gift," there actually is no gift.

To elaborate, one intuitively understands that one cannot give a gift *expecting* recompense. That would not be *generous* behaviour. Concomitantly, one ought not to feel an obligation to *give back* if one has received a *gift*. However, *giving back* is what one does precisely when one recognises *that one has been given a gift*. One, at least, gives back gratitude. And *expecting* gratitude is precisely what one does when one gives a gift—otherwise, it is perhaps a demonstration of rudeness on the part of the receiver, or perhaps, more drastically, the receiver did not understand that *one was giving him or her a gift*. Thus, as a gift is recognised as a gift, which seems to necessitate the expectation of reciprocation of some sort, on both sides—at least as an *affirmation* that both parties understand that *a gift* was given—the gift is dissolved. What is more, one normally feels *the need* to give back in simple *transactions*, such as when one

⁶² Mainly: Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1 Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); *Donner le temps: 1. La faussee monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991). See also: Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); "Donner la mort," in *L'Éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don* (Paris: Transition, 1992).

pays for items in a store; these are not cases of giving gifts, these are exchanges. Exchanges of items are reducible to presence, or to *an economy/circle of exchange*. An exchanged item allows one to recognise it *as such* and so, in an exchange, one gives something *causing* the other to give something back. Gift giving does not inspire, precisely, any *exchange*; gifts are *gratuitous*. The perceived need to give back negates the gift as something given freely or in an unprovoked manner; it interrupts one thinking the *purity* of the gift. The pure gift, something freely given, if one follows the above deconstruction, is *impossible*. Thus, Derrida will conclude that the gift must be maintained as something that does not appear; the giver does not recognise it as such, nor the receiver, and the gift as such cannot appear—it cannot *be*. The thought of the gift results in an aporia. This makes gift-giving, gift-receiving, and gifts themselves all undecidable elements of life. We can, by necessity, not recognise them if they happen. Naturally, Derrida's analysis has led thinkers to consider the experience of the gift as a sort of template for the experience of God, given that God cannot appear to a finite consciousness as God without ceasing to be, truly, God.⁶³ This is the background to the second discussion that occurred between Derrida and Marion.

The second discussion between Derrida and Marion at Villanova begins with a focus on what it means to think, specifically, the *pure* gift. What is noteworthy in the way the discussion begins is that Marion, ostensibly the theologian, says that he is not especially interested in the theological notion of the gift, though he was ten years earlier when he was writing in a theological register. At the time of the debate, Marion says that his thinking on the gift has been superseded by the notion of givenness (*Gegebenheit*) in Husserlian phenomenology.⁶⁴ Thus, this

⁶³ See Horner's *RGG*, in particular, her introduction.

⁶⁴ "On the Gift" 56.

puts Marion's interest squarely within phenomenological confines. In response, amusingly, Derrida expresses interest in "the gift in the Christian sense" and in "drawing conclusions"⁶⁵ based on it, which would seem to put the two at odds. But, thereafter, Derrida engages Marion on precisely whether the Husserlian notion of *Gegebenheit* is able to support the appearance of the gift in the "theological" sense, which secures the philosophical stakes of their discussion. This is a debate about what phenomenology is capable of accomplishing in regard to the gift and what the gift may represent (i.e. the various guises of the *impossible*), and what *relevance* or indeed *priority* impossible things like gifts have in phenomenology.

Derrida and Marion both understand that Marion is attempting to free the notion of givenness from the notion of being or to show givenness as antecedent to being.⁶⁶ Marion says that phenomenology is commonly criticised for only being able to access phenomena as objects or as being. But all great phenomenologists after Heidegger—Marion names "Gadamer, Ricoeur, Levinas, Michel Henry" and refers to Merleau-Ponty and Derrida himself⁶⁷—are interested in things that, strictly speaking, *are* not. They are interested in things that do not appear as objects, nor as being; they are all going beyond the horizon of being. It is a startling suggestion if one focuses on how capacious one might interpret the horizon of being to be. But it is an almost banal suggestion—Marion, at times, presents it so⁶⁸—if one considers it as merely another avenue of phenomenology. It is at least conceivable that there are further possible horizons, beyond the one out of which objects appear as presences and the one out of which

⁶⁵ "On the Gift" 57.

⁶⁶ They mention this with specific reference to his two books: 1) *Being Given/Étant donné* and 2) *God without Being*, 2nd ed, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); *Dieu sans l'être*, 3ième ed. (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2010). But this endeavour would span, essentially, all of Marion's works.

⁶⁷ "On the Gift" 57.

⁶⁸ Marion, "Banality" 119-144; "Banalité" 143-182.

being appears as the nothing. However, Marion is in fact suggesting something quite radical. He is proposing that that which is to “appear” beyond the horizon of being “appears” in a way that, paradoxically, is not reliant on presence or absence. It is an appearance that, by not appearing or disappearing, still gives itself.

Marion, therefore, believes that there is a way to conceive of the pure gift as not entirely aporetic. Derrida is sceptical, however, of Marion’s references to *purity* when speaking of the gift. For Derrida, a claim to have secured purity is a mark of an appeal to presence. Thus, the gift that we can see cannot be pure (and therefore the pure gift cannot be seen). If it is considered to be pure, if it is the gift *as such*, then it is in need of deconstruction in order to escape the distortions put on it by the dictates of presence, by its reduction to consciousness. As mentioned above, Derrida says that the issue with a *pure* gift is that a gift only *presents itself* within an economy of exchange, within a context in which *reciprocation* occurs, thereby negating itself *as gift*. In an economy of exchange, as soon as the gift becomes pure, as soon as it frees itself entirely from the need for reciprocation and recognition, it disappears, since the economy cannot sustain its sheer gratuity; i.e. a gift must be given and never return, but the economy necessitates the return of something in order for that something to be *recognised*; therefore, all one ever recognises is what *returns* and not *the gift*. Thus, Derrida says:

[T]he gift does not exist as such, if by existence we understand being present and intuitively identified as such. So the gift does not exist and appear as such; it is impossible for the gift to exist and appear as such.

However, Derrida immediately goes on:

But [this is not to conclude that] there is no gift [...] if there is a gift, through this impossibility, it must be the experience of this impossibility, and it should appear as impossible.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ “On the Gift” 59.

And Derrida identifies this as his and Marion's point of disagreement. He says that Marion believed him to be arguing that thought is merely trapped within an economy of exchange, within metaphysics, and, therefore, to have said that the gift is *merely* impossible, that it is nothing at all, that there are no gifts, only exchanges. Derrida makes it clear that his intention was not to disallow thinking of the gift, not to leave the gift behind or out of circuit, but that the thinking of the gift, in order to evade metaphysically determining the gift, must be effected through the gift's impossibility; the gift's "possibility is possible as impossible."⁷⁰ Derrida wishes to maintain that the disappearance or annihilation of the gift sets one a task: to think the gift *as* impossible. This is why Caputo and Scanlon write that something's disappearance into impossibility is the beginning of deconstruction, not its end or goal.⁷¹

Marion says explicitly that he never considered Derrida to have proposed the gift only within an economy of exchange and therefore as simply impossible (rather than possible *as impossible*).⁷² What is more, Marion goes on to speak of the pure gift precisely in terms of impossibility, even given his phenomenologically grounded description of the gift. Thus, Marion is trying to show Derrida that Marion's own phenomenological account of the gift's "appearance" does not violate Derrida's deconstruction of the gift, but follows from it or is at least compatible with it. Marion considers the gift as already deconstructed.⁷³ Marion states that

⁷⁰ "On the Gift" 60.

⁷¹ Caputo and Scanlon, "Introduction" to *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* 3-4.

⁷² "On the Gift" 62. The issue is slightly more complicated since Marion did appear to hold this opinion of Derrida in previous publications, such as "Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of the Gift," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Thomas A Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 80-100. [Hereafter: "Sketch."]; "Esquisse d'un concept phénoménologique du don," *Archivo di Filosofia*, 62.1-3, (1994): 75-94. [Hereafter: "Esquisse."] However, Marion does not pursue this disagreement here and allows that Derrida meant that the gift must still be pursued, though it is impossible.

⁷³ As he writes in *BG* 328 fn. 1; *Éd* 15 fn. 1. Furthermore, consider: "the reduction of the gift to givenness does not come about despite the triple objection raised against the gift by Derrida but quite clearly because of it" (Marion "Sketch" 89).

this is all a matter, not of metaphysical explanation or comprehension, but of mere thought: “the gift [is] a kind of issue reaching to the most extreme limits, that should be *described* and be *thought* and neither explained nor comprehended, but simply thought—in a very radical way.”⁷⁴ This accords almost exactly with what Derrida says earlier: “The gift as such cannot be *known*, but it can be *thought* of”; and here Derrida says he is drawing on a distinction, taken from Kant, between describing and thinking.⁷⁵ Note that the difference, here, between Marion and Derrida is located in the use of the term “describe.” Marion is pursuing a kind of *description* of the gift, an *account* of the experience of the gift, as well as the mere thinking of it or the indication of it. That description, he believes, is achieved through, if one pursues them to their absolute conclusions, the principles of phenomenology—particularly Husserl’s *principle of all principles*.⁷⁶ I will consider Marion’s understanding of this in greater detail below.

Near the end of their debate Derrida says: “[W]hat I understand as phenomenology, the principle of all principles [...] implies finally intuition, that is the fullness of intuition, the presence of something.”⁷⁷ That is, Derrida is willing to accept that there is some relation between us and the impossible gift in *thought*—in some form of hope, a hope for the other that is never fulfilled, in fact—but he considers *intuition* as inextricably reliant on *presencing*, on what Husserl terms *fulfilment*. The fullness of intuition, for Derrida, is the *filling*⁷⁸ of intuition: a real

⁷⁴ “On the Gift” 61. [Emphasis added.]

⁷⁵ “On the Gift” 60. [Emphasis added.]

⁷⁶ The principle of all principles is given in §24 of *Ideas, Book I*; see below for my account of Marion’s reading of it. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 44; see also Bernard Prusak’s translator’s introduction to “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 8-10.

⁷⁷ “On the Gift” 71.

⁷⁸ As in “pie filling.”

presence. At this point in their debate, he also considers this presencing to be definitive for phenomenology. Derrida has good reason for this; Husserl certainly believed that one could reduce the meaning of all appearances to the constitution offered by the transcendental ego, or, in linguistic terms, all indication can be reduced to expression.

Marion, on the other hand, considers the gift somewhat differently, though, as already indicated, he takes Derrida's deconstruction of the gift seriously. To quote Marion:

[I]f [the gift] is ever to be thought through, [it] must come about (first of all, to itself) outside of presence, outside of self-subsistence, and outside of truth. If truth is indeed sufficient to annul the gift, then the gift only comes about in being dispensed from *this* truth. If the subsistence of the gift is sufficient to annul it in exchange, then the gift will only occur by being freed from this very subsistence.⁷⁹

Marion is being shrewd here. He is saying that the gift must come about outside of metaphysical categories, even *truth*. But then he leaves the option open to say that whatever can be said to appear out of the impossible (i.e. the gift, in this case) provides, rather, a better understanding of *truth*. I see this as the key factor in the whole debate between Derrida and Marion: Is what is beyond possibility (the gift) the *real* truth, or is it to be considered beyond *truth* because *truth* is an inalienably metaphysical consideration? Or is there a certain intermingling of these positions? A paradox? Marion is maintaining that, in order to properly free the gift from matters of subsistence, in order to think the gift in its impossibility, it is imperative to reinterpret the meaning of Husserl's phenomenology, to radicalise phenomenology in order to allow for the gift. In order to do so, one must, as he indicates here, make the gift appear in itself first, and not to a constituting *I*. This analysis, Marion believes, will satisfy Derrida's concerns about reducing the gift to presence, to a constituting *I*, while still permitting a description of the gift's "appearance" in phenomenological terms.

⁷⁹ Marion "Sketch" 87. [Emphasis in original.]

However, what is somewhat confusing is that Marion at times seems to straightforwardly contest, disagree with, or even just ignore Derrida and his treatment of the gift. Indeed, Marion says many things about the gift that flatly seem to contradict Derrida's account rather than argue against it. For instance, according to Marion, a gift is a true gift if one can, in an instance of gifting, bracket *either* the giver, the receiver, or the gift object. Indeed, in order to reduce a gift to presence, to inscribe the gift within the metaphysical economy of exchange,⁸⁰ Marion believes that *all three* of these elements must be involved; but if one can successfully bracket *any one* of these elements at a time, one can show that a gift is not limited by presence. In a lecture given at Walsh University in 2013,⁸¹ Marion expresses these three forms of bracketing in the following manner: **1)** One may bracket the giver in the sense of receiving an inheritance. When one receives an inheritance, the giver is necessarily gone—he or she has died. Thus, one cannot feel obligated to *return* anything or *reciprocate*, because there is no giver to whom one can return anything. Therefore, the gift is not nullified because it cannot return to the giver, cannot become a part of the exchange economy. One may be generous *in turn*, in order to “repay” the debt, but this is hardly a problem since it does not inscribe the gift in the economy that reduces it to presence. Indeed, one does not return *the inheritance* itself, nor part of it; one's attention is shifted away from the inheritance, precisely, *as gift*. **2)** One may bracket the receiver in the sense of an anonymous donation. In such cases, one does not know to whom one is giving and so,

⁸⁰ Marion interprets the economy of exchange as metaphysical in the sense of reducing every element of the gifting activity to efficient causality. An exchange is based in presence precisely because the item which *causes* one to reciprocate—e.g. to return money, to trade something of equivalent value, etc.—can only cause one's reciprocation by *being unambiguously present* to one. See: Marion, “Sketch”/“Esquisse”; *BG/Éd*, Book 2.

⁸¹ A video documentation of this lecture is available online, the first of two parts deals with Marion's understanding of how the gift escapes the reduction to the economic circle: Jean-Luc Marion, “Dr. Jean-Luc Marion - Part 1: ‘The Gift and the Economy,’” *OhioWalshUniversity*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGRE-Oa8gNs>, May 14, 2013. In this lecture, Marion is particularly frank and straightforward on this issue, which is why I appeal to it here. Nevertheless, in this lecture he echoes much of *BG* 85-112; *Éd* 124-141, and the whole of his article “Sketch”/“Esquisse.”

again, one cannot expect any return. **3)** One may bracket the gift itself in cases when one gives only a symbol of the gift and not the gift itself. For instance, in proposing marriage, one gives a ring. But the ring is merely a symbol of one's love, or of oneself, etc. The *gift* itself is no object. Marion will say that it is also not a being. It is something else or something more.

This seems not to take Derrida's deconstruction of the gift seriously, however. It seems somewhat facile to say that simply because the three elements of the gift-process can be bracketed there is no return, no economy. Derrida even considers one's own private admission to *oneself* as being a giver (i.e. congratulating oneself for being generous) to nullify the gift (because one's understanding of oneself as generous is one's reward). One could easily contest the trite and simplistic psychological egotism of this account, but Marion does not. Marion simply affirms that one can give without knowing one gives. One can forget one has given. One can establish automatic donations that leave one's bank account without one's awareness. These are the kinds of things Marion considers gifts, because one of the causal factors of the economy is suspended.

However, this is not a full explication of Marion's position. The reason Marion's account appears not to answer Derrida's strongest claims concerning the impossibility of the gift is that Marion's understanding of the gift is reliant on his understanding of givenness as paradoxical and irreducible to either being, objectivity, presence, or really any concept whatsoever. Indeed, all other conceptual horizons are reducible to it. That is, one must first understand how gifts reduce to givenness—which is paradoxical, appealing to neither presence nor absence. In reducing to givenness, one is able to *describe* the gift, rather than merely think it through its aporetic disappearance.⁸²

⁸² See Horner *RGG*, 131 where she outlines how this marks a difference between Derrida and Marion *re* the gift.

This is especially important for Marion because he wants to show that *givenness* is an appropriate foundation for phenomenology itself; it is beyond concern for objectivity (Husserl) and beyond concern for discovering the meaning of being (Heidegger). It is also, he claims, the proper or the best understanding of phenomenology and follows Husserl's initial considerations to their logical conclusions. Thus, *phenomena*, understood as *givens*, can "appear" beyond any horizational constitutions and, crucially, without a *giver*. In his theological works, Marion more explicitly considers the Christian God in phenomenological terms as giver and creation as gift. However, in a strictly philosophical or phenomenological register, Marion needs to distance himself from such formulations. Thus, Marion's aim is to show that it is givenness itself that allows one to be a giver, recipient, or a gift. That is, one deconstructs the gift and leaves it as an aporia because one has not yet performed the reduction to pure givenness. Thus, the next step, for Marion, is to consider how this gifting process, beyond objectivity and beyond being, can be understood phenomenologically; i.e. not appealing to anything metaphysical, like a transcendent *giver*, or God as giver, nor to any reduction to presence and the constituting I, but to a reduction to the foundational horizon of givenness itself. How do we understand phenomena as, most fundamentally, *given*? And, what effect does this have on our understanding of the process of phenomenalisation?

Derrida's concerns, in their discussion, surround the potential (or lack thereof) of using phenomenological terminology to describe the impossible. But his concerns are eventually somewhat dispelled after Marion discusses how the gift does not make itself present as such. *Prima facie*, the gift is impossible, immediately unintelligible. And he describes, so to speak, ordinary events as typifying this perfectly: "life-death, birth, love, poverty, illness, joy, pleasure,

and so on.”⁸³ Marion is here indicating that such experiences now must be reinvestigated under the aegis of a phenomenology of the impossible—a phenomenology of givenness—in order to say about them what has never been said yet (at least in philosophy dominated by modern or metaphysical concerns).

It is important to reflect, for a moment, on the matter of the connection between rationality and the impossible in the context of this debate. While Derrida and Marion do not reach complete agreement in regard to the philosophical pursuit of the impossible, I believe that they come fairly close. This is because they find common ground in affirming that one must go, as Derrida says, “phenomenologically beyond phenomenology”;⁸⁴ one must reinvestigate the very constitution of phenomenology itself, transforming it and its “results”; the results of this new phenomenology will not be straightforward appearances, but things that issue from and toward the impossible.

Marion takes this need to radicalise phenomenology as an indication that phenomenology incorporates paradoxes. Marion writes in “In the Name”: “weakness [designates] God at least as well as strength.”⁸⁵ It is interesting to consider this statement juxtaposed to another from *Reduction and Givenness*, where Marion writes specifically about the new phenomenological project he is recommending: “[O]ne does not overcome a true thinking by refuting it, but rather by repeating it, or even by borrowing from it the means to think with it beyond it. Then even failure succeeds.”⁸⁶ That *weakness* and *strength* each designate or refer to God equally well is Marion’s way of restating that the Name one gives to God, whether emphasising weakness or

⁸³ “On the Gift” 75.

⁸⁴ “On the Gift” 75.

⁸⁵ Marion “IN” 37; “car la faiblesse désigne Dieu au moins aussi bien que la puissance” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁸⁶ Marion, *RG* 3; “Car on ne dépasse pas une véritable pensée en la réfutant, mais en la répétant, voire en lui empruntant les moyens de penser avec elle au-delà d’elle. Alors même l’échec réussit” (*Rd* 9).

strength, always indicates that God is beyond dichotomies. All dichotomous terms one may apply to God are equally correct in their ultimate incorrectness, since God stands beyond the interplay of all terms. This is not to say that God is a transcendental signified, because God's transcendence is admitted to be beyond what signifiers can signify. The pure reference that Marion and Derrida discuss is simply a reference beyond, an indication with no object, an intention without fulfilment. It is important to note that the Name that Marion discusses does not come *as a result* of this reference. God does not come to any kind of "appearance" due to the aptness of the Name *as we say it* but *as God gives it*; God "appears" not as a result of *our* call to God, but God's own declaration. The underlying grammar of "God" is derived from one's sense of the impossible beyond what it is possible for our subjectivity to constitute and explain. This ambiguity in the opposing descriptions of God, coupled with our ability to at least *refer* beyond presence and absence, offers the possibility that there may be a horizon in which God might "appear," but not in the way in which we are accustomed. This would have to be a paradoxical horizon. This would be a horizon that can give both the Name of God and the one to whom the Name is given, (i.e. both God's Name and ourselves), and do so beyond *being* (beyond concern for presence and absence). In other words, there is some kind of hidden part of us that *is not*, that *is beyond being*, and it is this part that may gratuitously receive the Name. Marion contends that there is a way to constitute that horizon to which the part of us that *is not* has access. In trying to secure a sense of this ultimate horizon, even failure succeeds, because one is not dealing with straightforward *presentations* out of a normal horizon, *presentations* that disclose that horizon's thematic possibilities, as is typical in traditional phenomenology. One is dealing with a variety of presentation that does not present itself, but to which both creaturely weakness and creaturely strength, one may discover, refers. The horizontal structure of phenomenology may be

capacious enough, then, to introduce us to the realm beyond presence and absence, if the ultimate horizon is paradoxically constituted as constituting itself beyond being, out of the impossible maintained as impossible *for us as we are*, but perhaps not *for us as we are given* (impossible) *to ourselves* (possible).⁸⁷ Therefore, in going phenomenologically beyond phenomenology, in taking a first step in recognising phenomenological thinking's indebtedness to the impossible, the results arising from this new phenomenology are not yet set. However, the old rules by which one judged results will prove to be insufficient. Even what is considered failure by the old rules, succeeds by the new.

Derrida, in both his writing and his discussion with Marion, remains somewhat ambivalent towards whether or not this radicalisation of phenomenology is still *phenomenology*. However, what I take to be crucial in this matter is that Derrida says, near the very end of their discussion, that his intention, like Marion's, is to remain phenomenological. And, in referencing this fidelity to phenomenology, Derrida notes his and Marion's common indebtedness to Levinas:

There are many places where [Levinas] says that we have to go phenomenologically beyond phenomenology. That is what I am trying to do. I remain and I want to remain a rationalist, a phenomenologist. [...] A man of the Enlightenment, and so on and so forth. I would like to remain phenomenological in what I say against phenomenology.⁸⁸

This is quite significant since, in their previous discussion (following the delivery of Marion's "In the Name"), Marion said: "The point is not whether there is a third [way], but how to understand that the third [way] remains *rational*, although it does not remain confined within the

⁸⁷ I apologise for the potential lack of clarity here. What is meant is that the part of us that is *given* remains impossible, because it is not constituted in the normal sense (by us), it is simply given to us. But that part that is given is then given over to the part of us that we are able to constitute (in terms of being), the part of us that *is*. Thus, this maintains a link between the possible and the impossible. Also, I might take this opportunity to say that the rhetoric I use of "parts" of ourselves is not ideal, but it is not intended with any strictness; it is intended as, essentially, metaphorical.

⁸⁸ "On the Gift" 75.

possibilities opened by metaphysics.”⁸⁹ Marion, at this prior stage in their debate, was indicating that both he and Derrida affirmed the third way (pure reference beyond cataphasis and apophasis), but they disagreed on how to construe it; they disagreed on whether the name one offers can be understood not only as a pure reference but also as still *a proper Name*. Nevertheless, in the above comments, one can see that the two thinkers agree that they are both trying to remain *rational*, to remain phenomenological without falling into the distortions of scientific/metaphysical/modern thinking. Remaining rational, in this context, means to remain phenomenological without forcing the phenomena to be explicated solely in terms of constancy or presence. It means that there is, in both Derrida and Marion, an attempt not only to idiosyncratically experience the impossible, but also to give an account of that experience and how it is (im)possible, as well as crucial or important. That is, it is fully *rational* to pursue the *impossible*. The contention is that philosophy or human thinking cannot survive without this stretching toward the impossible. This indicates a certain sensibility, on the parts of both Derrida and Marion, with regard to *what phenomenology can be*. As I will discuss later in this chapter, I believe Caputo’s reading of Derrida tends far less in the direction of supporting the *rationality* of the pursuit of the impossible. And, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Janicaud will prove to have far less openness or flexibility than either Marion, Derrida, or Caputo in regard to this matter of the impossible.

⁸⁹ “Response” 46; emphasis added. This is also reminiscent of Marion’s comments that the gift must be freed from the truth, or at least, whatever truth would keep it from, paradoxically, appearing. Derrida, by contrast, would say that the gift must merely be freed from the truth that would require it to appear.

Phenomenality as Givenness and the Question of Saturated Phenomena

In order to explain how he believes the gift and other impossible things might be able to, paradoxically, “appear,” Marion sees the need to re-imagine phenomenology itself. Marion is proposing specifically that the act of *reduction* can accomplish far more than phenomenologists realise it can accomplish. The logic of reduction must be followed until it results in a foundational, pure givenness, which results in paradoxical appearances—appearances that can be radically more than they appear to be. This relies on Marion’s interpretation of what that foundational horizon of givenness is capable of accomplishing *before* we, as constituting subjects—who deal in objectivising horizons of presence and causation—begin to act *as* subjects.

Marion maintains that the ambiguity inherent in “the reduction—the act which institutes phenomenology”⁹⁰ allows the meaning of the reduction to be continually reinterpreted in multifarious ways; “[t]he ‘breakthrough’ accomplished by Husserl in 1900-1901 in fact remains extraordinarily ambiguous.”⁹¹ According to Marion, the reduction is so radical—more radical than Husserl even understood—that it eliminates *any* recourse to concepts, e.g., objectivity, cause, being, etc., for explaining the phenomenality or the appearing of the phenomena. One may say that it eliminates recourse to *anything*. In putting forward the reduction, Marion sees Husserl as allying the notion of reduction to the notion of givenness. This allows us to reinterpret that which is *given* to intuition in the performance of the reduction.

Husserl’s principle of principles is as follows: “[T]hat every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its ‘personal’ actuality) offered to us in ‘intuition’ is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but

⁹⁰ “[L]a réduction - l’acte instituant la phénoménologie”; Jean-Luc Marion, “Réponses à quelques questions,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 1, (1991): 69; [my translation].

⁹¹ Marion, *RD* 1-2; “La ‘percée’ accomplie par Husserl en 1900-1901 rest en effect d’une extraordinaire ambiguïté” (*Rd* 8).

also *only within the limits in which it is presented there.*"⁹² What Marion pays special attention to here is the element of self-sufficiency accorded to intuition—though not self-sufficiency in the sense of self-*causing*, which he would take to be a metaphysical reading, but merely in the sense of needing only itself or appealing only to itself.⁹³ If such intuition comes originarily, anterior to all subsequent phenomena and concepts, then what is given in intuition *only gives itself*. That is, there is nothing to explain what is given in intuition, what is given in intuition must therefore be described *only* as simply given.

Marion writes: “[t]he ambiguity of the given, inseparably fact and means of access to the fact, characterizes them [all individual *givens*] from the outset, and this ambiguity of the given opens directly to givenness [... e]very given manifests givenness because the progress of its event unfolds it.”⁹⁴ That is, what is given is: **1)** whatever is itself intuited (“the fact”) as well as **2)** the means by which whatever is intuited is given (means of access; i.e. we access givens only by their being given to us; we access what is given only through the act of it giving itself). This safeguards the immanence of givens; givenness is not added to the given as some transcendent principle *behind* or *beyond* each individual given, fact, or datum of experience. Marion, therefore, describes the given as always *folded* back into pure givenness. The aim of a phenomenology of the given is to make that which makes a given *given* appear, and it appears in virtue of givenness; givenness is the *fold (le pli)* of the given; that is, a given, in its happening

⁹² Husserl 44. [Emphasis in original.]

⁹³ Cf. Marion, *BG* 74; *Éd* 124.

⁹⁴ Marion, *BG* 65; “l’ambiguïté du donné, indissolublement fait et procès d’accès au fait, les caractérise d’emblée. Et cette ambiguïté du donné ouvre directement sur la donation [... t]out donné manifeste la donation, parce que le processus de son événement la déplie” (*Éd* 110).

(unfolding), is invariably “fold[ed ...] back into givenness.”⁹⁵ This fundamental givenness is the logical conclusion one ought to reach in performing the phenomenological reduction.

Earlier in his career, in *Reduction and Givenness*, Marion explains his position by referring to phenomenology as undergoing three successive reductions: that of Husserl, that of Heidegger, and his own. He does not describe these successive reductions as superseding or cancelling one another. In fact, he describes them as somewhat involved with one another. Each reduction makes apparent a different kind or level of horizon of phenomenality and is therefore interpreted as a step on the way to the full understanding of the reduction; but these steps are not steps forward, rather they are steps inwards; “the breakthrough of 1900-1901 can be understood only in relation to what it does not yet state”;⁹⁶ the imperative is to go deeper into the potential of the reduction. To summarise the first two reductions: Husserl’s (transcendental) reduction yields constituted objects in the horizon of objectivity, delivered to the transcendental ego; Heidegger’s (existential) reduction yields the ontological difference in the horizon of time, delivered to Dasein. The issue with both of these reductions is that, while they each uniquely demonstrate something valuable, neither of them recognises the radicality of the reduction fully, and so they constitute both what is given and the receiver of what is given with too much specificity or determination. Thus, Marion speaks of his own third reduction (to givenness) in terms that are tautological: it “issues [...] from the pure form of the call”⁹⁷ and what is yielded is the call itself, without horizon, to the “interloqué” (one who is “interlocuted”; i.e. made an interlocutor) or a “pure and simple figure as an auditor preceded and instituted by the call which is still absolute

⁹⁵ Marion, *BG* 66; “repli[é] sur la donation” (*Éd* 110). Say what you will about Marion’s project, he has a flair for evocative word choice. And in this instance it even translates well into English from French.

⁹⁶ Marion, *RG* 4; “la percée de 1900-1901 ne se trouve comprise qu’en rapport avec ce qu’elle n’énonce pas encore.” (*Rd* 12).

⁹⁷ Marion, *RG* 204; “[il] provient [...] de la pure forme de l’appel” (*Rd* 305).

because indeterminate.”⁹⁸ That is to say, what appears is the call, from itself, as itself, to that to which the call calls. This interlocuted is not an *I* but a *me*; the call inspires a response from *me*, but I am not actively determining myself or what is given to me in experience before the interlocuted receives the call and then risks a response.⁹⁹ The tautological language here is meant to indicate the degree to which this is a *first* consideration, without any ability to explain itself to us nor any ability on our part to explain it. Therefore, Marion’s third reduction is a matter of “determining whether and to what extent phenomenology truly opens a ‘new beginning’ for philosophy as such.”¹⁰⁰ And this new beginning ought to be a way out of metaphysical determinations that reduce otherness to the constituting I.

What is crucial, in order to understand why this is the logical conclusion to which one ought to be led in performing the phenomenological reduction, is that one recognise the utter *reducedness*, so to speak, of this beginning in intuition, and its absolute completeness. It need not and cannot appeal to anything but itself. There is nothing behind givenness, because givenness appears in giving itself and gives only itself. However, it is equally crucial that this

⁹⁸ Marion *RG* 204; “sa pure et simple figure d’auditeur précédé et institué par l’appel encore absolu, parce qu’indéterminé” (*Rd* 305)

⁹⁹ It bears noting that Marion does not continue to refer to “l’interloqué”; in *BG/Éd*, Book 5, he has replaced that terminology with “l’adonné,” which he thinks ought to be translated as “the gifted” but Horner thinks it is best to leave it untranslated to remain faithful to its ambiguity and awkwardness even in French (See: Horner, *J-LM: T-LI* 115, fn. 44. See also: Horner’s discussion of l’interloqué in *RGG* 91-92, and l’adonné in *RGG* 149-152). Marion also refers to “le témoin” (“the witness”) and “l’attributaire” (“the receiver”). For the purposes of this thesis project, I do not pay much attention to these shifts in terminology since the relevant aspect is how the subject becomes a primarily *receptive* figure, who is determined by givenness before he or she is determined by any subsequent horizon or capacity to *act*. The subject is first given as not a subject but a receiver, then he or she can act, constitute, seek knowledge, determine phenomena metaphysically, etc. This is Marion’s emphasis in his essay “L’Interloqué” — found in *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Eduardo Cadava & Anne Tomiche (New York: Routledge, 1991), 236-245 — where his main target of criticism is Heidegger’s *Dasein*, who is still too reliant on the activity of *securing itself* through resoluteness to escape the basic constitution of the modern *subject*, according to Marion. That is, the key concept for understanding *Dasein*, according to Marion, is its autarky.

¹⁰⁰ Marion, *RG*; “de déterminer si et jusqu’où la phénoménologie ouvre vraiment un ‘nouveau commencement’ à la philosophie comme telle” (*Rd* 9).

self-explanation not be contained within the subject; it is not a representation to the self; it is not a reduction to the ego. Indeed, the ego is reduced to it since it precedes all constitution. There must first be givenness before there is an I; there is an otherness (givenness) in which I am installed first as a *me* and through which that *me* can become an *I*. Furthermore, if givenness precedes being, then so does this *me* to whom the call calls. Thus, this is a way in which a *human being* (as a *me*) escapes metaphysical determination. Metaphysical determination must involve, according to Marion, a consideration of something in terms of some sort of *being*, *cause*, or *reason* that transcends it and defines it beyond all its appearances. But what appears here is the sheer givenness of the givenness that gives *me* as well as *itself* to me. Givenness is undeniable, because it is there, but impossible, because it has no *reason* given along with itself.

In *Being Given*, referring to Husserl's principle of all principles, Marion writes:

This is clear: what shows itself on the basis of itself as pure apparition of self without remainder, and not of an other than self that does not appear (a reason). To justify its right to appear, intuition is enough for the phenomenon, without any further reason; it is enough for it to be given in and through intuition [...] But intuition becomes sufficient only inasmuch as it operates without background, 'originarily,' says Husserl. Now, it operates originarily, without any presupposition only inasmuch as it provides originary givens, therefore as it (itself) gives (itself) originarily.¹⁰¹

Intuition cannot be given a reason or a cause for being; therefore it is not *being*, it is given.

Phenomenality itself, therefore, appears within the widest horizon; not the horizon of objects, causality, being, nor even the horizon of time. Since no concept can be used to explain this givenness of phenomena, phenomenality itself appears as uncaused, thus the givenness of the phenomena appears as impossible. It is an impossible givenness because no conceptualisation

¹⁰¹ Marion, *BG* 184; "En clair: ce qui se montre à partir de soi-même come pure apparition de soi sans reste, et non d'un autre que soi qui n'apparaîtrait pas (une raison). Pour justifier son droit à paraître, l'intuition suffit au phénomène, sans autre raison : il lui suffit de se donner par intuition [...]. Mais l'intuition ne devient suffisant qu'autant qu'elle s'exerce sans nul arrière-fond, 'originairement,' dit Husserl; or elle ne s'exerce originairement, sans présupposition aucune, qu'autant qu'elle fournit des données originaires, donc qu'elle [se] done [elle-même] originairement." (*Éd* 303).

can be used to explain it or why it gives itself. Such a horizon is undefined, and is, as such, impossible, but it appears, but only because it cannot *not* give itself. Trying to deny givenness gives givenness.¹⁰² This is also partially why the horizon of givenness is paradoxical. Indeed, as indicated already, Marion says that phenomenology (in regard to certain phenomena at least) must dispense with the notion of the horizon entirely.¹⁰³

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the things that can appear out of this paradoxical horizon/non-horizon are themselves paradoxical.¹⁰⁴ In elaborating on the potential of his position—which begins to put these considerations back in touch, more explicitly, with the potential of a “theological” turn—Marion, following Husserl, also drawing on Kant,¹⁰⁵ mentions that phenomenology speaks of both appearing (*l'apparaître*) and what appears (*l'apparaissant*). Appearing corresponds to the signification, the intention, *noesis*, or the concept. What appears corresponds to the fulfilment, the intuition, *noema*, or the given.¹⁰⁶ This, it is normally said, gives us two options: **1)** One may experience a phenomenon where one's intention is greater than the intuition one receives (Marion gives the examples of Kant's phenomena; mathematical entities; etc.). Or, **2)** one's intention and one's intuition may match (this Marion identifies with Husserl's understanding of fulfilled intuition and truth, which he considers indistinguishable from the mediaeval conception of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*).¹⁰⁷ However, Marion

¹⁰² One ought to note the Cartesian overtones here and, yet, there is also a shift in emphasis away from the conclusion, “I am,” to that which precedes and exceeds the “I am.”

¹⁰³ Cf. “On the Gift” 66. However, Marion is not entirely consistent on this point throughout his writings; see Horner, *RGG* 143-144, fn. 116. I here maintain that the phenomenology of givenness requires the relinquishment of all horizons because it seems more consistent with his understanding of the foundation of phenomenology as paradoxical.

¹⁰⁴ Marion *BG* 225; *Éd* 314.

¹⁰⁵ In particular in: Marion “SP”; “Ps.”

¹⁰⁶ Marion, “In the Name” 39.

¹⁰⁷ Marion, “SP” 186; “Ps” 91.

points out that there is a third option, **3**) where one's intention or concept is inadequate, but one is given an overabundance of intuition; "[w]hat is given disqualifies every concept."¹⁰⁸ This is the "saturated phenomenon." Horner describes this, in a lovely way, as follows: "saturated phenomena disrupt the fulfilment of an intentional aim in intuition, not because intuition is lacking but because it is excessive."¹⁰⁹ One witnessed something, but one is incapable of finding any intention, any concept, any explanation that captures it.

Marion outlines *four* kinds of saturation, which accord with the four Kantian categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. These four kinds of saturation are given prototypical examples in: **1**) the event (a saturation of quantity), **2**) the idol (or the painting in a non-theological context) (a saturation of quality), **3**) the flesh (a saturation of relation), and **4**) the icon (or the face in a non-theological context) (a saturation of modality).¹¹⁰ Each of these examples allows one to see how phenomena incorporate an integral element of invisibility, but which should be explained, according to Marion, as an excess of intuition that results in us being dazzled into incomprehension, not a simple ambiguity that does not permit us to make any claims concerning it whatsoever. **1**) An intuition given with an excess of quantity means that the event, the event of historical import or weight—a birth or a death, for instance—is a phenomenon that cannot be foreseen or measured. **2**) An intuition given with an excess of quality means that a painting is excessive in regard to its visibility; it has too much to see. **3**) An intuition with an excess in regard to relation indicates a relation without relation. If one takes the example of flesh, one relates to one's flesh without relation: one *is* one's flesh, one experiences

¹⁰⁸ "On the Gift" 40.

¹⁰⁹ Horner, *J-LM: T-LI* 123.

¹¹⁰ Marion's *In Excess* devotes a chapter to each of these examples. See also *BG* 228-247; *Éd* 318-42. For an excellent summary, consult Horner's *J-LM: T-LI*, chapters 9-10.

phenomena via one's flesh, thus flesh is an absolute relation. Flesh is a phenomenon not conditioned by a horizon. **4)** And finally, with respect to an excess in regard to modality consider first that modality—something's possibility, impossibility, or necessity—is a matter, not of the objects themselves, as in the cases of *quantity* and *quality*, nor is it a matter of the *relations* between objects themselves, but of the coordination of the object to the mind, to knowledge, to the constituting *I*.¹¹¹ To take the example of the face, the face is not something that I look at, but that looks at me. It is a counter-intentionality, thus what is given in the face is *not* something visible; it is not seen by me but has installed me within *its* gaze. By calling to me before I can constitute it, I can accept this call and thereby recognise the face in its invisibility as preceding me.

When one *combines* all four of these kinds of saturation, one encounters the possibility of a phenomenon that, due to *excess*, **1)** cannot be predicted or foreseen, **2)** cannot be exhausted in its visibility, **3)** is not understandable in its relation to any other things; that is, it does not appear within a horizon wherein other things also appear, it appears, therefore, absolutely, out of itself, and **4)** appears as antecedent to any constitution on the part of the *I* and therefore can only appear through *its* initiative and not through that of the *I*. This describes the possibility (or impossibility) of a form of *super-saturated* phenomenon. And this Marion considers commensurate with *revelation*.

However, it must be noted that Marion maintains a distinction between *revelation* (minuscule “r”) and *Revelation* (capital “R”). That is, minuscule “r” revelation describes the *possibility* of a revelation of God as opposed to its *actuality*. With respect to small “r” revelation, one is *not* deciding whether phenomenology requires *assent* to what is revealed in

¹¹¹ See: Marion, *BG* 212; *Éd* 348-9.

super-saturated phenomena, but whether one is capable of *describing its possibility* (to keep things in line with the discussion between Derrida and Marion this would be the possibility of the impossible as impossible). One is assessing the right, so to speak, of such a super-saturated given to phenomenally itself by first establishing a sufficiently capacious phenomenological philosophy. This point is of great importance. In “In the Name,” Marion writes:

[P]henomenology cannot, and therefore must not, venture to make any decisions about the actuality of such a phenomenon [which seems to demand an ‘absence of divine names’ and our entering into the Name]—this question is entirely beyond its scope. Phenomenology is to make decisions only about the type of phenomenality which would render this phenomenon thinkable.¹¹²

Thus, minuscule “r” revelation indicates the possibility of the experience of God, the possibility of receiving such an overload of givenness. In essence, revelation is the test case for whether one accepts Marion’s understanding of phenomenology, because if phenomenality itself is to be understood in terms of givenness, then there would clearly be no limit to the excess of givenness that one could be given. But whether phenomenology can be understood in this way is seen as contentious (this is dealt with further below).

Capital “R” Revelation is something straightforwardly confessional; it is only accessed by the eyes of Christian faith. It is the Revelation of God in Christ, for instance, that requires full participation in the Christian life to be recognised, since only God can give one the grace of faith that allows one to see God in whatever manner or to whatever degree that is possible—which is still possible as impossible. Even in the case of the mystical vision, orthodox Christian theology still does not maintain that one can intuit God’s nature; even in coming to know God in Christ, one does not intuit the divine nature; one accepts the truth of a fundamental mystery that remains

¹¹² Marion, “IN” 39; “la phénoménologie ne peut et donc ne doit pas s’aventurer à décider de l’effectivité d’un tel phénomène [qui exige, ainsi, aussi bien le ‘défaut des noms divins’ que l’entrée dans le Nom]—question absolument hors de sa portée—, mais seulement du type de phénoménalité qui le rendrait pensable” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

beyond full human comprehension, but is still affirmed as the truth. In any event, Revelation requires the *assent* to what is only deemed *possible* in a phenomenology of givenness.¹¹³

This super-saturated phenomenon presents the extreme limit of what is (im)possibly or paradoxically delivered to one via *phenomenality* if it is conceived of as pure *givenness*, givenness without ground that one can represent, but that is absolutely originary for phenomenology. All phenomena reduce to pure givenness, and givenness has no upper limit to how much it can give, how much the *me* that I am before *I am* can be overloaded with intuition and thereby experience phenomena cut through with invisibility, but not an invisibility due to a lack of fulfilment of an intention (deconstruction), but an overfulfillment that renders any possible intention insufficient. This would result, for saturated phenomena, in an endless hermeneutic, an interminable shifting to limitless horizons in order to interpret the given in an infinity of ways.¹¹⁴

According to Marion the *phenomenality* of the phenomena is a paradoxical, inexplicable givenness that can give one more than one can see. Consequently, the pure givenness that is

¹¹³ Obviously, Marion focuses on Christianity in his discussion of the phenomenon of revelation, but one may remain open to considerations that there are other traditions to which this notion of an overabundance of intuition could apply. See: Caputo, “HP” 81-82. There is no space to take up this issue here, but it is an interesting consideration, and this notion, in the abstract, certainly could apply quite widely.

¹¹⁴ See: Chapter 5 of *In Excess/De surcroît*. However, Marion is clear that this does not mean that hermeneutics *precedes* phenomenology, as he maintains without *any* ambiguity in Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Hermeneutics*, trans. Jean-Pierre Lafouge (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2013) (this publication contains both the French and English versions of Marion’s address). [Hereafter: *GH*.] That is to say, the initial moment whereby one recognises givenness as givenness is universally accessible and not reliant on a previous constitution. If it were reliant on some previous constitution, it would merely become one among many proper ways to enter the hermeneutic circle and the recognition of the possibility of revelation would no longer be necessary for phenomenology. However, see also Shane Mackinlay’s *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press: 2010), wherein Mackinlay argues that Marion cannot maintain his phenomenology of givenness without a primary role being given to hermeneutics. Specifically, Mackinlay argues that each instance of saturation actually leaves a hermeneutic role for the self, and therefore does not become absolutely and universally *given* to the self, as Marion maintains. In order to do so, Mackinlay believes that Marion would have to reduce the self to nothing, in which case, there would be nothing to experience the absolute givenness.

phenomenality itself allows one to describe the possibility of receiving the call from the beyond of presence/absence and does not then participate in the grammar of affirmation/negation because it precedes the constituting *I* by preceding all horizons (objectivity, being) by which the *I* reduces appearances to presence or absence. Instead, paying heed to pure givenness sees one reduce the phenomena to their originary givenness, a givenness that only gives itself and only as enfolded in givens. And for Marion, this is simply the proper interpretation of the radicality of Husserl's phenomenological reduction: *Originally*, to take what is *given* in intuition *as it is given*, i.e. without background, without reason, without a *giver* to *cause* such givenness, or, simply, as *gratuitous*. However, Marion is not maintaining that this understanding of phenomenology *must* result in an overtly Christian theology. Rather, he is making the strong point that, given his interpretation of phenomenology, elements of Christian theology thought irrelevant to philosophy *qua* philosophy are perhaps shown not to be irrelevant. There is the potential of accommodating, of *describing* how impossible things *could* "appear" unambiguously (*reveal* themselves) from an effectively philosophically grounded perspective.

What is Being Attempted?

As Horner most helpfully writes, Marion is trying "to find a way to think what is greater than thought."¹¹⁵ And in this way we have already noted his partial similarity to Derrida. This returns us to the issue of the relation between rationality and impossibility, which is important for understanding the discussion between Derrida and Marion, as well as the "theological" critique of Marion offered by Caputo and others, before moving on to my next chapter, in which I will consider the philosophical critique of Marion offered by Janicaud.

¹¹⁵ Horner, *RGG* 158.

Derrida and Marion agree that phenomenology must be pushed to its limits. That is, deconstruction is not enacted by will; *presence deconstructs itself*. The insufficiencies of presence—the ways in which presence shows itself to cover up a more foundational, constituting non-presence—these reveal themselves through greater concentration on presence itself. The gift, for example, flees from the circle of exchange; *we* do not force it out or reject it. A reduction to presence is put forward as an explanation of things in tandem with a reliance on consciousness or subjectivity as *able* to constitute the *true* meaning of the appearances, exhaustively or without remainder. A metaphysical explanation generally also takes such an essential reduction as indicating a *transcendence* of the appearance, the true being *behind* the appearances. Phenomenology, however, brackets this very tendency in order to evade metaphysically determining the “true” being behind the appearances. Thus, normally, phenomenology is seen as non-metaphysical in the sense that it is a return to the constitution of things in consciousness, not to discover the true being *behind* the appearances, but to finally understand the being of the appearances themselves and all that is given to us immanently. But deconstruction reveals that, not everything is given in this manner. Indeed, deconstruction maintains that some things are not only *not given* but *cannot be given*. Thus, *metaphysics is defined in this context as any philosophy that discounts what cannot be given, what is other, by nevertheless reducing what is other to what is intelligible, conceived in terms of presence.*¹¹⁶ Marion understands this but believes that pure givenness is paradoxical; that is, pure givenness can fail to give (intention can eclipse/exceed/overpower fulfilment) and thus supply one with a certain reading of invisibility and otherness; but it can also give a sort of invisibility that can be read not as simply ambiguous, but an overabundance of givenness, that remains

¹¹⁶ This was indicated, last chapter, in my brief description of the *metaphysics of presence*.

incomprehensible (it is *so given* that it *cannot be given*, at least in the sense that *it cannot be adequately received*).

Neither Derrida nor Marion is interested in reducing to *consciousness* in order to understand the *meaning* or *being* of the appearances; i.e. they are not concerned with understanding that which is commensurate with our own capacities or possibilities. The question of their discussion, then, is whether one is still being *phenomenological* if one reduces not to consciousness (Husserl), nor even to our historical being (Heidegger), but to something inscrutable. Is it still phenomenology if one allows a foundational constituting role to what is beyond presence or absence? Marion's answer is a clear yes because he sees one as able to constitute a new foundational horizon that preserves otherness. Derrida's answer is more non-committal. Derrida does not overtly condemn Marion's phenomenology, because it tries to go "phenomenologically beyond phenomenology," but he does not confirm or accredit it either. One could say that Derrida again remains with the question of whether this silence—or *invisibility* in Marion's case—is ever truly possible.

This leads to the discussion of whether there is a course, through the rational, towards the impossible. If presence and absence is what is possible for us to constitute and interpret according to the capacities of the understanding, then a reduction to what is neither presence nor absence delves into what is *impossible* for us to constitute; i.e. if such a *reduction* is possible, it is inherently paradoxical, since, with such an approach, the impossible still *gives* something. But as Marion says towards the end of his second discussion with Derrida:

One may sum up modern philosophy by saying it [...] is a transcendental enterprise by which something is taken for granted a priori, which is the I, ego, subjectivity, in order, starting from it, to establish the limits of the possible, of any kind of possibility. To think amounts to foreseeing the possible, and to construct objects within the horizon of the possible. The result, as is well known, is that some effective experiences cannot be reconstructed within the limits of the possible. [...] In the end, only within the limits of

the concept does it become possible for the impossible to come to thought. I think that what we can glimpse here and aim at may still be called phenomenology, and implies a complete reverse of the former situation. That is to say, we now admit that we do have an experience of the impossible. The definition of such an impossible can no more arise within metaphysics. In metaphysics, the impossible simply contradicts the possible, which is already known and has, afterwards, to be fulfilled or not. But the impossible now is no longer what cannot be thought, but whose fact has to be thought.¹¹⁷

Thus, Marion is admitting that even in a rational discourse, “within the limits of the concept,” one ought to be trained upon the impossible. Marion sees exceeding subjectivity, consciousness, the I, etc. and *what is possible to think* as the proper aim for thought. The difference between Marion and Derrida is that Marion believes one can alter the basic phenomenological structure to allow for the Name, i.e. a given that insists it be thought. But for Derrida, as well as Caputo and others on the more negative “theological” side of this debate, altering phenomenology is not itself a significant concern; remaining faithful to the impossible is.

Marion’s work, therefore, has been considered controversial. One simple reason for this is because it has proven difficult to tell when he is writing in a theological register and when he is writing in a philosophical/phenomenological one. This is not helped by the fact that Marion also emphasises that the distinction between philosophy and theology is an historically late one. He maintains that it was not even in place with a “theologian” as eminent as Aquinas (who, Marion maintains, would have called himself a “philosopher”). Moreover, Marion points out that the word “Revelation” was used for the first time in the history of the Catholic Church councils at the First Vatican Council, i.e. in roughly 1870. This, for the first time, identified the two ways of knowing God as: **1)** through natural power, and **2)** by a supernatural way.¹¹⁸ Hence,

¹¹⁷ “On the Gift” 74.

¹¹⁸ See: Marion’s *Givenness and Revelation*, translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), 8-9; 25-26. This book is based on the Gifford Lectures Marion gave in 2014 at the University of Glasgow; a video recording of these lectures can be found at the YouTube channel for the University of Glasgow, uploaded December 1, 2014. Refer to the bibliography for a full reference.

Marion puts less emphasis on the distinction between revealed truth and reasoned truth and, furthermore, argues that phenomenology is apt for studying something like the New Testament. He believes the New Testament can be read as a document detailing a variety of special manifestations or phenomena, ones saturated with intuition. Marion is also here trying to dispel the question of whether Greek philosophy based in the phenomena (the λόγος as *bringing to appearance*) is appropriately applied to or mixed with a Hebraic religion which tells of the invisible, transcendent God. He is offering a way to overcome a seeming incommensurability.

Regardless of the questions surrounding Marion's work, he certainly argues that, in a strictly philosophical/phenomenological register, it ought to be universally recognisable that a phenomenon of revelation (minuscule "r") is *possible*, given the option of the super-saturated phenomenon. While this minuscule "r" revelation does not imply that God necessarily reveals himself in a way that everyone ought to acknowledge and accredit, it does imply that the pure givenness of all givens is potent enough to allow God to self-present. That is, minuscule "r" revelation indicates a special variety of given that *reveals itself*; this means that beyond any potential for perfectly matched fulfilment of an intention, in the realm beyond the limit of experience, there is the potential for a given that tells one exactly what one has been given, *and one is overwhelmed by it, unable to understand it*. Thus, Marion, in saying that there *could be* a phenomenon of revelation, is deciding that the ambiguity that presents itself beyond the limit of experience could have the potency to universally restrict our interpretations of it to *a revelatory act* and not simply to an *undecidable one*. No one denies that an individual *could* see God in such ambiguity beyond the limits of experience; this is often described as a hermeneutical, as opposed to a phenomenological, starting point, i.e. one that is irreducibly perspectival rather than

universal.¹¹⁹ But in calling this starting point *phenomenological*, Marion is contending that *everyone* should admit that such a phenomenon of revelation is possible. Marion says, “God remains incomprehensible, not imperceptible—without adequate concept, not without giving intuition.”¹²⁰ Marion emphasises that this preserves Derrida’s insistence on maintaining the impossibility of the impossible. However, in order to not conclude that this givenness is something simply undecidable, Marion must give a background or horizon for our reception of things from pure givenness. It is by supplying this background or horizon that Marion maintains that the thought of the impossible is still *rational*, and it is by explicating that horizon as paradoxical that he maintains that what is given is not limited to the rational in a *metaphysical* sense. The paradox of thought is that the thought of the impossible is still given to thought, but not via the means conceived of in the modern philosophical paradigm, which is dominated and limited by desires for control and mastery and the language of efficient causation.

Given that Derrida said that he too wished to remain phenomenological, a “rationalist,” a “man of the enlightenment,” one may have thought that he and Marion would have found further agreement in their discussion. But Caputo, in his “religious” reading of Derrida, sees Derrida as going in a very different direction from Marion. Indeed, Caputo speaks of the matter as follows:

Like Kant, Derrida found it necessary to detain the heady rush of knowledge in order to make room for the risky movements of faith, to defer the day of knowledge in order to make room for the anxious (k)night of faith. That is what structures the ‘desire’ of deconstruction and allows the name of God to gain entrance into phenomenology.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Janicaud will qualify it this way.

¹²⁰ “On the Gift” 40.

¹²¹ Caputo, “HP” 72. Compare: “Like Kant, Derrida finds it necessary to deny knowledge (truth) in order to make room for faith and doing the truth (which corresponds in Kant to the primacy of “practical reason”) and this in order to *save* the gift.” (Caputo, “AI” 209; [emphasis in original]).

Thus, while Caputo also sees Derrida as bringing an element of the mystical into phenomenology, he sees this as a matter of desire, of unending desire whose satisfaction is always deferred. Of course, this is a standard element of deconstruction. The perennial clue to deconstruction is, of course, the (non)word *différance*.¹²² *Différance* (with an “a”) is a word that differs with itself; i.e. it differs, when it is spoken, with “*différence*” (with an “e”) even though they sound the same. As such, *différance* is the creation of semantic distance as space—the space between *différance* (with an “a”) and *différence* (with an “e”) created within the same sound. That is, it is the difference between sounds that allows for different words to mean different things, but that difference is not itself “meaningful”; it is not itself able to be said, but it is what allows for the creation of the meaning of all that is said. And *différance* is also the creation of semantic distance as time—the deferral of meaning as representable in the voice that speaks the sounds “*différance*”/“*différence*.” The meaning of the difference between *différance* and *différence* will remain, forever, deferred, forever *other* to speech, to the voice that hears itself and holds itself in constitutable existence, holds itself within the *meaning* it is *possible* for it to both hear and speak simultaneously. The “meaning” of *différance*, then, is only on the written page and bears no resemblance to the meaning articulable in the voice. Thus, *meaning*, as commensurate with the consciousness or subjectivity that constitutes what is possible for us to understand (represented by *voice*), forever defers the meaning of anything *other*. It defers whatever does not have strict *meaning*, like *différance*. Indeed, what meaning does the difference between two sounds have? The difference between two sounds is essential for meaning, but it is not itself *meaningful*. It is other than meaning. However, what is other is not

¹²² The following précis is drawn from: Jacques Derrida, “Differance,” in *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129-160; “La différence,” in *Théorie d’ensemble* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968), 43-68.

then other as *external to* or *outside of* language; to affirmatively *posit* an external to language would be to determine the other; the other is, most radically, an *I-know-not-what* or an *I-cannot-know-what* (emphasis on “*know*”). The other is simply *otherwise*. It is referred to or indicated by using language, but not in the manner of *meaningful speech*. Thus, in indicating otherness, one cannot hope for otherness to become commensurate with meaningful speech. What *différance* proves is that a total essential reduction to *meaning*, therefore, does not “*say*” *everything*. Thus, no matter how complete any such reduction may be, it can never be fully complete. All one can do is accept the impossibility of a complete reduction and *indicate* the otherness that never enters the realm of the voice. The only choice, according to Caputo, is to *hope unceasingly* for the other to *Come! Viens!*¹²³ without specifying *how* this is possible. Indeed, it is to maintain that it is impossible.

To recall Derrida and Marion’s discussion of negative theology, according to Derrida in “Dénégations,” the other is what is negated in the apophatic stance only to be represented as hyperessential. But in maintaining this *hope* for the other to come, Derrida surpasses the apophatic stance. Like Marion, he moves onto a third way. According to Caputo, he only does so by moving into a “messianic” stance. This is, however, a messianism without a messiah. Caputo sums up his understanding of the difference between Derrida and Marion as follows:

Were the Messiah ever to show up, ever to pitch his tent among us in the flesh, in short, ever to be given, Marion would take this as be [*sic*] an event of excess and joy, a matter of prayerful praise—*Hallelujah*—whereas Derrida, approaching him cautiously, would ask, “When will you come?” (Again.)¹²⁴

¹²³ This is a consistent refrain for Caputo and others who see Derrida’s deconstruction as incorporating a “religious” or “theological” aim.

¹²⁴ Caputo, “AI” 219.

God, naturally, falls under the same requirement for deferral as what is other to meaning, since God cannot be merely intuited as objects or beings are. And God does not even necessarily do so in a more radical sense than any *other* other, for, as Derrida was fond of saying: “Every other is infinitely other,” or “*tout autre est tout autre*.”¹²⁵ The other, every other, is impossible. As impossible, a certain fervour, a certain desire that is not a desire to *know*, to *receive back confirmation* (*re* the gift), is the only appropriate means we have of *thinking* the impossible other. Caputo finds it helpful to speak of this general stance of Derrida’s as *religion without religion*; this awkward formulation is meant to indicate some kind of harnessing of religious fervour, or as Caputo calls it, “passion,” but without the violence of metaphysical determination or “the concrete messianisms of the positive religions that wage endless war and spill the blood of the other.”¹²⁶ That is to say, Derrida, according to Caputo, has (somehow) managed to free desire for that which is thought in mystical experience, the experience of the impossible other, what may be referred to as “God,” from both *philosophy* (desire for knowledge) and *tradition* (concrete messianisms). All past ways of thinking cannot measure up; they cannot anticipate the unprecedented *as* unprecedented (the impossible as *impossible*). This surpassing of philosophy and tradition is enacted for the sake of the *novelty* of the unprecedented, to allow what has *never* been to *never* appear and yet one is to *never* break faith with it. To require the other to appear would be to *someday* violate its otherness (again, *re* the recognition of the gift as gift). To allow the other to never appear, to think the other in its impossibility, leaves one unsure of *when* or *if* or *how* the other will come but in a state of constant preparation for the other. This leaves open the

¹²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Desire of God: An Exchange,” in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York, Fordham University Press, 2006), 307; also: *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 68, *et passim*; “Donner la mort,” in *L’Éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don* (Paris: Transition, 1992) *et passim*.

¹²⁶ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears* xxi.

(im)possibility that what does come *is* the other, but one will never reduce what comes, one will never recognise the other *as such*. Thus, to utter the name of “God” *deconstructively* is to indicate the most extreme *I-know-not-what*; it is to utter the purest *Anzeigen* in order to preserve whatever is indicated in its supreme (holy?) otherly unknowability.

It seems, however, that this radical preservation of the other leads to a loss of the other and a self that is for-another who *is not*. Indeed, this deconstructive endeavour may inspire indifference to this *otherness*. Consider, in this context of the desire to perennially preserve otherness, Caputo, above, allies Derrida’s admission of the relevance of God to an act of folly or madness, at least to something quixotic: “the anxious (k)night of faith.”¹²⁷ However, we ought not to forget that this may run counter to Derrida and Marion’s agreement that this “theological” endeavour within phenomenology is a matter of remaining *rational* even if one attempts to delve into the *impossible*. Caputo’s divergence here—his talk of folly, passion, and faith and not knowledge—is a matter of rhetoric, surely. But that rhetoric is of the utmost significance; Caputo not only qualifies Derrida’s version of the mystic as a variety of madman, who sacrifices the desire to have the word be commensurate with one’s intellect for the sake of an unending desire that preserves the other’s otherness, but he also valorises that choice as, truly, salvific, thereby, so to speak, “damning” knowledge. But, of course, one cannot “damn” knowledge and valorise folly without, implicitly, privileging folly as the superior form of knowledge. That is, only someone who already assumes that pursuing the impossible is a valid pursuit would valorise folly. But such a valorisation implicitly admits that the other *is something* to desire. That is, Caputo has no trouble denigrating philosophy and knowledge if it allows for the pursuit of the

¹²⁷ As he does regularly (compare, again, “AI” 209). Caputo even describes Marion’s views in a similar fashion: “the knight of infinite giving suspends the principle of sufficient reason in a moment of madness” (Caputo, “AI” 214).

impossible. Yet that very denigration is still dependant upon a certain affirmation of the impossible as meaningful—not in the sense of *presentable* and *sayable*, but certainly not so different so as to break any and all analogy with what is meaningful. Thus, if uttered in an *analogical* register, one might ask if it is possible to *speak for the other*, to *give the other's name*, or if there is some form of speech that is indeed needed in order for the other not to be left entirely incommensurate with rationality and, thereby, potentially inspire indifference to impossible otherness.¹²⁸

Marion has outlined the way in which he believes that speaking for the other is possible, and how to give the other an apposite *name*: he says it is *to receive it* from *the other*. Marion believes that his reduction to the paradox of givenness secures the total otherness of the other and does not violate it because the other is revealed in a call that establishes itself before *I am* constituted and myself able to constitute other presences. The other precedes me; the other is *given* before the other *is* for me and I am *given* before my risking a response to the call of the other that reduces the other only to what I can understand. That name I utter still retains a connection (an analogy, perhaps) to the given as it gives itself, and this is the underlying grammar of the name according to Marion. All that *I am* capable of accomplishing under my own power is indeed a pure reference or indicating, but the other is capable of giving much more. That is, if we speak in terms of *intention* and *fulfilment*, for Husserl, as well as most other figures in the phenomenological tradition,¹²⁹ as opposed to Marion, it is clear that intention always precedes fulfilment; I am active in determining the world *first*. Thus, any *sense*, any understanding is a *return*; my intention always must precede what returns. To intend God, then,

¹²⁸ I explore this possibility, in depth, in Chapter 4.

¹²⁹ To mention some other figures dealt with in this thesis, this certainly applies to Janicaud, Caputo, and likely applies to Derrida, though, I would maintain, not unequivocally in the case of Derrida.

re Derrida and Caputo, there can be no *return* because no intention could “match” God. However, in reducing to givenness, Marion is saying that fulfilment precedes intention; what is *given* is not *returned*, it is given first. The *me* who receives the call is then responsible for the first *return* when that *me* utters the Name, and never ceases uttering it since even every *Name* is reduced to a *name* when one utters it—one’s utterance will always be insufficient to capture what has been given. That is, the *me* returns an insufficient form of what is given, in the Name, to the other. Thus, Marion is clearly trying to carve out a role for the *rational*, a way of *giving an account* of what happens before *I am* by giving an account of a non-metaphysical horizon out of which veritable paradoxes, *constituted by their own giving too much of themselves*, “appear” in distinct and coherent varieties of invisibility (too much quantity, too much quality, etc.). Thus, whatever one may say about the super-saturated phenomenon to which one may be witness will be insufficient; whatever name one gives will not be exhaustive, it will not be *the Name*. But this does not mean that one *cannot say anything* or that one cannot *speak* for the other. It is that one can never say enough.¹³⁰

What is contentious in this picture of phenomenology is Marion’s description of beginning from the other, rather than from the self. Essentially, Marion’s contention to begin phenomenology *not with the self* has proven difficult for his critics to accept or imagine. Marion is generally judged, particularly when it comes to the phenomenon of revelation, by that point in his description of the phenomenalisation process at which one supplies a Name. If this is the Name of the other, how can one be sure that the Name is offered because of the excess of givenness rather than the excess of intention? That is, if what is given is given outside of being, then one has no means of describing it; it *is not* and never will *be*. Therefore, one can only

¹³⁰ Hence, an “endless hermeneutic”; again, see Chapter 5 of Marion’s *In Excess/De surcroît*.

coherently describe such a “Name” as consisting of a grammar of radical *intention*. Caputo writes: “when [Marion] introduces the hermeneutic of faith in order to make room for treating saturated phenomena of the second order [i.e. super-saturated] as matters of Revelation [...] his analysis finds itself resubmitted to the most classical Husserlian constraints in which givenness falls short of intention and swings him over to the side of the hyperbolization of intention.”¹³¹ That is, Marion’s position collapses back into Derrida’s. Horner, along the same lines, writes: “Marion’s ‘name’ is a ‘Name,’ which seems to implicate Marion in going beyond a mere ‘possibility’ and making a commitment to the outcome [or *return*]. Yet it could also be argued that here Marion [...] lays his bets on the Name, but ‘his’ Name gives, from the outside at least—no more than Derrida’s.”¹³² Thus, Caputo and Horner—who both argue more from the “theological” side of the matter, rather than the philosophical/phenomenological—are interested in preserving the ambiguity and undecidability of the other, i.e. the other to which one’s mind is merely opened after one has deconstructed presence. That is, they indicate that if Marion seriously accepts Derrida’s deconstruction, then he cannot be recommending that *everyone* ought to, universally, affirm the possibility of a revelation of God, because the other is simply other than meaning. What is other than meaning is simply ambiguous and undecidable. Thus, one could, from an existential standpoint, project God into such ambiguity, but not because such ambiguity is itself a kind of *horizon* of paradoxical stuff that can sustain *God* or something *revealed* to be *from* God through its sheer uncaused *givenness*. Such an interpretation resolves the other into possibility, violating its impossibility.

¹³¹ Caputo, “HP” 87.

¹³² Horner, *RGG* 246.

Marion, however, does seem to insist that this paradox is possible, and that the deconstructive side of the debate has not gone far enough. Firstly, it is clear that Marion does not see himself as a metaphysician, i.e. establishing a sense of the impossible as deriving from something possible; he begins with the rupture that *différance* establishes at the origin of any essentialist philosophy. Marion even considers the Catholic theological tradition based in the *analogia entis* and the conclusion of the Fourth Lateran Council¹³³ to emphasise the kind of radical rupture between creation and God that he explicates as *distance* in his theological works. This may be an uncommon reading among Catholic theologians, but it is clear enough that what Marion is doing is considering much of the content of the metaphysics of the *analogia entis* to be convertible with his own phenomenology, and he simply rejects the idea that what is being described is the *analogy of being* and not the *discontinuity of givenness*, since he writes that the magnum opus of Erich Przywara reflects this discontinuity “[d]espite its title [i.e. *Analogia Entis*].”¹³⁴ Thus, from the theological side, the side that is interested in affirming the impossible as impossible, Marion’s attempt to re-establish any discursive community with the other, despite his appeals to paradox, tends to be viewed by his critics as an attempt to reduce otherness to the self, even if he maintains that one begins with the other giving itself. As soon as one speaks the

¹³³ Marion quotes the conclusion of the Fourth Lateran Council, from Constitution 2, “On the Error of Abbot Joachim,” as follows: “[B]etween creator and creature no likeness can be recognized which would be greater than the unlikeness that is to be recognized between them” (Marion, “IN” 39); “[...] si grande que soit la similitude entre le Créateur et la créature, il n'en faut pas moins relever entre eux une plus grande dissimilitude encore” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

¹³⁴ Marion, “In the Name,” 52, fn. 65; “Malgré son titre” (“Au nom,” n. pag., fn. 69). Hart provides an effective argument against Marion on this point, considering Marion’s conception of the relation between God and creation to be “dualistic”; see: *BI*, 237-241. Again, for the most sophisticated account of the *analogia entis*, see: Przywara, *Analogia Entis*. While many have noted Marion’s indebtedness to the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, and the connection between von Balthasar’s theology and Przywara’s is well established, some have begun to explicitly explore Marion’s relation to Przywara; in addition to the works of Betz already cited, see: Robert Duffy, “Are Finite and Infinite Love the Same? Erich Przywara and Jean-Luc Marion on Analogy and Univocity,” in *Evil, Fallenness, and Finitude*, eds. B.E. Benson and B.K. Putt (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 25-39.

name as *Name* (capital “N”) and does not intend the impossible in a purely intentional *name* (minuscule “n”), the circle of community is established. And, as Caputo writes, Derrida is always “wary of community.”¹³⁵ Thus, the basic contention, on Caputo’s side of the debate, is that there is no need to deal with the threat of community with respect to otherness, because pure intention establishes no community, no return, no circle. Intention is perennially alone.

However, such a conclusion would frustrate any attempt to establish a bridge between the “theological” and the philosophical. With such a conclusion, one should abandon the philosophical because it is that which undermines the recognition of otherness. Should one be satisfied, however, with a notion of otherness that has no philosophical basis other than the trace? On Caputo’s reading, the passion for the impossible is a passion for the other never to arrive, so as to preserve otherness in its distance from me. This “shore that I cannot reach,”¹³⁶ could be understood as posited for the sake of not reducing the other to what is merely possible for me (i.e. I do so for the sake of the other). But, given that Caputo refuses to allow any communal element into the indication of the other, it also ought to be said that this other is simply affirmed, individually, without reason. That is, the trace of the other that is detected after the deconstruction of presence is a trace of something that does not give anything.¹³⁷ Thus, it is not

¹³⁵ Caputo, “HP” 90. I find this to be a problematic reading of Derrida. That is not to say that Derrida was *not* wary of community and tradition and language—given that he considered them all totalising and violent—but that Derrida seems to understand that such a position is not to be valorised. Derrida gives unmistakable indications that such wariness and suspicion of community is wholly insufficient or at least lamentable. Caputo, however, seems not to have any qualms about overtly denigrating community as invariably metaphysical since fervour for the impossible would require it.

¹³⁶ Caputo, “HP” 72.

¹³⁷ This is abundantly clear in Derrida’s notion of *khora*, which he explicates at the end of his discussion with Marion as follows: *Khora* is “the desert in the desert [...] It is [...] if I may use this terrible word, a condition of possibility which makes history possible by resisting it. It is also a place of non-gift which makes the gift possible by resisting it [...] the *khora* does not desire anything, *does not give anything*. It is what makes taking place or an event possible [...] the absolutely universal place [...] which] is what is irreducible to what we call revelation, *revealability*, history, religion, philosophy, Bible, Europe” (“On the Gift” 76; emphasis added). See also: Jacques Derrida, *Khōra* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

the other that inspires desire, *one may simply choose to desire any other*. One's choice is in fact given priority over the other. An other that inspires desire would have to, in some sense, *be*. Even an other that compels me to be ethical (to live *for* the other) would have to *be*. An other that one may simply *choose* to desire is ultimately one's subjective creation. This provides no significant bridge between the rational and the impossible. In fact, it may sever all connection between them. In affirming that one can indicate this non-given, one is either **1)** affirming that the other, in some distant and inscrutable sense, *is* and, therefore, one would be implicitly affirming otherness through analogy with what is; or, **2)** affirming that one is free to indicate a something so otherly that it bears no relation to anything, i.e. *nothing*. To reduce the other to a nothing so as to refuse to determine the other in any way yields nothing to do with the other. It has only to do with an affirmation of each individual's arbitrary freedom. Thus, this totally disanalogous other is just as easily posited *for the sake of maintaining one's own freedom to desire what one wishes*.¹³⁸ I believe, therefore, that Caputo only manages to sustain the relevance of the impossible other by, rhetorically, valorising folly.¹³⁹ But one may question this rhetoric, since Caputo cannot be maintaining that the other is simply nothing.

¹³⁸ This argument is inspired by a similar argument from David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 82, [hereafter: *BI*]. Hart's argument is directed at Levinas, arguing that Levinas' understanding of the other is more likely to be posited in order to affirm one's own moral purity, one's refusal to ever risk *any* understanding (denaturing) of the other's otherness. Hart instead argues that it is understanding the beauty of the other, even simply responding to the colour of another's eyes, that may lead to an ethical response.

¹³⁹ It would seem that Caputo, though his development of his *radical hermeneutics* may be precisely trying to ally what I have called the *impossible* and the *rational*, his formulation of this alliance leaves much to be desired (no pun intended). As Zimmermann has written, Caputo simply "falls in love with the breach itself," with ruptures and disintegration of meaningful structures for the sake of the existential experience allowed by such negativity (Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 229. [Hereafter: *RTH*]). See also: John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 6. This is not, however, to cast aspersions on Caputo as an exegete of, particularly, Derrida and, generally, contemporary post-modern philosophy. Caputo has a true talent for evocative and engaging exegesis. It is simply that, at regular intervals, his zeal for transgressive formulations overcomes him.

Recall that this impossibility of the other is not the end of deconstruction; it is its beginning. In deconstruction, the confrontation of the aporia of otherness is the beginning of *action*. It grounds action in a need to *decide*, without allowing one to rely upon a pre-established rule, or any other precedent. Thus, we are called to have *passion* (folly) for the other, to accept that nothing familiar to us can predict the other's coming nor describe what the other will be like. This is considered justifiable because it grounds action in freedom: a total absence of pre-determination akin to the Kantian practical framework; the reduction to aporia provides something "a little like a Kantian noumenal freedom."¹⁴⁰ However, to *act*, to be hospitable toward the other, one must determine the other somewhat. Does it follow that such hospitality does violence to the other? Furthermore, if this other gives nothing and, therefore, one can never be certain whether or not one has encountered the other—just as one can never affirm that one has given, received, or seen a gift—then there is no way to *know* or definitely *not know* the other. If one cannot know or not know the other, then one can only decide on an individual basis whether one will pursue the other. However, no two people who pursue the other can, in principle, know that they pursue the same other. Thus, "theology" becomes an inherently schismatic, existential, fideist, individualist pursuit. Philosophy may not then, necessarily, be jettisoned. It is simply reborn as a purely pragmatic venture in which reality is restricted to what is commensurate with possibility, since there is no thought of the other than can be recognised and thereby *truthfully* curb rational thought, and since one must, nevertheless, continue acting and thinking. Janicaud supports precisely this kind of venture. His position, therefore, becomes a significant feature in the debate regarding the "theological" turn, which I will consider in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears* 172; cf. "AI" 209.

CHAPTER 3: “PHENOMENOLOGY AND THEOLOGY MAKE TWO”¹

In the last chapter, I presented Marion’s account of his phenomenology of givenness, as well as the principal criticism of him from those who believe that phenomenology has some “theological” potential. This criticism, in short, is that Marion’s determination of the given as having the potential to reveal itself (which would include the potential for a Revelation of God) reduces the impossible to the possible. Consequently, if one wishes to preserve a “theological” element for phenomenology, then the impossible must be kept impossible, but I also argued that there are problems with such a conception of the impossible—it risks an irrational affirmation of otherness.

In this chapter, I will focus on Janicaud’s critique of the “theological” turn. Janicaud does not finally argue that phenomenology ought to lead one to pursue the impossible as impossible. He proposes a more restricted scope for phenomenological investigation and suggests adopting a kind of indifference with respect to questions regarding the impossible. I intend, therefore, to discuss Janicaud’s issues with the “new phenomenologists,” with Marion as their main representative, by detailing Janicaud’s criticisms of the attempt to view phenomenology as a first philosophy rather than, as he proposes, a limited, local, philosophical methodology, restricted entirely by its desire for scientificity. This will involve delving into Janicaud’s proposal of a “minimal” version of phenomenology. I also intend to provide my own interpretation of the philosophical position that motivates Janicaud’s criticism, which is inspired by a Kantian restriction of philosophic thought to the possible and a rejection of the impossible as *noumenal*. Janicaud’s criticisms have implications not only for Marion’s more positive “theological” phenomenology, but also for Derrida’s more negative version as well, and they also

¹ Janicaud, “TTFP” 103; *Ttpf* 89.

reflect Janicaud's tendency to limit phenomenology to a kind of pragmatism. Furthermore, considering Janicaud's commentaries on the "theological" turn will give me an opportunity to revisit some of Marion's arguments in favour of his phenomenology of givenness.

First, allow me to provide some context for Janicaud's contribution to this debate. Janicaud substantially addressed the issue of the "theological" turn in French phenomenology twice, with a gap of 7 years. His first essay, "The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology," first appeared (in French) in 1991, and *Phenomenology: "Wide Open"* was published in 1998. His revisitation of the issue after a period of years allows one to better glean the essence of his criticism. Janicaud comes at this issue from a very different perspective than those already considered. He questions those who deviate from a more straightforward interpretation of phenomenology as a method geared towards discovering the possible, and argues against setting one's sights on the impossible. He focuses his criticisms mainly on Marion. Concerning the turn to the "theological" in *phenomenology*, Janicaud asks: **1)** Is this still a matter of *phenomenology*? **2)** What constitutes *phenomenology*, as such? The answer Janicaud gives to the latter question is that phenomenology ought to be preserved, both in terms of its methodology and its objective, as *eidetic*; i.e. based on the immediate, non-paradoxically described appearances in experience. This determines his answer to the former question: No, the figures of the "theological" turn do not engage in *phenomenology*, for theirs is a turn away from the *eidetic* (while still maintaining that they are the *true* describers of the *eidê*).² That is, Janicaud's criticism of the "theological" turn in phenomenology is in many ways aimed directly at the element of paradox that becomes entrenched in Marion's account of givenness: the element that allows the appearances to be

² Janicaud, "TTFP" 82; *Ttpf* 67.

considered not solely in terms of what can be brought to presence, but as paradoxical appearances that issue from the inscrutable realm beyond both presence and absence, a realm that can only be indicated, and yet can still reveal something.

It will be important to explore a thinker whose interpretation of the “theological” turn is unreservedly critical in order to more clearly indicate the implications of this turn for phenomenology. Janicaud’s unwillingness, on philosophical grounds, to accept the foundational claims of those involved in the “theological” turn also helps to highlight the nature of the agreement reached between Derrida and Marion in their discussion with respect to the issue of the pursuit of the impossible. They place the emphasis on *surpassing* as a means of remaining faithful to the phenomenological tradition, so much so that one could say that this *surpassing* is raised to a principle of truth, to a foundational moment for phenomenological philosophy. Janicaud, on the other hand, considers the “theological” turn to be merely a *desire* for a new, more expansive beginning for phenomenology that lacks a defensible position that would justify such a desire. Thus, what follows will be a matter of considering how Janicaud criticises the paradoxical position of trying to go *phenomenologically beyond phenomenology* instead of remaining, simply, *phenomenological*, as he believes the philosophical positions of Husserl and Heidegger require.

It can be stated at the outset that the issue I take with Janicaud’s criticism of Marion is that he maintains a somewhat extreme and suspicious view of Marion and is never entirely forthcoming (in his two essays on the “theological” turn) as to why. He maintains that neutrality before the phenomena is phenomenology’s supreme virtue. But this neutrality is only virtuous, according to Janicaud, if phenomenology is not considered to be connected to the establishment of philosophy itself, if phenomenology is in no way first philosophy. That is, Janicaud

understands that the only way to make phenomenology first philosophy is to attempt to construct a phenomenology that can account for all experiences. This, in order not to be a straightforward metaphysical system, would require one to attempt to incorporate paradox into some fundamental horizon of experience, such that that horizon could support the appearances of more than its defining theme (so as not to be a totalising horizon that excludes what is other to it). Janicaud sees this attempt as a distortion of phenomenology. Yet, as will be discussed further below, he has his own view of first philosophy, which shapes his arguments and conclusions, a view that remains largely hidden or implicit. He does not address sufficiently, in my view, why one ought not to understand phenomenology to be connected to the establishment of philosophical thinking itself. I see Janicaud as, at least implicitly, indicating aspects of a first philosophy, in his efforts to exclude considerations of *paradox* in *phenomenology* and the *impossible* in *thought*. Janicaud maintains an argument that is in some ways similar to the deconstructive argument: There is a human incapacity to access or sense the impossible that one must not reduce to one's capacities; therefore, Janicaud chooses to exclude the consideration of the impossible. In that, he differs from deconstructionists, like Caputo. At first sight, his position may be persuasive to someone interested in practising phenomenology. I do believe that, in some sense, those on the "theological" side of the debate have not fully appreciated how serious Janicaud's criticism is. Indeed, to pursue the impossible, I believe one would have to reconsider elements of Marion's position (which I will do next chapter when I come to discuss Gadamer). In any case, one of Janicaud's boldest articulations of his general philosophical position comes in his posthumously published, *On the Human Condition*, from 2002.³ I will consider this position towards the end of this chapter. To begin, I will outline what Janicaud

³ Dominique Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, trans. Eileen Brennan (New York: Routledge, 2005). [Hereafter: *OHC*]; *L'homme va-t-il dépasser l'humain?* (Paris: Bayard, 2002). [Hereafter: *Hdh*.]

believes led to the “theological” turn, before discussing Janicaud’s own proposal for a proper phenomenology, which he refers to as a “minimalist phenomenology.”

Phenomenology, the Reduction, and the Invisible

In his first essay, “The Theological Turn in French Phenomenology,” Janicaud initially recalls some early twentieth century intellectual history, focusing on the time in which thinkers began to realise that Husserl’s project failed in certain respects. In particular, he writes that the phenomenological emphasis on and exploration of intentionality was deemed inadequate for securing the possibility of intersubjectivity. However, Janicaud’s diagnosis of the situation is that “the Husserlian legacy has been more used for its goods than respected as a whole.”⁴

Janicaud is pointing this out in order to establish that essentially nothing that calls itself phenomenology truly is *Husserlian* phenomenology, because even Husserl’s phenomenology failed to be what Husserl intended. Janicaud writes: “lack of rigor has always been phenomenology’s lot, even in Husserl, whose quest for scientificity remained largely rhetorical.”⁵

Janicaud believes that phenomenology is an inevitably “ambiguous [...] field of study[; i]t is neither altogether disciplinary nor altogether doctrinal, neither completely scientific nor wholly metaphysical.”⁶ However, he also believes that its basic insight is worth preserving. The fact that phenomenology cannot be what it was intended to be does not mean that one should abandon its *aim*—scientificity—and the rigour it requires. Furthermore, that aim is based in a certain way of understanding the reduction. Thus, Janicaud outlines his understanding of the

⁴ Janicaud, “TTFP” 21; “le legs husserlien est plus sollicité que restitué” (*Ttpf* 10-11).

⁵ Janicaud, “TTFP” 92; “le manque de rigueur a toujours été le lot de la phénoménologie, même chez Husserl dont la quête de la scientificité est restée en grande partie rhétorique” (*Ttpf* 79-80).

⁶ Janicaud, “TTFP” 92 [translation modified]; “le statut ambigu du champ d’étude [...] ni tout à fait disciplinaire ni tout à fait doctrinal, ni complètement scientifique ni intégralement métaphisique” (*Ttpf* 79).

legitimate and illegitimate ways to retool Husserlian phenomenology while holding to what he takes to be the proper understanding of the reduction. A primary concern for him is whether or not a phenomenological method falls back, entirely, into metaphysics, which would be defined as an unjustifiable reduction of knowledge, thought, and experience to an originary, self-justifying, totalising principle (a position he takes to be, invariably, ideologically motivated).

For Janicaud, the works of Merleau-Ponty and those of Levinas symbolise the, respectively, legitimate and illegitimate options for phenomenologists. Janicaud identifies that the overriding desire of phenomenologists, in roughly the middle of the twentieth century, was to name the invisible.⁷ What one must consider with respect to this effort, according to Janicaud, is what is *predetermined* as the invisible.

Merleau-Ponty uses “intertwining” to investigate invisibility—“intertwining, and not [...] pure givenness.”⁸ That is, Merleau-Ponty tries to delve back before the point at which the other appears, in Husserl’s phenomenology, merely as an alter-ego in the horizon of objectivity; he considers the fundamental horizon to be an *intertwining*, a line between visibility and invisibility, where the visible will always remain “inscribed within corporeality.”⁹ This is also referred to as the “flesh of things,” where unmitigated materiality and formal meaning meet, grounding the visible or meaningful in a certain understanding of *what does not appear*. Janicaud considers this to be an appropriate means of accessing one form of the phenomenologically invisible, especially if one’s goal is to reconstitute otherness and intersubjectivity because, “[m]y corporeality is immediately intersubjective”;¹⁰ the intertwining connects. This is the advantage

⁷ Janicaud, “TTFP” 22-28; *Ttpf* 11-17.

⁸ Janicaud, “TTFP” 25; “entrelacs, et non [...] pure donation” (*Ttpf* 14).

⁹ Janicaud, “TTFP” 24; “elle s’inscrit dans une corporéité” (*Ttpf* 13).

¹⁰ Janicaud, “TTFP” 25; “[m]a corporéité est d’emblée intersubjective” (*Ttpf* 14).

of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, which Janicaud believes remains phenomenological.¹¹ It has to do precisely with Merleau-Ponty's starting point, which is a decision to investigate “not an absolute invisible..., but the invisible *of* this world.”¹² Merleau-Ponty does not take as a starting point any “thinking from above (*de surplomb*),” and not adopting such a starting point is a necessary element of phenomenology for Janicaud.¹³ An element that will also prove crucial, for Janicaud, is that this investigation of an invisible of this world localises Merleau-Ponty's achievements; that is, there is no claim to have described *the* invisible, utilising *the* all-encompassing philosophical method of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's aim is specific and limited and so is his result, which is to say that it is firmly and universally established *for a definite type of phenomenon*.¹⁴ Janicaud wishes for us to note the element of real accomplishment that comes with localising one's application of a phenomenological method.

Levinas, according to Janicaud, does the opposite of Merleau-Ponty; he is, though, particularly in *Totality and Infinity*, also interested in resolving the same problem as Merleau-Ponty. Janicaud writes that, for Levinas, “intentionality does not succeed in ‘reducing’ reflexivity; neither emergence in the world, nor access to the other (*autrui*), receives sufficient

¹¹ Janicaud, “TTFP” 27; *Tpf* 15.

¹² This is a quotation from Merleau-Ponty's *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 198; English trans. *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 151. Cited in: Janicaud “TTFP” 34. [Emphasis in original]; “...non pas un invisible absolu, mais l'invisible *de ce monde*” (*Tpf* 22. [Emphasis in original]).

¹³ Janicaud, “TTFP” 25; *Tpf* 14.

¹⁴ As Janicaud writes in his conclusion: “however modest [Husserl's eidetic reduction] was in its intentions and in its ‘fulfillments,’ it brought balance to phenomenological research in the interests of determined, stable, and universal knowledge” (“TTFP” 96); “pour modeste qu'elle fût en ses visées et en ses ‘remplissements’ —elle équilibrait la recherche phénoménologique du côté d'une connaissance déterminée, stable, universelle” (*Tpf* 82).

attention.”¹⁵ It is always back to the self (the transcendental ego) that Husserl’s horizon of intentionality refers one—a matter of “reflexivity.” Thus, what can be considered scientifically meaningful, in Husserlian phenomenology’s account of experience, would be that which can appear in experience in tandem with one’s own (reflexive) account of *what* one has received. Thus, the reception of the world, the other, etc., is reduced to *what one can say to oneself* about the world and the other, not what the other and the world say of themselves, or the way in which they might rupture or break into one’s private horizon. The aim for Levinas is to overwhelm the horizon conceived of as intentionality in the Husserlian sense, in order to discover some prior connection or horizon that allows the world and the other to appear in an immediate way. However, and this draws Janicaud’s main criticism, Levinas considers the solution, the proper attention given to the other, as guided by an absolute Other, the pre-eminently invisible. Crucially, this is not, Janicaud says, an other derived from immediate experience—a *localised* and *limited immanent* other. Levinas asserts the importance of *Infinity, Transcendence*, and does so from the start. For Levinas, in order to correct phenomenology’s failure in the face of the other, the Other must be installed at the beginning, instead of the self, instead of the sameness that always results from the reflexive thought back to the ego or to being. The Other is, in that sense, the negation of all egoism. The desire for the other, is *Desire* for the infinitely Other, the other that cannot in principle be reduced to my horizon.¹⁶ Janicaud writes: “Desire is straightaway capitalized, emphatic to the extreme. In virtue of what experience? Evidently something metaphysical. This circularity is perhaps hermeneutical, but certainly not

¹⁵ Janicaud “TTFP” 25; “L’intentionnalité ne réussit pas à ‘réduire’ la réflexivité; ni l’émergence au monde ni l’accès d’autrui n’obtiennent une attention suffisante” (*Tipf* 14); compare with: Emmanuelle Lévinas, *Totalité et infinité: Essai sur l’extériorité* (Kluwer Academic: Paris, 2014); English translation: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Cf. Derrida, “VM”; “Vm.”

phenomenological.”¹⁷ Janicaud is indicating that Levinas has nothing but (essentially) a personal reason for seeing *ultimate otherness* as what one ought to pursue here, as forming one’s *Desire*. The question raised here is: Why is it that, in the negation of my horizon, I am able to establish a horizon of ultimate otherness? Doing so completely eschews the matter of fulfilment in any sense, because ultimate otherness begins *from above* (*de surplomb*) and not with what is closest or immanent.

Thus, while a certain liberty taken with Husserl’s basic project in order to pursue invisibility is philosophically justifiable (*re* Merleau-Ponty), ascribing to phenomenology an all-encompassing, transcendent, absolute goal, instituted in order to have a certain radical interpretation of the phenomenon of the other get underway, is simply brought on by a dismissal of Husserl’s definition of the phenomenological reduction (*re* Levinas). The phenomenological reduction is defined by a bracketing of transcendence; thus, one cannot, according to Janicaud, simply reinstate a need or desire for the transcendence of one’s horizon by the other and still call what one is doing “phenomenology.” To do so, Janicaud believes, involves great leaps that, while original, cannot be based in a rigorous kind of phenomenological explication because they aim, before they begin, at some ideal rather than trying to understand, more and more deeply, an immanently given experience.¹⁸

¹⁷ Janicaud “TTFP” 27 [translation altered]; “le Désir est d’emblée majuscule, emphatique jusqu’à l’extrême. En vertu de quelle expérience? Évidemment métaphysique. Cette circularité est peut-être herméneutique, certainement pas phénoménologique” (*Tpf* 16).

¹⁸ For instance, in installing the Other at the origin, Levinas makes the horizons into things that stare back and intend us (Janicaud “TTFP” 25-26; *Tpf* 14-15; cf. Levinas, *TI* 28; *Ti* 14). This is also a strong element of Marion’s fourth variety of saturated phenomenon, the face or the icon. Joeri Schrijvers, in his book *Ontotheological Turnings?*, criticises Levinas, Marion, and Jean-Yves Lacoste for failing to de-centre the subject in their philosophies by merely inverting the subject-object relation; the Other or God becomes the subject, and we the object; see: *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (New York: SUNY, 2011).

Janicaud simply does not believe that this thinking *de surplomb* should be called “phenomenology.” Phenomenology ought to be considered a methodology, as he repeats often. As a methodology, phenomenology has no need to explain the *ultimate* horizon of experience or the means by which total otherness can be given an account in experience. According to Janicaud, phenomenology is simply a certain methodology that aims to provide the means by which immediate, immanent experience can be described with a certain consistency and clarity. Therefore, Janicaud fundamentally denies that phenomenology is defined *primarily* by that basic horizontal structure, the *co-ordination* between two poles of experience that can straightaway be radically redefined in order to accommodate everything in experience. For Janicaud, phenomenology is defined by its desire for scientificity which restricts how those two poles can receive redefinition. Phenomenology aims at whatever is already universal in experience, which is only whatever can be immanently fulfilled. Surely, elements of experience are left out of this concern for fulfilment, but here Janicaud emphasises that some other philosophical endeavour could deal with those elements. Immanent fulfilment in experience, as a disciplinary focus, necessarily makes phenomenology’s scope limited. There is, furthermore, no need to re-evaluate and re-imagine phenomenology as Levinas, Marion and the “new phenomenologists” all do (i.e. in thinking *de surplomb*), because phenomenology, given the aforementioned aim of scientificity, does not aim to see *all experience* in virtue of some universal horizon. Phenomenology *cannot* do precisely that; a universal horizon is a metaphysical totality; a universal horizon must exclude what is other to it. To try to find some sort of all encompassing horizon that *does not totalise* would involve the search for something paradoxical. Janicaud, however, throughout both of his essays, does not even consider the possible legitimacy of the suggestion of establishing a paradoxical horizon or principle for experience that would evade the distorting effects of

totalisation. He sees the new phenomenologists as attempting to institute something metaphysical at the heart of phenomenology while not admitting or realising that this is their goal.¹⁹ That is, appealing to a foundational horizon that is defined by paradox, according to Janicaud, still has all of the effects and the results of establishing a metaphysical system.

For Janicaud, the phenomenological method is a reduction to the *immanently* given in experience—i.e. to the *appearances* or to *what appears*. It is enacted for the sake of evading a metaphysical projection of a meaning *transcending* the appearances, collapsing more into one's horizontal theme than is warranted or necessary. As already mentioned, there are elements of experience left out of any attempt to understand the appearances in terms of presence and absence. In short, if the appearances are understood in terms of presence, as Husserl maintained, then one is left understanding the being of the appearances in *objective* terms. One is allowing for a thorough encounter and description of *objects*. If one understands the appearances in terms of the play of presence and absence, as Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology stressed, then one is leaving room for the "presentation" of the negation of the whole of being, in order to open onto the thinking of the difference between being and beings. One is allowing for an encounter with *being* itself. However, there are still elements of experience that are not accounted for here. The question is whether one is able, therefore, to interpret the appearances as themselves more than they appear or whether one must admit that phenomenology is simply unsuited to describing *all* experience, because no matter how one describes the fundamental horizon it will always leave something out. Furthermore, if one admits that the structure of phenomenological experience, no matter how it is defined, must always leave something out, one then needs to

¹⁹ Janicaud, *PWO* 2-3; Janicaud writes: "the surreptitious turn toward the Other, the arch-original, the pure givenness, etc. occurred at the very heart of the most confirmed phenomenological pretensions"; "le tournant subreptice vers l'Autre, l'archi-originaire, la donation pure, etc. se produisait au sein même des prétention phénoménologiques les plus affirmées" (*Pé* 9).

decide whether what is left out should at all occupy one's attention or whether what is predetermined to be explicable ought to be the sole focus of any philosophical discipline. The reason this is an exclusive dichotomy is because no philosophical discipline can maintain any focus on what is impossible for one to think without some means of indicating why it is *relevant* to thought, or, indeed, paradoxically, *somehow thinkable*.

Thus, what is left out of any normal phenomenological horizon—either one that details the role of presence (disclosure of objects) or absence (disclosure of being)—is whatever is beyond *the thinkable*. What is beyond the thinkable is, from the phenomenological standpoint, simply enough, ambiguous. In Chapter 2, I discussed how Marion sees the potential for otherness to offer itself to one out of that ambiguity, as paradoxical givenness, in a way that one cannot comprehend (maintaining its ambiguity), but that can be at least partially named (dispelling its ambiguity). In this way, one can think the unthinkable. Janicaud rejects this approach and in his two essays on the “theological” turn, insists that it is because phenomenology—as merely a *methodology* that deals with a certain *type of experience*, not as *philosophy itself* that deals with *experience itself*—has a well defined principle.

Phenomenology's principle is the neutrality that allows *immanent* appearances to appear and to be described thoroughly in their *immanent* givenness. Indeed, considering how often he mentions it throughout both of his essays, this notion of neutrality is of central importance to Janicaud.²⁰ Permit me to supply several quotations: “The phenomenologist is neutral, in the sense that he or she is open to the thing itself, without any other teleological prejudice than the ideal of rational and scientific truth”;²¹ “[t]he theological veering [of the ‘new

²⁰ Horner states as much as well. See: *RGG* 103, where she also writes that Janicaud sees the neutrality of Husserl's method as coterminous with, essentially, atheism.

²¹ Janicaud “TTFP” 48; “[le phénoménologue] est neutre, en ce sens qu'il est ouvert à la chose même, sans autre préjugé téléologique que celui de l'idéal de vérité rationnel et scientifique” (*Tpf* 36).

phenomenologists’] is too obvious. [...] despite all the denials, phenomenological neutrality has been abandoned, just as the reasons that led Husserl to put the transcendence of God ‘out of circuit’ have been put aside (or neglected);²² “the phenomenological project sees itself and strives to be totally neutral. It is precisely from this that phenomenology takes upon itself, at least in its initial momentum, a striving for scientificity, which it shares with the Cartesian re-foundation of modern philosophy”;²³ “[t]hus disengaged by the *epochē* [from *metaphysica specialis*—concern for the transcendent nature of the soul, of the world, and of God] is an attentive, positive, and curious neutrality in search of truth”;²⁴ “what is specific to phenomenology [in its return to the conditions of its own reception of phenomenality], and this proves to be irreplaceable [...] is] an attitude of neutrality that has eliminated doxic prejudices.”²⁵

From these quotations, it is clear that Janicaud is referring to a neutrality that is willed or chosen for the sake of scientific clarity. Thus, what separates Janicaud’s position from those who, he claims, wish to “theologise” phenomenology is not that his impetus for phenomenology is not willed and theirs is; both are willed. Furthermore, one could argue that Janicaud’s is a *constructed* or *artificial* form of neutrality. Neutrality is defined so as to permit what is predetermined as *scientific*, to allow universal, intersubjective assent, without any appeal beyond immanent consciousness. Again, Janicaud says repeatedly that he is not maintaining that the

²² Janicaud “TTFP” 68; “Le virage théologique est trop évident. [...] en dépit des dénégations, la neutralité phénoménologique est abandonnée, de même que sont mises de côté (ou négligées) les raisons qui conduisaient explicitement Husserl à mettre la transcendance de Dieu ‘hors circuit’” (*Ttpf* 53).

²³ Janicaud *PWO* 19; “le projet phénoménologique se pense et se veut neutre: c’est en quoi il reprend à son compte, du moins en son élan initial, une intention de scientificité qu’il partage avec la refondation cartésienne de la philosophie moderne” (*Pé* 32).

²⁴ Janicaud, “TTFP” 94; “Se trouve dégagée par l’*épokhè* [des positions de la *metaphysica specialis*—la nature de l’âme, du monde et de Dieu—] une neutralité attentive, positive et curieuse en quête de vérité” (*Ttpf* 81).

²⁵ Janicaud, *PWO* 67-68 [translation emended]; “[pour la phénoménologie retourner aux conditions de son propre accueil de la phénoménalité] ce qui lui est le plus spécifique et qui s’avère irremplaçable: une attitude de neutralité, ayant éliminé les préjugés doxiques” (*Pé* 98).

neutrality of phenomenology ought to restrict other ways of engaging in philosophy; “our objection does not ring against the rule phenomenology imposes on itself insofar as it wants to be pure; it sounds against the extension of this rule (and of its methodological implications) to the rest of the philosophical field.”²⁶ Neutrality ought to restrict only phenomenology (and other sciences) and therefore it ought to restrict only how one views a certain aspect of truth: the pure seeing into essences. What Marion recommends is not a *pure seeing*. Marion’s view is of a very complex seeing that leaves much to be intuited from aspects of the given that remain invisible. This is a seeing motivated by a desire that differs from the desire that Janicaud is arguing is inherently “phenomenological,” i.e. the desire to be “neutral.” Thus, Janicaud is arguing that the desire to go beyond the visible in the manner that Marion recommends,²⁷ in phenomenology is, *by definition*, not phenomenological. Janicaud seems to be saying that what is *visible* admits no hermeneutical difficulties *if* what is visible is given a disciplinary definition beforehand.

Janicaud presents himself as only questioning why such thinkers who clearly wish to effect a “paradoxical and strategic blurring of the boundaries between the phenomenological and the theological”²⁸ find the need to maintain that they are phenomenologists. He writes:

What, then, in the final analysis, do we object to? Precisely the use of the flag and the cloak of the phenomenological method to invert it or compromise its effective insights to transform precise, limited, clarifying procedures into incantory [*sic*] preludes to the absolute autoreference of life and its pathetic sacredness.²⁹

²⁶ Janicaud, “TTFP” 90; “notre objection ne joue pas contre la règle que s’impose la phénoménologie en tant qu’elle se veut pure; elle s’élève contre l’extension de cette règle (et de ses implications méthodologiques) à l’ensemble du champ philosophique” (*Ttpf* 78).

²⁷ Recall that Janicaud is favourable to Merleau-Ponty’s approach to the invisible.

²⁸ Janicaud “TTFP” 50; “un brouillage, paradoxal et stratégique, des frontières entre le phénoménologique et le théologique” (*Ttpf* 39).

²⁹ Janicaud, “TTFP” 86; “Sur quoi porte donc, en définitive, notre contestation? Précisément sur l’utilisation de pavillon et du manteau de la méthode phénoménologique pour en inverser ou en compromettre les acquis effectifs, transformer des procédures précises, limitées, éclairantes, en préludes incantatoires à l’autoréférence absolue de la vie et à sa sacralité pathétique.”

He is claiming that we ought not to lose what is possible to achieve when we have recourse to a methodology that, in an effective way, limits our philosophical engagement to issues that do not involve paradox. To adopt the phenomenological method is, therefore, to make a certain *decision* to limit one's considerations, within philosophy, to a reduced engagement that aims to reveal the phenomena only as they appear, only as they give themselves in intuition. Any "phenomenology" that tries not to so limit the appearances at the outset—that tries to see into the *all*, so to speak—is, therefore, not phenomenology. One may see here that this is an argument over the originating impulse of phenomenology. Is phenomenology a concern for the all, for the fullest horizon? Or is it a concern for scientificity, i.e. the *specific* horizon that allows for fulfilment of intuition in a direct sense, thereby evading completely any need to defend itself against accusations of totalising experience, because it has nothing to say about experience that occurs beyond the horizontal structure that it gives to itself?

Of course, it could simply be maintained that phenomenology is both. But while Janicaud does seem, at the end of his second essay, to back away from his earlier definition of phenomenology saying that *what phenomenology is* has simply been blown *wide open*,³⁰ his efforts are basically devoted to arguing that one ought to limit the scope of phenomenology and stay clear of turning it into a philosophy that can account for all experiences.

As already noted, Janicaud explicitly recommends a phenomenological minimalism. However, he locates such a minimalism in a greater context: "Minimalism in phenomenology has nothing to do with definitively coming to rest upon the image or the object but aims to

³⁰ Hence the title of his second essay: *La phénoménologie éclatée*; "éclatée" literally means "exploded."

stimulate research through a return to the origins of wonder before the appearing.”³¹ The invocation of the traditional beginning of philosophy in wonder is obviously significant. But what this passage makes clear is that all of Janicaud’s criticisms are ultimately traceable back to a criticism of the attempt to bring the origin into view, to make wonder *the* phenomenon. That is, to interpret the ambiguity of the origin so as to then dictate a universal way in which one must *receive* that which one may derive from that ambiguity.

Janicaud believes that his “minimalist” phenomenology evades the overarching problem associated with “the same doubt [that] affects all philosophies preoccupied with the origin and the originary”³²—the tumbling back into metaphysical, “theological” pronouncements. Given the difficulties of such philosophical matters, I do not think it is an unfair criticism to say that Janicaud does not succeed in his aim of avoiding the problem represented by the need to define an origin for experience. As noted above, he recognises the origin of philosophy in wonder, and yet constructs his minimalism on the basis of the decision to *not* question that origin, in part to evade the metaphysical implications of doing so. However, Janicaud cannot avoid adopting an attitude towards that origin. Its dismissal does not itself stem from a neutral stance, no matter how “neutral” the scientific attitude that results from that dismissal is intended to be.

In establishing his version of phenomenology, Janicaud counters precisely the “maximal” interpretation of the new phenomenology—in its estimation of the potential reach of phenomenology—with a “minimalist” one. In doing so, he engages the issue of the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Janicaud engages this issue because he sees what

³¹ Janicaud, *PWO* 67; “Le sens que prend le ‘minimalisme’ en phénoménologie n’est nullement celui d’un arrêt définitif sur l’image ou sur l’objet, mais plutôt celui d’une stimulation de la recherche grâce à un retour aux origines de l’émerveillement devant l’apparaître” (*Pé* 98).

³² Janicaud, *PWO* 15; “un même type de soupçon [qui] s’exerce sur des philosophies soucieuses de l’origine et de l’originaire” (*Pé* 27).

joins phenomenology and hermeneutics as summarised by Ricoeur's insight that both "choose" meaning; "le choix pour le sens."³³ The issue becomes how to choose meaning without adopting a metaphysical position.

Ricoeur, like several others, considers the "hermeneutical turn" in phenomenology to have corrected many of the deficits in Husserlian phenomenology,³⁴ particularly its scientific pretensions.³⁵ Janicaud, however, expends much effort to emphasise a fundamental difference between the two discourses: **1)** Phenomenology is, overall, identified by its scientific desire to see into essences, thereby privileging clarity and unhiddenness as ultimate experiences of meaning, while **2)** hermeneutics is identified by the need to clarify, expose, and unfold unendingly, and consequently approach the ultimate meaning of experiences in their clarity and lack of clarity, with an emphasis on the particularity of one's perspective that cannot be extended to all or universalised. Phenomenology looks to things to show themselves; hermeneutics looks to those very same things and notices, as Janicaud writes, in quoting Ricoeur, that "'the closest to us [the clearest thing] is also the most hidden [the most unclear].'"³⁶ Overall, Janicaud maintains that no one has yet managed to truly unite phenomenology and hermeneutics because they are fundamentally in competition. While phenomenology and hermeneutics are not united in their

³³ Janicaud, *PWO* 53; *Pé* 79. See also: Paul Ricoeur, "The Intellectual Autobiography of Paul Ricoeur," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 36.

³⁴ See also: Gary B. Madison, "The Interpretive Turn in Phenomenology: A Philosophical History," in *Between Description and Interpretation: The Hermeneutic Turn in Phenomenology*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2005), 3-51. However, many point out how Husserl already understood and accounted for many of these deficits. Caputo shows how Husserl anticipated many of those elements given to phenomenology by hermeneutics in his essay: "Husserl, Heidegger, and the Question of a "Hermeneutic" Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 1, (1984): 157-178.

³⁵ Scientific pretensions that, Janicaud even implies, might have *inevitably* led those who followed Husserl to suggest a "theological" reading of phenomenality by pushing the definition of the *eidē* to a metaphysical extreme due to a lack of descriptive, scientific rigour. See: Janicaud, *PWO* 65-66; *Pé* 95-97.

³⁶ Janicaud, *PWO* 52; "'le plus proche de nous est aussi le plus dissimulé'" (*Pé* 79). Compare: Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), 170.

respective ways of describing meaning, nor in how meaning may be communally recognised—since phenomenology appeals to what is universal, and hermeneutics appeals to circumscribed instances of agreement between individual perspectives—the one place where they are united is *in the choice for meaning*.

Janicaud notes that many thinkers, Ricoeur in particular, have come to the conclusion that phenomenology was inconceivable except as hermeneutics.³⁷ That is, the universality of phenomenology, the claim for scientificity, is itself incoherent and requires a perspectival or existential foundation. Janicaud then implies that one may take two different paths at this stage: **1)** to attempt a phenomenology without the initial or originary need for a hermeneutics, that nevertheless evades the pitfalls of metaphysics and of Husserl's transcendental idealism (i.e. this is the approach that is taken by Marion); **2)** to criticise both phenomenology and hermeneutics in their decision for meaning (i.e. this is the approach of deconstruction). Nevertheless, Janicaud notes, a proper, non-metaphysical conception of meaning and textuality is the desideratum on all sides. Thus, Janicaud goes on to interpret the desire to unify phenomenology and hermeneutics as an attempt to properly remain with the decision for meaning without metaphysically overloading it, without going too far in claiming that certain hermeneutical or perspectival matters to be phenomenological or universal.

³⁷ Janicaud, *PWO* 52-3; *Pé* 79. Consider, from Ricoeur, the following passages disclosing how Ricoeur took phenomenology to be essentially hermeneutical, given the consideration of *meaning* (taken from: “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Ed. & trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981)): “The most fundamental phenomenological presupposition of a philosophy of interpretation is that every question concerning any sort of ‘being’ [*étant*] is a question about the meaning of that ‘being.’ [...] the ontological question is a phenomenological question. It is a hermeneutical problem only insofar as the meaning is concealed, not of course in itself, but by everything which forbids access to it” (114). Consider also: “That consciousness is outside of itself, that it is *towards meaning* before meaning is for it and, above all, before consciousness is *for itself*: is this not what the central discovery of phenomenology implies?” (115).

However, even given his opinion about the basic incompatibility of phenomenology and hermeneutics, when Janicaud introduces his intention to outline a minimalist phenomenology, he writes: “we will see to what extent our investigation doesn’t really place us in disagreement with what perhaps may not be out of line to call a ‘hermeneutical minimalism.’”³⁸ This translation softens the force of Janicaud’s statement—even more than Janicaud did himself—by adding the word “really,” when it is not there in the French text. Janicaud maintains this point of “*articulation*”³⁹ between his minimalist phenomenology and “hermeneutical minimalism” in an excessively tentative manner. In any case, this passage above indicates that Janicaud views the choice for meaning as an inherently minimalistic position. This implies that the origin of phenomenological thinking provides only ambiguity. Indeed, Janicaud elsewhere associates this with the philosopher’s responsibility and freedom in trying to decide the limits of phenomenology:

[W]e encounter the aporia all philosophy must assume as both judge and interested party in weighing the legitimacy of its propositions. The responsibility of the philosopher corresponds to this abyssal liberty.⁴⁰

Here Janicaud clearly loads his conception of, not only phenomenology, but philosophy itself with a suspicious attitude towards all bias (i.e. being an “interested party”). For Janicaud, what is specifically expressed in any bias cannot be universalised; therefore, whatever one’s perspective might afford one in confrontation with the ambiguity beyond fulfillable experience, it cannot compel one to present that interpretation of what is, in principle, ambiguous, as

³⁸ Janicaud, *PWO* 62; “On verra alors dans quelle mesure [...] notre enquête ne nous place pas en désaccord avec ce qu’il ne serait peut-être pas déplacé d’appeler un ‘minimalisme herméneutique’” (*Pé* 92).

³⁹ That is, phenomenology and hermeneutics are at times complementary, they *speak* in unison as well as function as two parts of a limb do, given the limb’s *joint*, hence, “articulation.” This play on words is possibly more appropriate in French; see the translator’s note *PWO* 95.

⁴⁰ Janicaud, “TTFP” 101; “nous retrouvons, pour la phénoménologie, l’aporie que doit assumer la philosophie, à la fois juge et partie dans l’appréciations de la légitimité de ses propositions. La responsabilité due philosophe est à la mesure de cette abyssal liberté.” (*Tpf* 87).

something that another ought to accept. This parallels what I would refer to as speaking *for* the other. According to Janicaud, one is only allowed to speak for the other in cases of neutrality; that is, in cases when one has predetermined that one is only considering the visible, what appears, what is grounded in a scientific horizon. But what Janicaud is actually describing is a context in which thinkers come together and *agree* that they will consider the foundational (minimalist) hermeneutic of visibility and appearance as binding for phenomenology. Furthermore, thinkers will also *agree* to allow the greater ambiguity of philosophy's beginning in wonder to be reined in for the sake of counteracting tendencies to repeatedly try to overcome one's limitations with regards to such ambiguity. In his critique of Marion and his providing a positive position to counter it, Janicaud puts forward the argument that, in order to maintain something philosophically, one must maintain it weakly, minimally. One must look to the origin of experience and then *define one's own limited starting point*, not as deriving from that origin, but from one's decision—a decision nevertheless made within that ambiguous space. Janicaud maintains that it is in minimally maintaining one's philosophical positions, in locally and regionally pursuing particulars within the confines of some methodology, and in eschewing all grand vision of philosophy, that one properly pays heed to the commonality between hermeneutics and phenomenology: the choice for meaning.⁴¹

Therefore, what Janicaud is doing is eschewing the need, in any “science,” for that initial *entreaty* that I defined in my first chapter as necessary for entering into the philosophical mindset. A science deals with what is unambiguous, even if it is defined artificially. It claims to have no need for an *entreaty*—from this scientific perspective, such entreaty is considered a

⁴¹ This is of course strongly reminiscent of Lyotard's famous definition of postmodernism as the rejection of grand narratives. See: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

matter of bias. And yet, somehow, the scientific definition of the visible is still *binding*. It is in this way that Janicaud confronts the figures of the “theological” turn with a conception of philosophy that rejects *their* entreaty to see meaning where it is newly suggested. But in doing so, he merely provides his own entreaty without defining it as such. There is, in the end, no sense in which Janicaud *does not* interpret the ambiguity of the origin of experience.⁴² That is, Janicaud is not denying that the issue of the ultimate horizon arises; rather, he is saying that, due to its paradoxical qualities, one should not engage it. *This*, according to Janicaud, we should be able to universally accept, but *not* Marion’s givenness. Hence, Janicaud refers to Jocelyn Benoist, who wrote, also criticising Marion: “What will you say to me if I say to you that where you see God, I see nothing? [...] or something else.”⁴³

To elaborate on Janicaud’s position and my criticism of it, consider that Janicaud describes an example of his minimalist phenomenology in the late Heidegger’s tautological declarations.⁴⁴ Janicaud first describes how the late Heidegger approached phenomenology eschewing all of Husserl’s highest ambitions (for phenomenology to be a rigorous science and a first philosophy). Instead, Heidegger installs himself within an ambiguous but highly charged space: “[I]t is out of this space where the earth, the sky, the gods, and the mortals stand, reflect, and shine together, that this strange word, having the appearance of a tautology, must be heard:

⁴² Even in spite of his sympathetic quotation of Cioran: ““Where do they [those who ruminate on the absolute] find such pertinacity in the unverifiable, so much attention in the vague, and so much ardor to seize it?”” (Janicaud, “TTFP” 69); ““D’où tirent-ils [ceux qui ruminent sur l’absolu] tant d’obstination dans l’inverifiable, tant d’attention au vague et d’ardeur à le saisir?”” (*Ttpf* 54) Compare: E.M. Cioran, *Précis de décomposition*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 196.

⁴³ Jocelyn Benoist, *L’idée de phénoménologie* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2001), 102. Quoted in: Marion, “Banality” 124 and a lengthy response is also given in fn. 12, page 175. Marion’s response to Benoist is similar in content to my argument against Janicaud and I draw on it here. Cf. Janicaud *PWO* 9; *Pé* 19.

⁴⁴ It bears mentioning here that Janicaud maintains that this minimalist phenomenology is inalienably pluralistic; see *PWO* 64; *Pé* 94.

‘The world presences by worlding.’⁴⁵ What is crucial here is that it is the *space* that allows the proper meaning of the tautological word to be heard, something that *precedes*. This is not an evasion of the question of the origin, but an attempt to determine it, philosophically, as little as possible before pronouncing on it and what appears out of it. Or, it is an attempt to determine, *once and for all*, the ambiguous as ambiguous in the sense of an essentially meaningless refusal, rather than a refusal “pregnant” with *impossible* meaning.⁴⁶ This is how Janicaud justifies a position of unrelenting suspicion with respect to any other interpretation of the origin of experience.

Thus, there is a certain inconsistency in Janicaud’s argument: leaving the origin and its ambiguity in tension is still a way of interpreting the origin and its ambiguity. However, Janicaud’s position could still be justified if the *impossible* that may come from such ambiguity is not only *difficult* to access but is in itself a compromised philosophical notion. I will now explore this possibility.

⁴⁵ Janicaud, *PWO* 72; “c’est à partir de ce jeu où ce tiennent, se reflètent et miroitent la terre, le ciel, les divins, les mortels, que doit s’entendre ce mot étrange, à l’allure tautologique: ‘Le monde se déploie dans la mesure où il se donne comme monde’” (*Pé* 105).

⁴⁶ I use the word “pregnant,” here, with knowing reference to the end of Derrida’s essay, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in which he writes that the contemporary turn away from the history of metaphysics (the study of a succession of transcendental-signifieds (Man, God, etc.)), and a turn towards the study of language, or the understanding of understanding, implies “two interpretations of interpretation”—(1) a return to the origin that lives in exile from interpretation; (2) the affirmation of the play of the sign. Derrida also argues that this turn does not mark a time for *choice* between these two options. Instead, Derrida writes, “there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose conception, formation, gestation, and labor we are only catching a glimpse of today. I [Derrida] employ these words [...] with a glance toward the operations of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity” (“SSP” 370-371). French text: “il y a là un type de question, disons encore historique, dont nous ne faisons aujourd’hui qu’entrevoir la conception, la formation, la gestation, le travail. Et je [Derrida] dis ces mots les yeux tournés [...] vers les opérations de l’enfantement; mais aussi vers ceux qui, dans une société dont je ne m’exclus pas, les détournent devant l’encore innommable qui s’annonce et qui ne peut le faire, comme c’est nécessaire chaque fois qu’une naissance est à l’œuvre, que sous l’espèce de la non- espèce, sous la forme informe, muette, infante et terrifiante de la monstruosité” (“Sj” 427-8).

Janicaud's Philosophy: The Overcoming of Overcoming⁴⁷

This debate concerning the “theological” turn cannot merely be a dispute over a certain disciplinary definition. The very response of Derrida to Marion in their discussion indicates that there is more room in the definition of “phenomenology” for some concern for ultimacy than Janicaud allows. Let us revisit that discussion.

In Marion's debate with Derrida, when moderator Richard Kearney presses Marion on whether or not he is still doing phenomenology, Marion responds, “whether what I am doing, or what Derrida is doing, is within phenomenology or beyond, [... right] now [...] is not very important. I claim that I am still faithful to phenomenology [...] But this will be an issue, if any, for our successors.”⁴⁸ While this does not express a philosophical position *per se*, Marion's ambivalent distancing of his work from the issue of whether or not it is “phenomenology” is obviously motivated by a desire to get on with the research he sees as necessary, and not to stall on this question.⁴⁹ But this is not the ultimate word on this matter in Marion's discussion with Derrida. Recall, Derrida's position in “Dénégations” is clearly a desperate attempt *not* to speak, to properly gesture to the other in a third way that is counter to speech and its reliance on predication (presence/absence). Furthermore, that essay simply ends on a question; there was no absolute statement given on whether negative theology or deconstruction could properly attain this silence. Admittedly, “Dénégations” was written ten years before Derrida and Marion's debate, but this perhaps goes to show that Derrida's thought may have moved more in the

⁴⁷ The latter part of this section relies on Simon Critchley's interpretation in his article: “The Overcoming of Overcoming: On Dominique Janicaud,” which was included as the introduction to the English translation of *L'homme va-t-il dépasser l'humain*. See: Simon Critchley, “The Overcoming of Overcoming: On Dominique Janicaud,” in *On the Human Condition*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), vii-xxiv. [Hereafter: “OO.”]

⁴⁸ “On the Gift” 68.

⁴⁹ It is clear that, in writing this thesis, I have found it important to stall on this question. Furthermore, Prusak writes that this very response, on Marion's part, “is obviously inadequate” even if Marion's exasperation is understandable (Prusak 6).

direction of a tortured speaking founded in the impossible, that maintains, paradoxically, the silence of “Dénégations.”⁵⁰ Derrida, at the conclusion of his and Marion’s second discussion, just after having said that he is still a phenomenologist (trying to go phenomenologically beyond phenomenology), cites Husserl as having said that the alter ego cannot be purely intuited, and that this “is a limit of phenomenology that appears within phenomenology. That is the place where I work also.”⁵¹ Thus, Derrida is showing a definite acceptance of the claim to operate *at the limits*, but still *within* a phenomenological paradigm. But then he is also clearly insisting on the necessity of the impossible for rational thought; *the impossible ought to change how one thinks*. Thus, Derrida is showing a certain sensitivity to the paradox of the need for the *return* of the other, though outside of possibility. Derrida is recognising that, in reducing to what it is possible for me to constitute (Husserlian phenomenology), one fails the other in a significant sense. This cannot but inspire a certain desire for, if not the presence of the other, then a certain closeness or, better, intimacy, *community* with the other. The question, then, is whether one can ever allow for such intimacy or community with what is impossible.

At the close of his final speech in the second discussion with Marion, Derrida characterises his whole endeavour as a hope. It is clear—if we recall Caputo’s comment about Derrida suppressing knowledge for the sake of faith—that this *hope* is Derrida’s way of justifying one’s concern for the impossible other without collapsing the other into one’s capacities, i.e. letting it remain *itself*, letting it remain *otherly*, letting it remain *impossible*.

Marion expresses, in their discussion, the desire to preserve otherness in the same sense.

However, Marion is less consistent than Derrida since he speaks equally of givenness as simply

⁵⁰ In other areas, Derrida is said to have begun to contemplate a need for more straightforward speech; see Richard Kearney, “Derrida and the Ethics of Dialogue,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 19, no.1, (1993): 1-14.

⁵¹ “On the Gift” 76.

not knowledge, *not truth*, as well as speaking of it as, specifically, *non-metaphysical knowledge*, (“knowledge of another type,”)⁵² *non-metaphysical truth*, (“[i]f truth is [...] sufficient to annul the gift, then the gift only comes about in being dispensed from *this* truth”).⁵³ That is, while Marion follows the postmodern, continental philosophical tradition’s tendency to conceive of otherness in terms of radical disanalogy with the self’s possibilities, he does, in some sense, leave open the possibility of discovering some analogy between one’s capacities and the other. He does so by making one’s capacities (specifically for *receiving*) potentially limitless though still finite—givenness can be saturated, but my ability to understand and express it is still restricted. One can know that one was given too much rather than not enough.

Though a fuller discussion of this issue will be taken up next chapter, allow me to mention here that the notion of analogy has the advantage of sustaining extreme difference between oneself and the other while still maintaining some form of continuity between one’s faculties and otherness. This was a central element of the mediaeval Christian metaphysical tradition. The intellect (as a human faculty) enjoys a certain continuity with being. This allows for one to *know* the being of beings. But one would also conceive of *being itself* (in a version of the ontological difference) as spanning an interval of analogies that permit certain modes being to surpass the capacities of the intellect, while still remaining in continuity with it. The other’s otherness, therefore, can still be said to *have being* without totalising what it is possible to understand of the other and violating the other’s otherness. Otherness, as still participating in *being*, therefore, can still be perhaps partially understood, rather than having to be affirmed only as otherwise than being, and ultimately contravene or destroy understanding and, so, only ever

⁵² Marion, “IN” 36; “une connaissance d'un autre type” (“Au nom” n. pag.).

⁵³ Marion “Sketch” 87. [Emphasis in original.]

permit reference or intention. What is problematic in Marion is that he seems to try to appeal to both a notion of analogous otherness—i.e. the given as giving too much—but also the notion of otherness as total *disanalogy*—i.e. the given as giving so much it is as though it gives nothing, primarily because it gives no *being*. Thus, one could say that, according to Marion, givenness partakes in analogy, while being remains confined to univocity. However, total disanalogous otherness, however one integrates into one's thinking, if it is not simply incoherent or irrational nothingness, can only be, logically speaking, intended and never returned in a reduction to our capacities. That is, if one unequivocally jettisons any kind of reduction of otherness to one's own capacities, then one also jettisons analogy, which alone justifies any form of community, or intimacy between oneself and the other. Indication is not intimate. The agreement between Derrida and Marion, therefore, when they both express the desire to remain *rational* in their dealings with the impossible, could be interpreted as the attempt to maintain analogy (true community or intimacy) without violence. In this agreement, they perhaps both exceed their adherence to the conception of otherness as totally disanalogous. Again, this will be explored in greater depth next chapter.

One of the questions that must be raised for this debate, then, is if otherness must be defined through total disanalogy, or whether the other should remain ultimately commensurate with, reducible to, some kind of rational intelligibility. Clearly, Husserl's reduction to constant presence, though it is a clear variety of intelligibility, does not allow *otherness* to appear at all (hence, the alter-ego is simply *not* the other, even if the alter-ego is indicative of the trace of the other). Husserl's reduction, if taken as a complete reduction, plainly effaces *différance*. In fact, Derrida, Marion, and Janicaud all maintain this. But then they offer three distinct interpretations of what this means for philosophy.

1) Derrida, especially according to Caputo, will try to escape philosophy (as metaphysics, i.e. concern with scientificity, knowledge, truth, being, presence) in order to participate in minimising the violence towards the other that all language incurs, and will still maintain attention towards impossible otherness as the proper (or ethical) focus for *thought*. However, while this follows Caputo's reading of Derrida, I question its sufficiency since I read Derrida as having more sympathy for the need for community than Caputo does, since the indecision of Derrida's position allows for one to interpret him in a variety of ways. Furthermore, Caputo has a tendency to simply *redefine* this acceptance of disanalogous otherness as *true intimacy*; *breech* somehow becomes closeness; un-returnable intention becomes the freedom of the other to be (other). But, of course, for Caputo, if the other *is*, the other is not *other*, and so the other is not. As I have already argued, I believe one's desire for the other, on Caputo's reading of Derrida, becomes an irrational one, especially if it is couched merely in the empty freedom of arbitrary choice and purely existential intention.

2) Marion will, in his own way, attempt to escape philosophy. But it is perhaps more accurate to say that Marion decides to redefine philosophy as a phenomenology with the ultimate horizon as its concern. Marion seeks to ground philosophic thought in a paradoxical horizon that reduces to what the other gives of itself, and not to our own capacities, thereby allowing both the comprehensible and the incomprehensible a role in directing philosophic thought.

3) Janicaud understands the difficulties involved in paying heed to otherness. Janicaud clearly argues, however, that, since the other cannot return, since there is no community but the ersatz community that comes about from the mere indication of total otherness, we should nevertheless focus on what *does* return. In focusing on what does return, Janicaud clearly sees phenomenology as not concerned with this issue of otherness. Janicaud even lodges this

criticism at Derrida, who is not normally the object of Janicaud's criticism, but who falls under the same "critical point of *The 'Theological Turn,'*" when Derrida, "in saluting [the] body of work [of Levinas] [...] displace[s] [...] the intentional thematisation toward an ethical—if not religious—reception in terms of hospitality."⁵⁴ Janicaud is perhaps never more elliptical than he is here, and so I wish to proceed with only a cautious interpretation of what he means by this statement. It appears that Janicaud understands Derrida as emphasising that Levinas' works have left us something essentially *consecrated*, i.e. something invaluable in terms of its ethical import. Derrida seems to go beyond just expressing his esteem for Levinas, and makes instead a certain claim about the proper interpretation of Levinas. Whatever this shift toward the ethical, on Derrida's part, may represent, according to Janicaud, it is not phenomenological.

Phenomenology, for Janicaud, must remain neutral in what it *receives*. Janicaud, then, does not simply reject Derrida and Marion's understanding of the discourse beyond presence and absence initiated by the third way of pure reference, but he insists on its irrelevance for phenomenology; he insists on the irrelevance of noticing "a limit of phenomenology that appears within phenomenology."⁵⁵ He justifies his position by arguing that the pursuit of the *eidê* is merely a methodology; it cannot be made into a paradoxical (non)foundation for entering into philosophy, or *thought*, itself. However, while Janicaud, throughout both of his essays, relies on his claim that he is not limiting philosophy in general through his limitation of phenomenology, this comes into question when one actually looks to his understanding of philosophy itself.

In *L'homme va-t-il dépasser l'humain*, Janicaud puts forward the argument that while the human condition is irreducibly ambiguous, it is also always suspended between, in the parlance

⁵⁴ Janicaud, *PWO* 58; "le point de vue critique du *Tournant théologique* [...] [quand Derrida déplace] la thématization intentionnelle vers un accueil éthique—sinon religieux" (*Pé* 87).

⁵⁵ Recall that this is Derrida's comment; "On the Gift," 76.

of that work, *the angel and the beast* (“l’ange et la bête”).⁵⁶ Janicaud’s minimal conclusion is that one must hold these elements in tension. This kind of cautious conclusion, whereby one identifies a certain ambiguity and one is then to simply cease probingly investigating it and instead hold the various elements involved in tension in order, precisely, to *maintain that ambiguity*, is ubiquitous in all of Janicaud’s works that I have consulted for this project. The ambiguity of what *humanity* is, what makes humankind human, and what can make humankind *non-human* is irreducible. It is so because humanity is itself a kind of overcoming of itself at every stage. In being precisely this capacity for overcoming, Janicaud’s recommendation is to cease trying to overcome overcoming. Or one could put it, as Critchley does: “to leave behind all fantasies of overcoming, whether that concerns an overcoming of metaphysics, of rationality, or humanity as such.”⁵⁷ That is, Janicaud sees himself as a defender of the possible, of what is commensurate with our capacities (metaphysics, rationality, humanity). The way he explicates this position is by drawing on examples from the twentieth century, whose horrors, according to Janicaud, demand an ethical response in some form of humanism—death camps require a certain insistence on the sacrality of human life. That is, we need humanism to keep ourselves from the very real possibilities of becoming *subhuman* or *bestly*. But the overcoming in the other direction—the *superhuman* or the *angelic*—is to be recognised as the *possible* already provided for within the ambiguity that is “man.”

In this way, Janicaud maintains that philosophy, or, more specifically, the restrictions of rationality, are not elements of some project that failed or that will inevitably result in a totally technocratic attitude towards the world (*re* the end of philosophy). Philosophy is something that

⁵⁶ Janicaud, “OHC” 22, cf. 58; *Hdh* 42, cf. 108.

⁵⁷ Critchley, “OO” vii.

needs to be achieved *better* than before; it needs to be *better articulated, more carefully* laid out. Thus, this echoes very closely Janicaud's view of phenomenology itself and his critique of Marion: the principles of phenomenology must be *more faithfully adhered to*, in the sense of adhering to the most straightforward meaning of *phenomena, appearance, fulfilment, intuition, givenness*, etc. And, with this thesis of trying to subdue the desire to overcome overcoming, what Critchley calls the "governing logic"⁵⁸ of all Janicaud's work, Janicaud's reasons for maintaining such a position come into stronger relief: The impossible is simply nothing that can occupy our rational attention. There is no call for a true overcoming or a desire to surpass our possibilities because we *are* an ambiguous, limitless, but also concrete set of *possibilities*. Janicaud completely collapses the impossible *into* the possible. Any attempt to reduce experience to some dimensions that can take stock of the impossible will have one of two results: Either **1)** one will fail and simply return to an explicitly metaphysical framework or **2)** one will cross no metaphysical lines, but will relegate rationality to being pointless as well as fail to inspire proper ethical responses by failing to have us focus on our *possibilities*.

This second result, in my view, applies to Derrida and his method of orientating thought by the impossible. Janicaud's argument is in fact that, with the definition of the impossible as totally disanalogous to anything possible, our *possibilities* may be mistaken for impossibilities. Consider, Derrida makes the distinction between *le futur* (what is predictable) and *l'avenir* (what is *always to come*). And *l'avenir* is the (non)place of the impossible. But Janicaud problematises this distinction, when he writes the following (which requires quoting at length):

If we had asked a man of the Middle Ages the question: 'Is a being that flies from Paris to Rome in two hours still a man?' he probably would have replied: 'It is a particularly swift bird or an angel, but not a man.' If we ask ourselves the question: 'Is an electronically aided being that reproduces through cloning still a man?,' would we not be

⁵⁸ Critchley, "OO" vii.

tempted to answer in the negative too? In both cases, the actual capacities of man seem to define him. Now the evolution and history of the human type have shown that man is precisely the being who continually exceeds the frontiers of his field of action, sometimes to the point of being no longer recognizable or identifiable in his own eyes. But is it the superhuman, the inhuman or other expressions of the human that lie in wait for us? Are not the dangers of monstrosity, which haunt our humanity, only myths that are reserved for science fiction? Not exclusively. We must compare myths and fictions to reality, encountering terrifying regressions into the inhuman. Are these warded off or nurtured by the call of the superhuman? [...] it will be important to show the ambiguity of the call of the superhuman, between the nobility of the desire for transfiguration and the vertigo of reduced capacities. [...] We will try to put forward a twofold strategy, both defensive (towards the inhuman) and open (to what ‘passes man’ in man). Overcoming prejudices and purely ideological oppositions, this strategy will afford at least the advantage, and perhaps the originality, of expanding the horizon and of opening up this salutary prospect: not to lose hope in ourselves.⁵⁹

In defining “man” as an ambiguous set of possibilities, but then shifting one’s focus to a vision of the future designating some being whose capacities are nothing like one’s own—while what is designated would still be “man”—Janicaud is implying that, because the *ever to come* will always be reduced to what *has come*, there is no need to deal with the impossible. Furthermore, this attitude favours a pragmatic or functional reduction of one’s relation to the other. An “ethical” response to inhumanity and barbarism must come from a call not to what is *beyond* our capacities, an altruism entirely for the impossible other, but a call to the limitless possibilities

⁵⁹ Janicaud, “OHC” 3-4; “Si l’on avait posé à un homme du Moyen Âge la question: ‘Un être qui vole en deux heures de Paris à Rome est-il encore un homme?’, il aurait probablement répondu: ‘C’est un oiseau particulièrement vélocité ou un ange, mais pas un homme.’ Si l’on nous pose la question: Un être électroniquement assisté se reproduisant par clonage sera-t-il encore un homme?’, ne serons-nous pas tentés de répondre également par la négative? Dans les deux cas, les capacités effectives de l’homme semblent le définir; or l’évolution et l’histoire du type humain ont montré que l’homme est justement l’être qui déplace sans cesse les frontières de son champ d’action, au point de n’être parfois plus reconnaissable ou indétectable à ses propres yeux. Mais ce qui nous guette, est-ce le surhumain, l’inhumain ou d’autres visages de l’humain? Les menaces de monstruosité qui hantent notre humanité ne sont-elles que des mythifications réservées à la science-fiction? Pas seulement. Il faudra confronter mythes et fictions aux réalités, en y affrontant de terrifiantes régressions dans l’inhumain. Celles-ci sont-elles conjurées ou nourries par l’appel du surhumain? [...] il sera important de montrer l’ambiguïté de l’appel du surhumain, entre la noblesse du désir de transfiguration et le vertige de pouvoirs démultipliés. [...] On tentera de proposer une stratégie présentera au moins l’avantage, et peut-être l’originalité, d’élargir l’horizon et d’ouvrir cette perspective salutaire: ne pas désespérer de nous-mêmes” (*Hdh* 9-11).

within the human span of “man.” If Derrida calls for hope in the other, Janicaud calls for “hope in ourselves.”

Again, as far as Caputo’s reading is concerned, Derrida does not posit any return for the impossible. But he does posit *passion* for it. I have argued that *passion* for the impossible cannot maintain itself without intimacy; indeed it has to arise from intimacy. The lack of intimacy with the impossible other may lead one to decide, like Janicaud, that such a pursuit is irrational, and that what is rational is a certain pragmatic demarcation of the ethical. As noted previously, Caputo writes that, if the messiah were ever to come, Derrida would still ask him: “When will you come.” But Caputo also writes that Marion’s willingness to *receive* something of the impossible is misattributed to *this life* rather than the *life after death*.⁶⁰ That is, even Caputo finds a place for the return of the impossible (even though it is within another impossible, from his perspective). Thus, if one were to take seriously the notion of there being *no return* for the impossible other, I believe one should maintain a position like Janicaud’s. Janicaud’s position comes with a rejection of the problem of impossibility within philosophy. This position is strictly Kantian; indeed, Prusak, in his introduction to Janicaud’s first essay, notes that Janicaud’s argument against Marion and the new phenomenologists reduces to a kind of Kantian critique of any attempt to say anything concerning what is noumenal:

The Kantian tone of Janicaud's work is [...] striking. [...] the framework of his critique cannot but recall the first *Critique*. [...] The upshot is that it could well be asked whether Janicaud’s critique is sufficiently “precise and delicate,” or not rather more systematically Kantian than he wants it to be.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “[Marion’s] is an hypothesis better fit for explaining the possibility not of historical Revelation but of post-historical, supra-historical life in eternity. But in the meantime, on the way from here to eternity, we are compelled to make a more circumspect use of phenomenology *in theology*.” (Caputo, “HP” 89) [Emphasis in original].

⁶¹ Prusak 8.

Nevertheless, if one accepts the other as totally disanalogous with respect to the realm of possibility and human understanding, Janicaud's position is a defensible one. To commit oneself to an other that is impossible, not merely in the sense of being ultimately incomprehensible but in the sense of having no analogy with oneself, is to have taken note of something that is not relevant. If the other gives nothing, then there will be the tendency to hope only in ourselves, and ethics will become a kind of pragmatics. Without the consideration of the impossible, one risks losing true community; i.e. community between oneself and what one does not understand. Thus, desire for the other, the effect the impossible other may have, has to be encountered within a rational framework, *and* it is not enough to leave it as a mere trace that gives nothing.

The conclusion of Marion and Derrida's debate is that the pursuit of the impossible remains somehow rational. I interpret this as the recognition that, while otherness ought to be preserved in its impossibility, it cannot be *pursued* without some possibility of intimacy or community. Thus, for the pursuit of the impossible to be rational, to have reason to pursue the impossible, one must display the means by which one can be said to encounter otherness and not violate or destroy it. Janicaud simply eschews this focus for philosophy and proposes a Kantian and somewhat pragmatist position.⁶² The aim on the part of Marion and Derrida is precisely to find a way beyond such a position, even if they recognise the philosophical difficulties in doing so. The impossible beyond experience ought to draw our attention, but it can only do so if some element of it can be given an account, if it can be shown to retain an analogical connection with human possibility. This happens, not, strictly speaking, by reducing the impossible, but by fully trusting that our incapacities provide an openness to another realm.

⁶² Critchley indicates in his obituary for Janicaud that Janicaud was "committed to the idea that philosophy should attend to the concrete world and nothing besides," and that Janicaud's philosophical concerns led him into "proximity with both Foucault and Habermas, but also Anglo-American philosophy of science." See: Simon Critchley, "Dominique Janicaud, 1937–2002," *Radical Philosophy*, 117 (2003): 56.

CHAPTER 4: GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS, THE OTHER, AND THE POTENTIAL OF ANALOGY

The aim in this chapter is to offer support for Marion's general position that there is a way to give an account, from within a rational discourse, of the experience of the impossible. However, I will not do so by attempting to reinforce his particular position that the impossible other can appear, unambiguously, out of the paradoxical horizon of pure givenness—at least not as Marion conceives of it. The debate regarding the “theological” turn, in centring on the notion of otherness as originally, totally disanalogous to any element of subjective experience, finds itself, in my view, at an impasse. Such otherness is represented by *différance* or originary rupture, and such a rupture can never be overcome without a violation of otherness. However, such otherness becomes alien to any philosophical endeavour, and this causes serious issues, leading ultimately to a dismissal of the concern for the impossible, as I argued in Chapter 3. Looking to Gadamer's understanding of conversation—including how one understands the other in conversation—I will argue, still allows one to conceive of the other as an impossible other, who nevertheless does not escape all analogy or the potential to be recognised by the self, within the rational sphere of thought. This allows the pursuit of the impossible to properly remain an element of a rational discourse. Thus, in what follows, I argue that an appreciation of the relationship between rationality and impossibility may be reached by beginning from within finite understanding and expanding towards incomprehension (following Gadamer's position), rather than by beginning from the incomprehension of impossible givenness and emphasising the other's right to impose upon one's understanding (following Marion's position). In many ways, I argue for a similar conclusion to Marion's, but from the opposite starting position.

I argue in this way because I find it to be, ultimately, a more defensible position than Marion's. It allows one to more easily demonstrate the relevance of the impossible as a pursuit

derived from within a rational system, and to respond to and resist criticisms that would otherwise lead one to positions akin to irrationalism (Caputo) or pragmatism (Janicaud). In this context, an argument that begins from finitude conceived of in Gadamer's sense allows one to recognise the analogical structure that sustains oneself and the other, but which nevertheless, I will argue, also permits the discovery of true difference. On the other hand, an argument that begins with the impossible disallows such analogy and overstates the role that difference must play, tending towards the irrational preservation of otherness at the expense of rational community or the pragmatic dismissal of the issue of the impossible from a rational standpoint.

I will begin this chapter by recapitulating what I have established thus far in this thesis, while directing the central issue of the "theological" turn more towards Gadamerian hermeneutic themes of conversation and linguistic understanding. Then I will give an overview of Gadamer's philosophy in general, including its relationship to metaphysics. I will also cover some of those who have dealt with the topic of Gadamer and "theology," and distinguish my approach from theirs. I will, finally, consider the understanding of otherness that arises through a consideration of Gadamer's notion of conversation; that is, I will detail what I believe is accomplished, in regard to the impossible, by Gadamer's notion of conversational "lenience" (*Nachsicht*).

Recapitulation and Introduction of a New Theme

In the interest of both summarising what has been established thus far in this thesis project, as well as beginning to change the direction of the conversation, I will highlight that the debate regarding the "theological" turn in French phenomenology, as I have described it, is a debate centred on the issue of whether one can, in maintaining a philosophical or rational position, provide an effective account of why one must leave room for pursuing the impossible beyond

experience. This has involved questioning the relationship between otherness as impossible (i.e. what does not come to presence and can seemingly only be indicated, not described or truly Named) and the rational structure of a philosophical discourse, phenomenology in particular. The matter of God becomes the ultimate case of this issue of impossible otherness, since God's essence, by definition, cannot be intuited. If one claims to be able to reduce the experience of God to a phenomenological horizon, one is said to have reinstated metaphysics—that is, a totalising discourse that erases otherness. However, I have argued that if one claims to be incapable of providing *any sense* of the impossible other, one is left only with the choice of irrationally pursuing a problematic formulation of the impossible or pragmatically dismissing the impossible in all its formulations. This should, perhaps, lead one to reconsider the merits of a variety of thinking that is in certain ways closer to “metaphysics” than the post-modern, continental discourses considered thus far.

It is notable that, in this debate, the status of phenomenology as a unique rational system is emphasised. Phenomenology is defined here primarily by its practice of describing horizontal structures or backgrounds against which experiences can be measured or judged. This metaphorical notion of the horizontal structure is a highly effective explanatory tool that is used to explicate the constitution of experience itself and what can be expected to appear within it, in principle—at the border, or limit, or horizon at which things come into or disappear from view. However, the description of the specific nature of the fundamental or widest possible horizontal structure of experience, through various interpretations of what the reduction to said horizon is able to accomplish and reveal the ground of said horizon to be, has been subjected to repeated and radical revision. The revisions are aimed at properly determining *whatever it is* to which one

is reducing—i.e. the quality and capacity of experience and its relation to subjectivity and its possibilities.

The “theological” turn, then, in focusing on the contentious claims of Marion, is most properly described as an experiment wherein those recommending the turn are not only trying to determine whether the horizontal structure of phenomenology is able to reveal the limitless capacity of human beings to *indicate* radical transcendence or impossible otherness (*re* Derrida and Caputo), but also whether the ultimate horizontal structure is itself irreducibly paradoxical or enigmatic,¹ such that from within a phenomenologically defined milieu, one is able to provide an account of the experience of impossible otherness in terms of a special case of fulfilment (*re* Marion). A significant critique that calls the entire “theological” turn into question, may be formulated as follows: *If we wish to defend rationality*—and defend *phenomenology* in particular with its horizontal structure of regular experience within which one is able to supply concrete judgments of the appearances—then, while it is possible to indicate impossible otherness from within such a rational system and no error is committed so long as one makes no attempt to describe some universal or intersubjective form of receptivity arising out of one’s ability to indicate limitlessly, such a practice is, at best, a distraction, and, at worst, it keeps us from more important matters that are based in the rational view of the world. Furthermore, some of these important matters are properly practical and ethical and they do not involve concern for impossible otherness. Therefore, the matter of impossible otherness should be left to the side in favour of a more concerted effort at a careful, though minimal or circumspect, pragmatic, rational project (*re* Janicaud).

¹ Marion refers to givenness as an enigma, thematically, in *Givenness and Hermeneutics*.

Thus, in this area of contemporary continental philosophy, there is a focus on the conflict between the rational background against which we measure our experiences and the other that is seen as necessarily escaping any totality that rationality may construct. That is to say, the effectiveness of rationality comes at the expense of what is other. Rationality does not exclude otherness intentionally or willingly, so to speak, but merely by definition. *Différance* displays the way in which phenomenological rationality, by developing a background of experience to which one may reduce all events, creates an *interior* for judgment and relinquishes or effaces what is otherwise, thus creating, in essence, a false *exterior*. That is to say, *différance* is not truly *exterior* to meaning—it is always exceptionally near to, but never contained by meaning; it plays a key role in generating meaning without itself appearing “within” the meaning generated. But at the moment when a new meaning is recognised, when a new word is differentiated, it is done by the effacement of *différance*—the constituting non-presence, the difference between words that allows them to be separate, meaningful words. And so, the only way in which one may *speak* of the role represented by *différance* is *as* an exterior, *as* an other to meaning, *as* an impossible, *as* what cannot be *produced* or *reduced to presence*, *as that which does not respond to one’s call for it to display itself*.² Crucially, *différance* is, *itself*, that about which one may come to no conclusions; *différance* is the opening onto the impossible, but it is only an opening. Nothing can be said to definitively present itself or gather disparate experiences together beyond that opening.

If this much is accepted, then the rational and the impossible are elements of phenomenological experience that are inherently mutually exclusive and conflictual, thus, the

² Of course, the issue of *exteriority* is one way of describing the constant in Derrida’s thought—it is precisely because one needs an *interior* (rationality, speech, etc.) in order to define an *exterior* (impossibility, writing, etc.) that the issue of their relation arises and the incommensurability between them seems to present itself. Cf. Hart, *BI* 53-4.

issue becomes merely a matter of the *priority* one may accord to rational pursuits, on the one hand, or to the pursuit of the impossible, on the other. Caputo, in my interpretation of his reading of Derrida, goes the furthest in suppressing the *priority* of the rational. I would say he does this more unequivocally than Derrida himself—a follower of a position may always present an even more concentrated version of the position in question, without the self-doubting and self-questioning of the original. This may be especially true in the case of Derrida, who was perhaps uniquely preoccupied with remaining with indecision and the tense opening offered by radical questioning. Caputo believes that the impossible other—that to which one might only refer but never gain “meaningful” access—given its necessary erasure in the metaphysical history of Western thought, deserves a certain primacy now, if for no other reason than for the sake of a *just* change of topic (or for the sake of the more radical novelty of a *just* change to a *non-topic*).³ Janicaud, conversely, in the context of this debate, has done the most to suppress the priority of the impossible and emphasise the priority of the *strictly rational*, in the sense of Kant’s first critique. However, note that both of these figures remain wholly Kantian in that the impossible beyond experience and the rational have no analogical structure between them. And I would maintain that such rupture does no favours for either the rational (diverting phenomenology towards a kind of circumspect or pragmatic endeavour), nor for the impossible (distorting “theology” into an kind of irrationalism).

³ Caputo, following Derrida, often comments on deconstruction’s concern for *justice* and the “democracy to come”; see: *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 60-124. Cf: Jacques Derrida, “Force De Loi: Le Fondement Mystique De L’Autorite,” *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990): 920-1045. (This publication includes the French version, as well as its English translation by Mary Quaintance, on alternating pages). The basic sentiment is that, given the erasure of otherness in Western thought, deconstruction *is* justice (as giving to things their due), in the sense that it gives attention to otherness, to what has been erased by history, trying to give otherness the *representation* that is its *right*. For a critique of the position that “deconstruction *is* justice,” see: Hart, *BI* 88-90.

Marion is fundamentally trying to escape such a Kantian dilemma and assert that, with respect to the rational and the impossible, neither has priority over the other. Marion may recognise more than Caputo that without a rationality that is able to support an understanding of the impossible, the critique of those like Janicaud should hold sway in a philosophical context. Now, if one jettisons philosophy or phenomenology entirely (as Janicaud continuously entreats the “new phenomenologists” to do), then one may pursue such matters as one pleases. But one does so without any clear rational basis, making such an offer somewhat hollow, and one would then be recommending some kind of abandonment of philosophy itself (as is a tendency with deconstruction). When the impossible is shown to be impossible in the sense of sustaining only indication, then the piety of thought is shown to extend to nothing beyond referring to the impossible’s inscrutable, impenetrable, ambiguous fact because that fact lacks all relation to human understanding and its need for manifestation and recognition. This makes a *philosophical* ethics untenable, since such a position must reduce the other to one’s own understanding, and therefore cannot permit the true other to direct or curb one’s actions and responses. This, however, also makes a *non-philosophical* ethics, if not untenable, then overly peculiar, since such an impossible—meant to drive one’s ethical concern—could never retain priority in one’s attention, because there is no way to receive something of it without projecting into it one’s own desires for it. All interaction with otherness would become violence. One’s only option, then, would be to perform “[v]iolence against violence,”⁴ i.e. to mitigate the violence one would unavoidably do to the other by doing violence to oneself, or to one’s understanding, or to one’s language (i.e. to whatever erases the other). In doing so, one would consistently interrupt the natural flow of human attention in order to at least gesture towards what does not and cannot

⁴ Derrida, “VM” 145; “Violence contre violence” (“Vm” 172).

enter one's attention. But given such a conclusion, one could be forgiven for ignoring such impossibility and its requirement for constant violence, and tend instead only to one's own localised capacity for understanding and description.

Yet, this conclusion would only be unavoidable if there were no way to reconcile the rational and the impossible. Marion clearly disagrees that, after the deconstruction of presence, all that may be ethically permitted is the indication of the other. And Marion certainly also disagrees with Janicaud's portrayal of rationality, since Marion recognises that the impossible must have some guiding influence on our rational systems, even if the proper account of that influence is difficult to articulate and tends to draw the suspicion that it is ideologically motivated. Thus, Marion attempts to find a way to make rationality itself appeal to a fundamental horizon that is not conceived of in terms of the intelligibility of either presence or absence. A reduction to such a fundamental horizon, he claims, does not violate deconstruction's revelation of the inalienably foundational constituting role for non-presence. But this claim is only coherent if one allows that *it is possible and philosophically justifiable to reduce experience itself (experience of anything and everything) to a paradox*. A paradox, in this case, is simply something that, in some sense, appears but also cannot be fully understood or secured in thought. And so, such a reduction would allow something of the paradox to be grasped, but never in such a way that it is inscribed within the totality that is produced out of our subjective possibilities. Furthermore, Marion contends that phenomenology has always had within itself the potential for just such a reduction. One will recognise this potential if one is able to understand that the very givenness of the phenomena has been waiting to become fully considered and constituted as the paradoxically ultimate horizon. This ultimate horizon allows for a conception of experience wherein what phenomenalisises is immediately given (and so immanent and finite); but what is

given is also purely given, or given in such a way that the given's givenness remains an enigma, thus it cannot be reduced to anything but more givenness. And so givenness, upon further analysis, only multiplies how much it gives or can only ever give more and more (and so it is transcendent and infinite). This is the result of what Marion considers a *full* reduction.⁵

But Marion's reduction to givenness has proven difficult to understand, or difficult to conceive of as anything but a commitment to the ultimate outcome for which he argues—a personal (or at best hermeneutical) desire *for God*, not a phenomenologically necessary insistence *by God* to be able to (at least partially) self-manifest through givenness. This, I would argue, is because Marion, following deconstruction, divides the self from the other in a manner that appears to be irreconcilable and thus requires one to interpret God's self-manifestation or self-revelation as a return from across that divide instituted at the origin by *différance*. Such a divide cannot but provide ambiguity between too much givenness and too much intention and, consequently, such an identification (of *God*) is seen as unwarranted.

However, one may distinguish two very general elements of Marion's position: **1)** There is the goal he wishes to accomplish, and **2)** there are the means by which he attempts to accomplish that goal. To secure the distance, otherness, or impossibility of the other, Marion's *means* are those of deconstruction, which initially severs the community between self and other, so as to avoid the reduction of the other to the self, and then any *apparition* of the other becomes worthy of suspicion. On the other hand, Marion's *goal* is in part to avoid the rejection of the impossible as well as the irrationality that may be integrated into our conception of it.

Furthermore, it is clear that Caputo's goal is to safeguard the impossible and Janicaud's goal is to

⁵ Consider: "the reduction not only does not suspend givenness but provokes it and makes it increase in direct proportion to the accomplishment of the reduction" (Marion, *BG* 73); "la réduction non seulement ne suspend pas la donation, mais la provoque et la fait croître en proportion directe de son propre accomplissement" (*Éd* 122).

affirm the powers of the rational.⁶ Going forward, I choose to read Marion primarily in terms of his goal, and I will seek a way to alter (potentially even drastically alter) his means in order to better achieve that goal.⁷

Marion is right when he writes that “[a]ny phenomenology of givenness is likely to face a refusal that is based [...] on a suspicion; it can be tolerated that the phenomenon amounts to a given, but not that this given should refer to givenness, however one defines it.”⁸ In trying to make pure givenness itself the all-encompassing phenomenon to be examined, disclosing its paradoxical capacities and cementing phenomenology within a discourse that accepts the irreducibility of paradox or recognises that a full reduction results in productive paradox, Marion has alienated many of his readers, suggesting to many that he is doing something untenable.⁹ It should be noted, though it is something of an aside, that Marion’s phenomenological investigations that utilise the notion of givenness, outside of his claims concerning the total otherness of God and the implications for the possibility of revelation, largely stand without criticism. Caputo explains this qualified acceptance of Marion’s position: “Marion has successfully described saturated phenomena on the natural order, but he has failed to establish that the phenomena of Revelation are marked by an excess of givenness beyond intention instead

⁶ This is, indeed, the English translation of the title of his book: Dominique Janicaud, *Powers of the Rational: Science, Technology, and the Future of Thought*, trans. Peg Birmingham and Elizabeth Birmingham (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 1994); *La puissance du rationnel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

⁷ It may be noted that I have left Derrida somewhat behind. This is intentional. Derrida’s goal is ambiguous, or Derrida does everything he can to avoid having a summarisable goal, since he is consummately cautious concerning what ought to happen next in regard to the issue of the impossible. And one cannot force trust into a suspicious heart; at a certain point, one can only continue to trust that that heart’s suspicion is nobly intended, even if it is harmful in practice.

⁸ Marion, *BG* 71; “Toute phénoménologie de la donation s’expose à un refus [...] [dérivé entièrement] de soupçon: on pourrait tolérer que le phénomène revienne à un donné, mais non que ce donné doive renvoyer à la donation, de quelque façon qu’on la définisse” (*Éd* 119).

⁹ The criticisms are that either Marion is **1**) being ideological and plainly metaphysical, as per Janicaud’s critique, or **2**) doing something that may be acceptable up to a point, but must not actually go further than deconstruction with respect to impossible otherness, as per Caputo and Horner’s statements. See: Caputo, “HP” 87; Horner, *RGG* 241-7.

of intention beyond givenness.”¹⁰ That is, Marion’s position collapses back into deconstruction, and is a matter of personal (radical) intention, not the universal recognition of some *Other*. If Marion is trying to maintain the latter, then he is maintaining something incoherent, i.e. totally disanalogous otherness can be even partially understood and reconciled to the self. Moreover, Janicaud has praise for the insightfulness of Marion’s phenomenological descriptions of visual art in terms of the idol and the icon.¹¹ Janicaud simply cannot accept the greater context in which Marion places such phenomenological descriptions. At times, though, Janicaud seems to see Marion’s whole enterprise as conditioned by its endpoint of revelation and sees Marion, therefore, as ideologically perverting phenomenology and its inalienable concern with locality and immanence. Consequently, he sometimes appears to reject the phenomenology of givenness in its entirety. In any event, what is heavily critiqued in Marion is his claim that the ultimate other is even *potentially* identifiable; that the experience of the impossible God is *possible*. Whether there is a horizon that ever provides intelligible insight into otherness is the contentious issue here. Note how this is the contentious issue in both the criticisms of Caputo and Janicaud: In both cases, it is still a matter of the intelligibility of otherness relative to one’s own horizon (no matter how it is defined), and both Caputo and Janicaud consider otherness to be unintelligible or totally disanalogous to any element of our experience. Only *then* do they diverge in regard to what takes *priority* in a phenomenological milieu. Therefore, if one wishes to argue for *both* rationality as well as the pursuit of the impossible, but one argues so as to bolster Marion’s account of the fundamental horizon of *givenness* that explicates how paradox

¹⁰ Caputo, “HP” 88.

¹¹ Janicaud, “TTFP” 98; *Ttpf* 84-5. And here Janicaud also praises another new phenomenologist, Michel Henry, for his investigations of colour.

can *itself* offer us more than total ambiguity, one will draw the same criticism and suspicion that Marion draws.

In beginning to revise the approach to the question of the relationship between rationality and impossibility—that is, in trying to circumvent the tendency of all those involved in the debate towards maintaining that otherness must be conceived as totally disanalogous to the self’s capacities in order to preserve the other from the inherent violence of understanding and community—one ought to reconsider Marion’s notion of givenness. And here I am going to make an, in some ways, audacious suggestion, the rationale of which may only be revealed over the course of the rest of this thesis project. Perhaps the excess of givenness is nothing other than *being*, though it is *being* conceived of in a peculiar manner. Givenness is similar to *being*, if *being* is conceived of as a kind of overwhelming intelligibility (but intelligibility nevertheless). Givenness makes it possible to affirm an appearance of God, thus, it allows one, potentially, to affirm at least that *God* (the totally other) *is*. This is what Marion means when he says that the phenomenon of revelation is *possible*: That God can be said to *be* (in a qualified, paradoxical sense), not that anyone has clear proof or understanding of such *sui generis being*.

Deconstruction maintains that, as in the case of the gift, this cannot be allowed without the effacement of otherness. But I maintain that without such an affirmation, deconstruction only allows the pursuit of the other to be recommended as an existentially irrational pursuit. On the other hand, if the pursuit of the other is recommended by maintaining analogy (in this case, a markedly distant analogy) as the underlying grammar of “the totally other” or “God,” I believe this allows one to maintain Marion’s distinction from the other positions in the debate, as well as allow him to accomplish the goal that he sets for himself. That is, rather than seeing the appeal to analogy and the alliance of givenness and being as a criticism of Marion, one ought to see it as

a way to recover his aim: that the revelation of God is possible within a phenomenological framework.

I believe that Marion's is an eminently admissible phenomenological position since it is simply not unreasonable to assume that there may be a way to pursue the impossible beyond experience without compromising philosophical thought, as well as a way to engage in philosophical thought without excluding the impossible beyond experience. As Marion himself points out, the desire to refuse the possibility of a phenomenon of revelation is clearly a recent, historically conditioned bias. Consider:

[T]here is nothing astonishing in the fact that one inquires after God's right to inscribe himself within phenomenality. What is astonishing is that one should be obstinate—and without conceptual reason—about denying him this right, or rather that one is no longer even surprised by this stubborn refusal.¹²

Speaking in a similar vein, consider Caputo's comment that "Marion thinks that one must either admit the paradox of the saturated phenomenon or one cuts off the possibility of Revelation in advance on the basis of preconceived philosophical conditions or prejudices—for example, naturalistic and reductionistic ideas about what is possible—regarding the limits of phenomenality."¹³ It could appear as though this issue, consequently, remains an undecidable matter or a sort of stalemate, because one bias or the other is unavoidable. That is, either one has the bias of wanting to see God or the bias of not wanting to see God. But, to be frank, while I certainly believe that all those who criticise Marion's position offer arguments with which one must contend, I agree with the insinuation that Marion offers above: the desire to remain

¹² Marion, *BG* 243 [translation altered]; "il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que l'on s'enquière du droit de Dieu à s'inscrire dans la phénoménalité. L'étonnant semble plutôt qu'on obstine—et sans raison conceptuelle—à lui dénier ce droit, ou plutôt qu'on s'étonne même plus de ce refus têtu" (*Éd* 397-8).

¹³ Caputo, "HP" 83. This criticism applies readily to Janicaud's criticisms of Marion. The question then is merely if Caputo's irrationalism protects the impossible from the opposite kind of preconception about the other being submitted to *being*. I have argued, and continue to argue, that it fails to do so.

“neutral,” to disallow the possibility of revelation, appears stronger only for being offered at this particular time in Western philosophical history. The desire for revelation is, at the current time in the history of Western philosophy, an unpopular position. Things being so, arguments against it may appear stronger if we are not able to temper the prejudices of our time and acquiesce more fully to the entreaty to seriously consider or even defend the position that Marion offers.

As already argued in Chapter 1, phenomenology in particular cannot escape the fact that it always begins with an entreaty, and *it is always a question as to whether one has gone far enough to give that entreaty a fair hearing*. Ultimately, Marion’s comments simply indicate that those who deny “God’s right to inscribe himself within phenomenality” cannot be *unequivocally* understood as offering such a denial in order to protect the other from violence.¹⁴ Regardless, I am not questioning the desire to preserve otherness from a complete reduction to the self’s categories and possibilities. I am questioning the account of otherness that maintains that the other must escape all intelligibility and flee all community in order to be preserved as other. Thus, the question at this stage, if one does not begin in the same position as Marion, is whether one may still arrive at his conclusion: that we ought to say that revelation is possible.

Pure receptivity to the call of the other—i.e. Marion’s description of the state of the self before it *is*, which is a state that is antecedent to the self’s capacity to constitute appearances—is what Marion believes is revealed in a full reduction and it is what Marion appeals to in order to ensure that one’s reception of the other comes entirely from the other. That is, it is by means of pure receptivity that one is said to receive the name of the other as a first phenomenon. Marion, here, re-establishes the community between self and other dissolved by deconstruction, and he

¹⁴ This is Caputo and Derrida’s main line of argument, of course, but recall that it is also Janicaud’s: “I [Janicaud] don’t deny the possibility of speaking *to* God [...]. But speaking *of* God is particularly risky in philosophy, by using ideas, concepts, and categories which might turn out to be irrelevant to God (or not worthy of Him)” (Janicaud, “Is the Possible Doing Justice to God?” 239).

does so by founding that community within givenness and describing givenness as coming, *not from the self*, but from the other, while still allowing some version of the self immediate access to givenness. However, such *community* has simply been severed by *différance*, which leaves the other (*re* the gift) only in the realm of hope and desire, in the *to come*, and never in the realm of even paradoxical affirmation. However, pure receptivity to the call would become one's necessary starting point only if one considers all appeals to truth and understanding to be based in a reduction to presence. Pure receptivity to the call is not the only means by which one could receive the name of the other; it is only the means by which one could receive, *at the outset* or *as a first phenomenon*, the impossible name. Thus, Marion's givenness begins with the revelation of the impossible Name, and all other phenomena are progressively dimmer emanations of givenness. But one ought to look more closely at the potential to arrive at the impossible other, not by beginning with the gift of the other, but by beginning with one's imperfect understanding of the other.

For the offering of the other's name to avoid violence, one requires that the name one offers to the other not be *justified* by a reduction to full self-presence. That is, if the foundational horizon of phenomenology remains a horizon of *being*, and yet the grammar of "being" is understood as neither univocal nor entirely equivocal, but always spanning an interval of analogical senses, it is possible to preserve, in very distant analogy, a true sense of impossibility that nevertheless appears within a phenomenological horizon. However, what is needed here is twofold: **1)** One needs a sense or an understanding of the impossible so as to keep "theology" from irrationalism; but **2)** one also needs the impossible to remain impossible and yet worth pursuing to keep phenomenology from a mere rationalism. The conception of difference maintained by analogy accomplishes both of these goals; it keeps the pursuit of the impossible

relevant by allowing one a sense of the impossible, but it also retains the impossibility of the impossible by providing the means by which one can move into greater and greater incomprehension of the other. One does so by attending to the always greater *dissimilarity* that all analogies disclose, and not only the *similarity*. Thus, those means by which one moves into greater and greater incomprehension are *rational* means; such means do not entail that one explore an opening onto that which is otherwise than *being*, but they still allow one to transfer one's attention to that element that runs through all phenomena, even in their appearing: their irreducible incomprehensibility (the always greater dissimilarity). But such incomprehensibility is still accorded to a thing that *is*, not merely left to some *I-know-not-what* that may not even *be*. Note something: Marion is normally criticised for his desire *for God* in particular, and his willingness to distort phenomenology in order to allow for the appearance of God. But to affirm the analogy of being as allowing a proper understanding of otherness is not to defend a bias for *God* in particular, but to appreciate all otherness as remaining within the analogy of being and therefore always recognisable in some distant measure. This permits Marion's phenomenon of revelation to be considered *possible*—again, not *necessary*, as Marion has never maintained that God's presence must *necessarily* be recognised, only that it may be described as potentially occurring.

Another way of formulating this issue is to raise the question of whether one may reduce all experience to a kind of incomprehension, via the analogy of being, so as to pay proper heed to what is meant by *différance*, while not allowing *différance* to result in the end of philosophy (which always risks existential irrationalism). Marion tries to reduce phenomenological experience to a kind of incomprehension that leaves in place both simple presence (the matching of intention and fulfilment) as well as mere intention (intention exceedingly poor or totally

lacking in fulfilment), and then he simply offers a third possibility (saturation and the overwhelming of intention). The criticism that he is not successful in his ultimate aim (for God) because one cannot, in the case of God, or of anything that is otherwise than being, be certain that one is receiving an overabundance of givenness rather than no givenness whatsoever; one could always be dealing with a form of self-induced stupefaction, which cannot serve as an intersubjective horizon of experience. Therefore, one could not establish a community of “understanders” based on excessive givenness. How could excessive givenness break down the relevant barriers between receivers and provide a truly communal experience of givenness rather than a merely existential experience that depends on one’s own idiosyncratic constitution of the given?

In order to make his reduction of experience to incomprehension truly communal and plausible, I believe he would have to reject the idea of the self-sufficiency of intention. Intention, on its own, would remain meaningless—and not in the deconstructive sense of *otherwise than meaning*. An intention, without a fulfilment, would not manage to be a true intention. An intention that cannot be fulfilled, an intention of the unfulfillable, would, therefore, be a flawed construction, awaiting a fulfilment that could repair or remake its deficiencies. If intention is considered to function without fulfilment, then the postmodern skeptical questions of why to trust givenness rather than pure intention enforce themselves on one. And, in the debate regarding the “theological” turn, it seems to have been forgotten that phenomenology, if it is to be judged by any standard, certainly ought to be judged by the standard of effectively responding to and dissolving skeptical concerns. It is to put one back in touch with *the things themselves* and their capacity to show themselves, however and whatever they are. Phenomenology may be said to involve, therefore, the search for rational ways to *trust* what one is given in experience. If

one's capacity for solitary intention is questioned, then one's intentions require a fulfilling return in order to be *intentions*. However, it is crucial to note that, if one's intentions are not properly *intentional* without fulfilment, *one has no prior or prejudicial sense of what fulfilment can be*. That which fulfils intention would always be a surprise—a surprise that would not only give one a sense (though not a perfect sense) of fulfilment, but potentially, *retroactively* reveal one's true intention. Indeed, to learn to trust the appearances again (as the immediate goal of phenomenology) would be to learn to be surprised by everything. Without the self-sufficiency of intention, fulfilment is not yet determined; it is not being as presence, nor as absence. It is perhaps both, perhaps neither, perhaps more. It is towards this basic understanding of intention and fulfilment that I will argue in this chapter.

With this trajectory established, I believe it is appropriate to introduce Gadamer into this debate, for Gadamer describes conversation and language in these terms (trust, surprise, etc.). For Gadamer, conversation moves forward entirely due to acts of *lenience* and not by well established conclusions. I believe that his conception of lenience, which is used in the service of the never-ending and never fully consummated philosophical search for meaning, can contribute something significant to this debate.

Chapter Methodology

There is a significant issue that needs to be discussed before progressing further.

Methodologically speaking, my aim, in what remains of this chapter and project, is not to provide an exhaustive written presentation of Gadamer's philosophy itself. Nor is it, more importantly, to reproduce Gadamer's philosophical position exactly as he would have done. I do not believe such a thing is, in principle, possible. But nor did Gadamer: "[T]here is no

understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure [Dasein's thrownness and projection] does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read 'what is there' and to discover from his sources 'how it really was.'"¹⁵ But, more to the point, in this particular case of the debate regarding the "theological" turn, an attempt to remain strictly "faithful" to Gadamer's intentions would not be particularly helpful, since Gadamer's considerations of "theology" were limited.¹⁶ My intention, in this chapter, is to utilise Gadamer's portrayal of the Western philosophical project in such a way that the debate regarding the "theological" turn is able to progress further than it has on the matter of deciding Marion's contention concerning the possibility of a phenomenon of revelation. I intend to do this by focusing on the issue of understanding the relation and difference between the self and the impossible other in terms of analogy rather than rupture. This is to utilise Gadamer's hermeneutics in a way that, for the most part, he likely never could have intended.

However, in utilising Gadamer's works in such a way, I consider myself as remaining, so to speak, *more* rather than *less* faithful to Gadamer's understanding of philosophy itself. The relationship between the need for faithful reproduction and creative invention in the interpretation of texts is, of course, an important matter. Gadamer would have, nevertheless, considered this to be a matter of practical judgment—and, thus, to be determined situationally—

¹⁵ Gadamer, *T&M* 252; "So gibt es auch kein Verstehen und Auslegen, in dem nicht die Totalität dieser existenziellen Struktur [Daseins Geworfenheit *und* Entwurf] in Funktion wäre—auch wenn die Intention des Erkennenden keine andere ist, als zu lesen, 'was da steht,' und den Quellen zu entnehmen, 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'" (*WuM*, *GW*1, 266-7).

¹⁶ Nevertheless, an attempt to consider Gadamer's "theology" is made by Walter Lammi, *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine* (New York: Continuum, 2008). [Hereafter: *GQD*.] Consider: "I [Lammi] provide considerable evidence of being faithful to Gadamer's thinking, for I am more interested in (hermeneutically) ferreting out what is 'there' than going 'beyond' him" (*GQD* viii). Elsewhere, in contrast to his own project, Lammi refers to Patricia Altenbernd Johnson's work on Gadamer as aimed at "transplanting" Gadamer's Heideggerian philosophy into *theological* "foreign soil" (*GQD* 4). Doing so is also the explicit aim of some of Jens Zimmermann's works, but I discuss this further below. I also further discuss Lammi's project and its shortcomings below.

since his philosophical hermeneutics is derived from his understanding of philosophy as *practice*.¹⁷ Theoretical practice is, for Gadamer, as for Plato and Aristotle, still the highest practice. But philosophy is, therefore, not *ultimately* an *epistemic* discourse. At the final stage, *the truth* submits itself to *phronesis*, to the concern for the good which allows one to *act* in history. And every instance of understanding is an act of *applying* one's understanding to one's current situation.

What is more, Gadamer thought of philosophical hermeneutics, his own primary contribution to the Western philosophical tradition, somewhat humbly as essentially a continuation of Heidegger's project.¹⁸ Thus, his opinion of the way in which he himself remained *faithful* to Heidegger's project may be relevant here. There is a passage that I find particularly telling in which Gadamer writes:

It belongs to the irony of world history that there is nevertheless something like a Heidegger-scholasticism, which only imitates, fixes the natural-artistic constructions of Heidegger into something like a rigid terminology, and shuffles them this way and that. This is not what Heidegger envisaged under phenomenological philosophy and it is the opposite of that which impelled him to make a return to the Greeks.¹⁹

¹⁷ See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 227-245. [Hereafter: "HPP"]; "Hemeneutik als praktische Philosophie," in *Vernunft im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, 3rd Edition, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 78-109. [Hereafter: "HpP."] Also: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 246-265; "Hermeneutik als theoretische und praktische Aufgabe," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 301-318.

¹⁸ Cf. Robert J. Dostal, "The Experience of Truth for Gadamer and Heidegger: Taking Time and Sudden Lightning," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 47-67.

¹⁹ Gadamer, "OWBB" 254-5; "Es gehört zur Ironie der Weltgeschichte, daß es gleichwohl so etwas wie eine Heidegger-Scholastik gibt, die nur nachahmt, die natürlich-künstlichen Bildungen Heideggers wie einer festen Terminologie fixiert und sie hin- und herschiebt. Das ist nicht das, was Heidegger sich unter phänomenologischer Philosophie dachte und ist das Gegenteil dessen, was ihn zur Rückkehr zu den Griechen bewogen hat" ("ARA," GW3, 401).

To return to the Greeks, to revive and perform true philosophical thinking, as Gadamer believes that Heidegger did, one must find yet new paths, and these new paths ought to express themselves even in one's terminology, even in one's willingness to speak at cross-purposes to the one whom one is interpreting, so as to indicate that one has taken seriously the historical-linguistic lifeworld that is one's own and from which one must always begin understanding.²⁰ Furthermore, Gadamer writes that "violent interaction with texts is only justified in cases where it opens up new horizons."²¹ It is within this type of complex framework that I engage Gadamer's philosophy and find that he is able to inject something that is needed into the debate regarding the "theological" turn in French phenomenology.

²⁰ In connection with this issue, consider Gadamer's reactions to Heidegger's criticism of his use of the word "consciousness" in his notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*; "Heidegger certainly took special offence at my [Gadamer's] use of the word 'consciousness'" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace [On Derrida]," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. & trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 384. [Hereafter: "HTT"]); "An meinem [Gadamer's] Gebrauch des Wortes 'Bewußtsein' hat Heidegger gewiß besonderen Anstoß genommen" ("Hermeneutic auf der Spur," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 155. [Hereafter: "Spur"]). See also Gadamer's account of the same issue in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey, Section IV," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, trans. Richard E. Palmer, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 46. [Hereafter: "RMPJ, IV"]; "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik Versuch einer Selbstkritik," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 10. [Hereafter: "ZPDVS"]. Gadamer's ultimate defence of his decision is a bit of a capitulation: "[t]his has more Being than being conscious" ("Kant and the Hermeneutical Turn" in *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 58. [Hereafter: "KHT"]); "daß mehr Sein als Bewußtsein ist" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Kant und die hermeneutische Wendung," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 221. [Hereafter: "KhW"]). Compare with: "RMPJ, IV" 47; "ZPDVS," *GW*2, 11. Nevertheless, Gadamer still defended and tried to justify the use of the term "consciousness." For more on this theme, see: Walter Lammi, "Gadamer's Platonic *Destruction* of the Later Heidegger," *Philosophy Today*, 41.3 (1997): 394-404; "Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Correction' of Heidegger," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52.3 (1991): 487-507.

²¹ Gadamer, "HTT" 383; "Gewaltsamer Umgang mit Texten rechtfertigt sich vielmehr in solchen Fällen nur wenn sich daraus ein Blick auf neue Horizonte öffnet" ("Spur," *GW*10, 154-5).

Gadamer's Understanding of Philosophy, Metaphysics, and "Theology"

It will be important, in order to establish a basis from which I will go on to discuss Gadamer's notion of lenience and what I believe it contributes to the debate regarding the "theological" turn, to discuss: **1)** Gadamer's general understanding of philosophy itself, especially what conceptual understanding represents, **2)** his understanding of philosophy's relationship to metaphysics, and **3)** what relation he may have seen between philosophy and "theological" issues, as well as my assessment of that relation. Addressing these three issues will allow me to explore Gadamer's claims concerning the relationship between philosophical thinking and otherness. The distinctness of Gadamer's style of thinking is itself something that I believe has potential to contribute to the debate regarding the "theological" turn by implicitly opening one to the grammar of analogy with respect to impossibility and otherness.

With respect to the nature of philosophy itself, Gadamer considers philosophy to be a discipline fundamentally aimed at conceptual understanding. But Gadamer does not reduce conceptual understanding to a rigid, scientific grasp of the world, since he also thinks of philosophy as the

pursuit of questions that have no answers.²² These two aspects of philosophy may seem to conflict. That is, the concept represents a kind of organised, intellectual grasp of some element of reality, in the sense that a concept can only be offered with respect to an element of reality that the human mind can stand outside of and grasp in its distinction from other elements. Therefore, conceptual understanding provides an answer of sorts, concerning what is, and that answer reflects the finite possibilities of the human mind. This would seem to make Gadamer's understanding of philosophy similar to Janicaud's—an intentionally circumscribed inquiry, limited by human possibility and, therefore, eschewing concern for the impossible. But philosophy is also interested, according to Gadamer, in questions like, "What was there before

²² Gadamer offers this definition in multiple essays. See the following: (1) Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey, Section III," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, trans. Richard E. Palmer, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 32. [Hereafter: "RMPJ, III"]; "Selbstdarstellung," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 500-501. [Hereafter: "S."] (2) "HTT" 405; "Spur," *GW10*, 173. (3) "TPRL" 19-50; "ZPRS," *GW8*, 400-440. (4) "Death as a Question," in *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer: Volume I*, eds. and Trans. Pol Vandavelde & Arun Iyer, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 59. [Hereafter: "DaQ"]; "Denn ihre Aufgabe ist, das wissen zu wollen, was man so weiß, ohne es zu wissen" ("Der Tod als Frage," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4: *Neuere Philosophie II, Probleme, Gestalten*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 161. [Hereafter: "TaF."] (5) "Interview: Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Without poets there is no philosophy,'" *Radical Philosophy* 69, (1995): 28. (6) "On the Natural Inclination of Human Beings toward Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), 141. [Hereafter: "ONIHBP"]; "Über die Naturanlage des Menschen zur Philosophie." In *Vernunft im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft* (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt. 1976) 112. [Hereafter: "UNMP."] (7) "The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time and the Limits of Thought," in *Time and the Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), 34; "Die Zeitanschauung des Abendlandes," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4: *Neuere Philosophie II, Probleme, Gestalten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 120. (8) Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Beginning of Thought," in *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer: Volume I*, ed. & trans. Pol Vandavelde & Arun Iyer, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 233. [Hereafter "OBT"]; "Vom Anfang das Denkens," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 381. [Hereafter: "VAD"]. This essay is very similar, almost identical apart from the introductory paragraphs, to an essay published in English as "The Beginning and End of Philosophy" (which is cited in my Chapter 1), and in German as both "Anfang und Ende der Philosophie" and later as "Heidegger und das Ende Der Philosophie." See the bibliography for the full reference.

the beginning?” Such questions cannot result in the establishment of a concept and also cannot be asked from within a, broadly, scientific approach to reality.²³

Gadamer’s dialectical approach to philosophical issues is on display here—the possibility of the unity of opposites, or the more general potential for unity amidst multiplicity, is a consistent, guiding theme of Gadamer’s philosophical works. If one considers Gadamer’s understanding of the concept more closely, I believe that one ought to see that he understands the concept itself to be something that incorporates an appreciation for what cannot be understood and, therefore, Gadamer ultimately arrives at a definition of conceptuality as a loose grasp of one’s subject matter. But what motivates that looseness is significant. Allow me to elaborate on how Gadamer arrives at this definition in greater detail. Doing so will allow one to begin to view Gadamer’s thinking as implicitly concerned with “theological” issues or the issue of the impossible, a concern that will only be established more firmly in later sections. At the same time, doing so will also help one to begin distinguishing Gadamer’s philosophical position from the restrictive, pragmatic approach of Janicaud, since Gadamer’s position does, at times, seem similar to Janicaud’s.

²³ Gadamer writes: “Philosophy is concerned with questions that cannot be avoided and for which one will never indeed find demonstrable answers. We have, for example, the well-known question from Kant’s dialectic of pure reason that is formulated in the cosmological antinomy: what was there at the beginning? Physicists cannot ask such questions. When we ask them about what existed before the ‘Big Bang,’ they can only smile. From the perspective of their scientific self-understanding, it is meaningless to ask such a question. Kant is right about this. Yet, this is what we all do. We are all precisely philosophers, unswerving in our compulsion to question, even where no answer and not even a path toward an answer is to be seen. [...] It is a going back behind that which can be formulated in valid propositions” (Gadamer, “OBT” 233); “[Philosophie] hat es mit Fragen zu tun, denen man nicht ausweichen kann und für die man doch keine beweisbaren Antworten je wird finden können. Da ist zum Beispiel die aus Kants Dialektik der reinen Vernunft wohl bekannte, in der kosmologischen Antinomie formulierte Frage: Was war am Anfang? Die Physiker können so nicht fragen. Wenn wir sie danach fragen, was vor dem *Big Bang* was, können sie nur lächeln. Von ihrem wissenschaftlichen Selbstverständnis her ist es sinnlos, so zu fragen. Kant hat darin Recht. Trotzdem tun wir es alle. Wir sind alle Philosophen, unbeirrbar in unserem Fragenmüssen, auch wo keine Antwort, ja wo nich einmal ein Weg zue Beantwortung sichtbar ist. [...] Es ist ein Zurückgehen hinter das, was in gültigen Aussagen formulierbar ist” (“VAD,” *GW3*, 381).

In seeking to understand Gadamer's views concerning conceptuality, it will be helpful to investigate his understanding of the beginning of philosophy, since that beginning is, in Gadamer's opinion, the beginning of conceptual thinking. Gadamer once began a lecture course on the pre-Socratics by seeking to explicate the "*principium*"²⁴ of Western philosophy. Gadamer writes elsewhere that the Greek word *archē*, to him, reflected less the academic conceptuality of the Latin-derived "principle"—in the sense of "primary," or "first"—but meant more "both 'beginning' as well as 'ruling.'"²⁵ In connection with this sense of "ruling," Gadamer mentions Aristotle's image of the universal, in which the scattered, retreating army, soldier by soldier, comes again to stand as one and can, anew, obey commands. Thus, the notion of *the beginning* to which Gadamer appeals is a notion of what pervades something, a principle that can be detected not only at something's temporal origin, but throughout its history. That is, philosophy's beginning, for Gadamer, is in some sense accessed any time one is being philosophical or asking philosophical questions, i.e. when one's experience becomes a question to oneself. The kind of *ruling* that Gadamer is looking to explicate implies a certain way of approaching experience itself.

Gadamer then proposes that the abstract issue of the beginning of *anything* is a "mystery" or "riddle"²⁶ that generates far too many undisciplined questions. Yet, in order to give such an abstract issue more concrete contours, Gadamer often links the issue of the beginning with that of the end:

²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Beginning of Philosophy*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 1998), 12. [Hereafter: *BP*]; *Der Anfang der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), 14. [Hereafter: *AP*.]

²⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 23; "sowohl 'Anfang' wie auch 'Herrschaft' bedeutet" ("Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprach," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8: *Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 404. [Hereafter: "ZPRS"].

²⁶ Gadamer, *BP* 13; "Rätsel" (*AP* 14).

[S]omething is only ever a beginning in relation to an end or a goal. Between these two, beginning and end, stands an indissoluble connection. The beginning always implies the end. Whenever we fail to mention what the beginning in question refers to, we say something meaningless. The end determines the beginning, and this is why we get into a long series of difficulties. The anticipation of the end is a prerequisite for the concrete meaning of beginning.²⁷

And so, what Gadamer has done, in order to avoid “say[ing] something meaningless,” is reinscribe the irreducibly mysterious notion of *the beginning*, which generates innumerable abstract questions, within the hermeneutic circle, where the result determines the origin.

Gadamer has given this ultimate question the contours of the understanding so that something of it may be put into words.

In considering, specifically, the beginning of philosophy, Gadamer defines “philosophy” as “the rational explanation of life and the world.”²⁸ Also, of course, given that the context in which Gadamer is speaking is that of a lecture course on the pre-Socratics, Gadamer will conclude that the beginning of philosophy is found in Thales. But this still leaves what is involved in Thales’ rational understanding of life undetermined; the question is how to understand what *ruling*, what kind of thinking Thales in fact institutes. Gadamer considers three conceptions that one might use to understand what kind of thinking rules philosophy, but the third will prove to be the most crucial.

²⁷ Gadamer, *BP* 15; “etwas immer nur mit Bezug auf ein Ende oder Ziel Anfang ist. Zwischen diesen beiden, Anfang und Ende, besteht ein unausflölicher Zusammenhang. Anfang meint immer das Ende mit. Wenn man nicht angibt, worauf sich der in Rede stehende Anfang bezieht, sagt man etwas Sinnloses. Das Ende bestimmt den Anfang, und damit geraten wir in eine lange Reihe von Schwierigkeiten. Die Vorwegnahme des Endes ist eine Voraussetzung für den konkreten Sinn von Anfang” (*AP* 17). Gadamer echoes this in another essay: “[W]hat beginning is a beginning at all that is not the beginning of an end? We can indeed think a beginning only from the standpoint of an end” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. & trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 361. [Hereafter: “HOD”]); “welcher Anfang ist denn überhaupt ein Anfang, der nicht Anfang eines Endes ist? Wir könnenja überhaupt nur von einem Ende her so etwas wie Anfang denken” (“Hermeneutik und ontologische Differenz,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 61. [Hereafter: “HoD”]).

²⁸ Gadamer, *BP* 13; “[die] rationalen Deutung des Lebens und der Welt” (*AP*, 15).

Firstly, Gadamer considers the notion of development [*Entwicklung*], or growth, or maturation; that is, Gadamer identifies a notion of the end where “everything is already given in the beginning—enveloped in its beginning.”²⁹ As is the case with animal or plant growth, the organism has within itself the potential to unfold, from a nascent to a mature form—e.g. the tree is present in the seed. On this understanding, nothing truly *comes to be* but, rather, only *becomes visible*. Gadamer believes that this notion, while essential, is also problematic when applied to philosophy. (The reason why will become clear when we consider the third possibility.)

The second possibility is a positivistic notion of the beginning, that is, a beginning derived from looking directly at a particular moment as a literal *end* of something—something that was *is no more* and is replaced by something else. In this category, Gadamer includes ends like the Enlightenment ideal of a new scientific culture, or the end of metaphysics/philosophy, or Foucault’s end of man. By looking at these results, one can determine where such historical processes began and Gadamer indicates that this notion allows one to see the beginning of philosophy in Thales, but only as the first thinker who tried to explain experience not by appealing to mythological explanations but to evidence.³⁰ Gadamer is highly critical of this position and he considers it under the slogan of *from mythos to logos* and mentions Max Weber’s notion of the disenchantment of nature as applying to it. Gadamer considers this positivistic conception to be one-sided when applied to philosophy because he considers philosophical thinking to involve a two-directional motion: **(1)** the *historical* motion from word to concept (from *mythos* to *logos*), that rightly describes the development of Western philosophy out of Greece and, subsequently, the emergence of the discipline of natural science; however, **(2)** it is

²⁹ Gadamer, *BP* 16; “alles schon im Anfang gegeben—in den anfang eigenwickelt—ist” (*AP* 19).

³⁰ Gadamer, *BP* 16-17; *AP* 19-20.

just as much the *imaginative* motion from concept back to word, thinking back to the beginning before the beginning, thinking back to the irreducible power of words found in myths.³¹

The third and most significant definition of the beginning for Gadamer is summarised by the notion of *incipience* [*Anfänglichkeit*].³² Gadamer is quite clear that what he means by this term is *that which was not predictable in advance*, or something that could go in many different directions. One may now see why the first notion of the beginning conflicts with this last one. The notion of a beginning that contains everything and only unfolds what was already present but invisible does not actually present anything new; it ultimately presents a static picture. Philosophy must be able to allow one to experience the world in a new way, to allow new insights to enter into one's experience. This third definition stems from the recognition of the potential for something new to come into being, which is "open at first and not yet fixed but which concretizes itself into a particular orientation with ever-increasing determinateness."³³

What I find especially noteworthy in Gadamer's analysis is that *incipience* attests to some form of connection between the openness and closure of thought. The first notion, *development*, has only the appearance of openness at the beginning and so it both starts and ends with closure. Development appeals to closure exclusively as its ruling principle. The second, *positivistic* notion begins with a form of rupture, of discontinuity with the past and moves towards another rupture, another instance of discontinuity. A rupture is a kind of opening, but one that breaks any ties with any possibility of closure or of reconnection, and so the positivistic notion moves from

³¹ For a brief commentary this non-oppositional relation between *mythos* and *logos*, and how Gadamer's attitude towards myth and art involves "religious overtones," see Donatella Di Cesere, *Gadamer: A Philosophical Portrait*, trans. Niall Keane (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 62-64.

³² Gadamer, *BP* 17; *AP* 21.

³³ Gadamer, *BP* 18; "bei zunehmender Bestimmtheit eine Richtung konkretisiert, die zu Beginn offen ist und noch nicht feststeht" (*AP* 21).

opening to opening, and thus appeals only to openness as its ruling principle. *Incipience* is the only notion that tries to recognise the role of both thoughtful openness and closure. And, as I will explore further below, Gadamer is attempting to develop a notion of philosophy wherein there is the potential for closure within the open, but also the need for the power of the open in order to assert any kind of closure.

Thus, Gadamer believes that the notion of incipience describes the beginning of the kind of conceptual thinking that characterises philosophy. And this is the beginning Gadamer finds in the pre-Socratics, in Thales.³⁴ In doing so, one could say that, similarly to deconstruction, hermeneutics leaves in place a kind of *I-know-not-what* structure in looking to any philosophical subject matter, since this *mysterious* beginning, this *point* at which *something new* comes into being, can be said, itself, to be an experience of something that *gives nothing* to thought, because it simply presents a riddle. It may, however, also be similar to Marion's givenness, since it generates so many undisciplined questions that it may be said to give too much to thought.³⁵ However, from a hermeneutic standpoint, even the most abstract engagement with the beginning naturally turns to a dialectical consideration and to a concretisation of one's exploration in order to have conversation get underway. Thus, there is something of Janicaud's pragmatic approach to the origin of all philosophical thinking here as well.

³⁴ It ought to be mentioned that Gadamer, in practice, thinks that the pre-Socratics themselves are only properly accessed through the works of Plato and Aristotle: "I [Gadamer] begin [in my lectures ...] with Plato and Aristotle. This, in my judgment, is the sole philosophical access to an interpretation of the Presocratics. Everything else is historicism without philosophy" (Gadamer, *BP* 10); "Das Entscheidende an meinen Vorlesungen [...] ist [...] Platon und Aristoteles. Das ist nach meinen Dafürhalten der einzige philosophische Zugang zue Interpretation der Vorsokratiker. Alles übrige ist Historismus ohne Philosophie" (*AP* 10).

³⁵ Consider the following question, which Gadamer says Heidegger would ask in his lectures: "the moment in which man raised his head for the first time and posed a question to himself. The moment in which something begins to occupy human understanding [...] when was that?" (Gadamer *BP* 13); "von dem Augenblick [...], in dem der Mensch zum erstenmal den Kopf hebt und sich ein Frage stellt. Von dem Augenblick, in dem etwas den menschlichen Verstand zu beschäftigen beginnt: Wann war das?" (*AP* 15).

However, for Gadamer, one never loses touch with that experience of the mysterious, absolute beginning, even when one comes to some conceptual conclusion. What Gadamer concludes concerning what kind of thinking rules philosophy echoes what he describes about the most proper conception of *the beginning*: **1**) He says that the beginning (as incipience) is characterised by absolute openness, but such openness is conducive to greater and greater closure so that the beginning is always conceived of as the beginning of *something new that comes into being*; **2**) he concludes that the beginning of philosophy is found in the pre-Socratics in the sense that the pre-Socratics were the first to begin to try to rationally describe life conceptually, to describe the experience of something absolutely open with greater and greater conceptual determinateness. Yet, Gadamer provides many reasons to think that this answer he has given, while captivating and undeniably true in some sense, will always require some supplement in order for one to *reopen* (so to speak) one's answer and remember *why* and *in what sense* it is true.

It is imperative here to go into greater detail on Gadamer's understanding of conceptual determinateness itself. Gadamer views conceptualisation as a process of (to take the literal meaning of "*Begriff*") *grasping* or *bounding*. In elaborating on this etymological point, Gadamer argues that the first concept ever was Parmenides' *being*:

[S]omething like the creation of a concept is encountered for the first time in these verses [of Parmenides' poem], in so far as there the singular, *to on*, is encountered in opposition to the nothing, the *me on* or the *ouk ón*. That is something like a concept. What entity is meant by this? Even if first from the mouth of a goddess, that is still a new step in abstraction.³⁶

³⁶ See: Gadamer, "TPRL" 42; German text: "begegnet in diesen Versen [von Parmenides Gedicht] zum ersten Male so etwas wie eine Begriffsbildung, sofern dort in der Gegensatzung zum Nichts, dem μή óν oder dem ουκ óν, der Singular τό óν begegnet. Das ist so etwas wie ein Begriff. Welches Seiende ist denn damit gemeint? Wenn auch zunächst aus dem Munde einer Göttin, ist das doch ein neuer Schritt der Abstraktion" ("ZPRS," GW8, 429).

Gadamer goes on to say that we ought not to make the mistake of those who say Anaximander created the first concept in the *apeiron*, or the boundless. The boundless is not a concept; the bounded is. The *apeiron* even perhaps resembles more *the beginning*, or the radically open. The concept comes from the addition of boundaries to the limitless. Philosophy, from the time of the pre-Socratics until the current day, has been engaged in this same practice of describing boundaries.

However, something relevant for understanding the nature of such boundaries is found in Gadamer's assessment of Heidegger's critique of Husserl; that is, moving from Husserl's reduction to the theoretical construct of consciousness to Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity and his account of the encounter with the lifeworld.³⁷ Both projects, of course, are attempts to give a rational account of the experience of life. But Gadamer associates relinquishing the Husserlian ideal of an ultimate foundation with a concomitant expansion of the meaning of rationality:

[O]ne can not give [the ideal of ultimate foundation] up if one insists on a narrow sense of rationality, of rigorous science in the sense of mathematics and its analogues. For transcendental phenomenology, which should fulfill Husserl's ideal of science, one needs apodictic evidence and a consistent development of all valid consequences from this evidence. But is that possible? I mean, does it explain the full claim of rationality to self-understanding? That is the philosophical problem.³⁸

The implication here is that rigorous science requires a foundationalist structure, but that phenomenological philosophy (post-Heidegger) has chosen to remain with the truth as non-foundationally verified, but also with the truth that is still able to come into being. The

³⁷ I am not engaging, here, in the significant issue of whether Husserl preempted most of Heidegger's critiques of him, since it is irrelevant when dealing only with how Gadamer understood the difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's respective philosophies. However, for a discussion of this, particularly in regard to the hermeneutical elements of phenomenology, one may refer to: John D. Caputo, "Husserl, Heidegger, and the Question of a 'Hermeneutic' Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 1, (1984): 157-178.

³⁸ Hans-Georg, Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Man and World*, 17 (1984): 320. [Hereafter: "HoS."] There is no German version of this essay.

philosophical problem, once one has given up the foundationalist structure of thought, as well as apodictic evidence as one's standard, is to determine how one may manage to coherently think the truth within a wider space that has no need of an ultimate foundation considered as a justification of all things to a self-conscious consciousness. Another way in which one might put this is to ask: How does one think the truth without an ultimate appeal to presence? All reductions to presence are reductions to what can be secured by the self. If the self ceases to be one's ultimate foundation, then presence ceases to enjoy its privilege in matters of truth. Thus, thought becomes, as Gadamer explains it, a matter of expanding beyond the narrower requirements of "rationality as rigorous science" and into the realm of "the rationality of life."³⁹ This expansion of the horizon, or the relocation to the factual lifeworld, implies that the "closure" that constitutes a grasping of the truth is inherently looser than it would be if one still operated within a scientific horizon exclusively. Furthermore, in a philosophical context, when one relaxes such a standard, that is, when one gives up a foundationalist structure in philosophy, then the tightness of one's grasp becomes a new sign of potential *falsity*, or a perversion of the truth. The truth still must be encountered, but not known with certainty or in terms of presence. This is to say that Gadamer accredits this new foundation for philosophy, the one that he believes

³⁹ Gadamer, "HoS" 320.

Heidegger offers, only insofar as it never offers complete understanding, but only “[w]hat flashed in that strange ‘dark-light.’”⁴⁰ And this “dark-light” is accessed, particularly, through language.

According to Gadamer, language is “the most telling form” of “the givenness of our life”;⁴¹ that is, language itself reveals that life is irreducible; life is what is simply given for understanding. As Gadamer also writes, “hermeneutics [as a hermeneutics *of facticity*] is focused on something that is *not understandable* (life),”⁴² because “[f]acticity is obviously that which cannot be clarified, that which resists any attempt to attain transparency of understanding.”⁴³ That is, hermeneutics, in beginning with our finitude, desires an understanding of things in their particularity, locality, facticity—things as encountered in normal *life*. But pure facticity is incomprehensible; in fact, we do not encounter such pure facticity, because we encounter the world through language with its capacity for generalisation. But it is language that itself indicates to us that there is facticity, that there is a dark element in the event of understanding that cannot be reduced. Language indicates that the “closure” of which we are capable is never complete. This bears some similarity to deconstruction’s account of *différance*,

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Thinker Martin Heidegger,” in *Heidegger’s Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 66. [Hereafter: “TMH”]; “Was da in seltsamem Dunkel-Licht aufblitzt” (“Der Denker Martin Heidegger,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 227. [Hereafter: “DMH”]). This appears to be an allusion to Hölderlin’s “Andenken”—a poem that was significant to Heidegger in exploring the *Sprachnot*. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Hölderlin’s ‘Andenken,’” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays On the Work of the 1930s*, ed. James Risser, trans. Richard Palmer, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 155. [Hereafter: “TPHHA”]; “Denken und Dichten bei Heidegger und Hölderlin,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). [Hereafter: “DDHH.”] In the English version of this work, from page 153 to the end (page 162), the text was amplified by Gadamer, drawing on unpublished materials, and so does not correspond to the German text cited. However, the material from page 153-162 of the English version is also dealt with in Gadamer’s essay: “Dichten und Denken im Spiegel von Hölderlins ‘Andenken,’” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 9: *Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 42-55.

⁴¹ Gadamer, “HoS” 321.

⁴² Gadamer, “HOD” 363 [emphasis added]; “Hermeneutik konzentriert sich damit auf etwas Unverständliches” (“HoD,” *GW10*, 63).

⁴³ Gadamer, “SaISaP” 281; “Faktizität ist ja offenkundig das Unaufhellbare, das allem Versuch der Durchsichtigkeit des Verstehens widersteht” (“SuISuP,” *GW10*, 93).

but there is a significant distinction, which is based on whether such incompleteness still refers to some form of *being*—but I will explore this further in the next section of this chapter. In any event, Gadamer’s description of the rationality inspired by the relocation to the lifeworld shows that the grasp that is the highest standard of philosophy is, while still requiring a certain rigour, in its essence, a gentle or loose grasp. The concept is a grasp that does not permit perfect intellectual clarity, as appears to be on offer in “mathematics and its analogues.”

If the concept is simply a loose grasp, however, one may question whether what Gadamer is describing is, truly, a concept. Thus, it becomes important to consider how, in Gadamer’s view of philosophy, the concept is able to maintain any *significant* grasp of reality at all. The concept is something that relies on a prior power of words in order to be a concept; it achieves the grasp of which it is capable from its connection to some *other power*.⁴⁴ Gadamer writes: “the concept, which very often presents itself as something strange and demanding, must begin to speak if it is to be really grasped. [...] ‘*Not only from word to concept but likewise from concept to word.*’”⁴⁵ That is, philosophy can only continually re-explain itself and its choice for the concept by appealing to a prior power of language, that possibility of meaning in dialogic speech that Gadamer considers most evident in myth and art. Hence, as is well known, Gadamer begins *Truth and Method* with an attempt to retrieve a sense of the experience of truth in art as paradigmatic for all experience. Thus, philosophy, for Gadamer, must be *both* the striving for the

⁴⁴ One may actually say language is *given* its power by the other, but such a consideration forms the entire argument of the next section of this chapter, titled “What is Speech?”

⁴⁵ And, immediately following this, he writes: “Let’s think back to the beginning for a moment” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, “From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy,” in *Gadamer’s Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Bruce Krajewski, trans. Richard E. Palmer, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1. [Hereafter: “FWtC”]; [emphasis in original]); “der Begriff, der oft eher das Befremdliche und das Fordernde gegen den anderen hervorkehrt, zu sprechen beginnen muß, wenn er wirklich begreifen soll. [...] ‘*Nicht nur vom Wort zum Begriff, sondern ebenso vom Begriff zurück zum Wort.*’ Wir wollen einen Augenblick auf den Anfang zurückdenken” (“Vom Wort zum Begriff: Die Aufgabe der Hermeneutik als Philosophie,” in *Gadamer Lesebuch*, ed. Jean Grondin, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 100. [Hereafter: “VWzB”]; [emphasis in original]).

concept, and the continual renewal and exceeding of philosophy's own possibilities in its retrieval of its sense of the saying power of words. Furthermore, this reveals Gadamer's general attitude towards the Greeks, especially Plato. As he writes, critical of the Heideggerian understanding of Plato: "Plato is viewed only in this direction, only on the way to the concept and there is not a glance at what Plato's poetic art had held onto in word, speech, and mythical lore, all that was to be lost in the transition toward concepts."⁴⁶ This aspect of the saying power of words is further revealed in living conversation, but I will discuss this in much greater detail below. Suffice it to say for the moment that one must always access what is understandable of facticity, of life, by trust in that element of language that allows pure facticity to take on meaning in our eyes.⁴⁷ Continual trust in language, therefore, is the means by which philosophy manages to extend its view of rationality to life without *reducing* life to its possibilities, as opposed to the more narrow rationality of the scientific or metaphysical *system*, which does reduce life to itself by imposing a strict human *grasp* as the measure of reality itself.⁴⁸ And Gadamer's claim is that

⁴⁶ Gadamer, "OWBB" 258; "Plato nur in dieser Richtung, nur auf den Begriff hin, gesehen ist und nicht auch auf das geblickt wird, was Platos dichterische Kunst in Wort und Rede und mythischer Kunde festgehalten hat und was im Übergang zum Begriff verlorengehen muß" ("ARA," GW3, 404-405).

⁴⁷ Gadamer discusses this issue further in the context of geometry and the relationship between figures in the sensible world and ideal figures. When one sees a sensible circle, "one must, so to speak, see through that which appears there as a figure to something that is. It is this original mathematical experience that Plato first deepens into conceptual consciousness" (Gadamer, "OWBB" 263 [translation altered]); "man durch das, was da als Figur erscheint, gleichsam hindurchsehen muß auf etwas, das ist, das ist die mathematische Urerfahrung, die Plato zuerst zu begrifflichem Bewußtsein vertieft hat" ("ARA," GW3, 410). While there is not space to delve into this notion here, I would put forward the idea that, in the case of *both* the geometric figure and the other (as another person), it is trust that allows one to look through the appearance in order to see *that which is*. That is to say that there is a conversational aspect to every event of understanding—the ideal circle seems to give one something of itself; it appears to allow itself to be understood in a less than perfect way (to be seen through a less than perfect circle) in order to be imperfectly understood in the measure that it *is*, indicating how far beyond understanding *being* always remains. This occurs when one speaks to the other person, who can never appear fully, but, if there is mutual trust, one can see whatever there is to see of the other and, at the very least, affirm another's being.

⁴⁸ In connection with how language is properly understood as the language of the lifeworld, and not any *system*, Gadamer notes that "the concept of a 'system of philosophy' came to an end with the ascendance of the 'philosophy of existence.'" Gadamer, "SaISaP" 276; "Aber mit dem Begriff 'System der Philosophie' ging es im Zeichen der 'Existenzphilosophie' zu Ende." ("SuISuP," GW10, 88).

language itself is not a totalising system because it is an expanded rationality that allows for both light and dark; language both leaves the ambiguous ambiguous as well as, *at the same time*, drawing out whatever is intelligible from the inherent ambiguity of experience.

Before moving on to Gadamer's understanding of metaphysics, I would like to connect these matters, in a preliminary fashion, to the issues discussed in the "theological" turn. Note that Gadamer's philosophy has bidirectional movement between factual understanding of particulars and ideal understanding of universals built directly into it. The question is whether Gadamer's *trust* in language nevertheless reduces facticity/particularity to an essentialist construct (the word or *logos*) that, in effect, reduces the otherness of such facticity/particularity to the self's possibilities. Thus, a significant question is whether the structure of Gadamer's word (*logos*) is sufficient for preserving otherness, or whether one must press on, going beyond the *logos* (being) in order to assure that one's thinking does not, even against one's intentions, totalise experience.

The question one might ask at this stage is whether Gadamer's account of conceptual thinking goes far enough in preserving otherness. Indeed, Caputo would say that Gadamer's willingness to dispense with the strict *grasp* required by scientific reasoning is commendable, but not enough to safeguard true otherness, since it still conceives of the other in metaphysical terms. But what is significant is that one can, according to Gadamer, escape the binding force of metaphysics if one trusts in the saying power of language, since that saying power is not grounded in anything like strict presence or a scientific foundation. This was a significant note when Gadamer had his encounter with Derrida, in 1981:

[N]o conceptual language, not even what Heidegger called the 'language of metaphysics,' represents an unbreakable spell upon thought if only the thinker allows

himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking.⁴⁹

The implication in this statement is that the interval that must obtain between two interlocutors in dialogue—which constitutes “language”—cannot be dissolved. This must be the case if Gadamer is appealing to dialogue with others and other ways of thinking as allowing one to stave off the metaphysical reduction of otherness to the self. But Gadamer is also pointing to the difficulty of saying our linguistic understanding is *inherently* held back by anything; as he wrote elsewhere, “[t]here is nothing that cannot mean something to [man’s understanding].”⁵⁰ That is, the understanding pursues precisely what is *not understood*; when it encounters a limit, it appeals outside itself, it “engages with other thinkers and other ways of thinking.” Thus, this already implies a view of an otherness as open to the understanding, which may appear to limit otherness to some form of the self’s possibilities.

However, this is, at the very least, not to say that, for Gadamer, otherness is simply reducible to consciousness, since, for Gadamer, hermeneutic understanding is a matter of being and acting in the world, of knowing one’s way around, of *practice*. Gadamer writes: “language is the medium where I and world meet, or rather, manifest their original belonging together.”⁵¹

Hermeneutics, or the activity of interpreting, becomes philosophically fundamental, according to

⁴⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard Palmer, trans. Dennis J. Schmidt & Richard Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 23. [Hereafter: “TaI”]; [translation altered]. German text: “daß keine Begriffssprache, auch nicht die von Heidegger sogenannte ‘Sprache der Metaphysik,’ einen unbrechbaren Bann für das Denken bedeutet, wenn sich nur der Denkende der Sprache anvertraut, und das heißt, wenn er in den Dialog mit anderen Denkenden und mit anders Denkenden sich einläßt” (“Text und Interpretation,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 332); [Hereafter: “TuI”]).

⁵⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. & trans. David E. Linge. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 103; “Nichts kann sein, was [dem Verstehen des Menschen] nicht etwas zu bedeuten vermag” (“Ästhetik und Hermeneutik,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8: *Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 8).

⁵¹ Gadamer, *T&M* 469; “die Sprache eine Mitte ist, in der sich Ich und Welt zusammenschließen oder besser: in ihrer ursprünglichen Zusammengehörigkeit darstellen” (*WuM*, *GW1* 478). Cf. Lammi, *GQD* 65.

Gadamer, precisely because both Dasein and the world in which Dasein lives have the same mode of being: historicity. That is, Gadamer concludes, with Heidegger, that “being itself is time.”⁵² Our being and the being of the world, therefore, enjoy a certain capacity for confluence, so to speak. This, Gadamer is clear, does not mean that Dasein and the world relate to one another veridically because they share an ontic homogeneity.⁵³ If this were his argument, Gadamer writes, this would imply that one would, in principle, be able to establish a kind of psychic link between humans and things, through which one would know a thing’s being as like one’s own, thereby reducing hermeneutic philosophy to psychology—thereby re-establishing understanding as a form of ontic objectivism, and undoing all the work he sees Heidegger as having done. Rather, Dasein and the world share their mode of being ontologically in the sense of “belonging” to one another; Dasein is, ontologically speaking, a temporal structure: the thrownness into a tradition (past) and projection onto a horizon of future possibilities (future) that we always are now (present). Thus, human beings *are* their understanding of the world in the sense of being well-versed in something, having facility with something, knowing one’s way around, etc. This entails that all understanding is in part self-understanding—one must be able to project oneself in an appropriate way, which requires an *implicit* understanding of one’s own ontological/historical constitution, but does not imply that such understanding is fully articulable.⁵⁴ This also implies that the understanding that Dasein *is* is not a matter of conscious awareness; it is a recognition that what one *is* is thrown-projection; what one *is* is a primordial understanding of the world. This is part of the meaning of the expansion of rationality to that of the lifeworld; the meaning of what is true is never reducible merely to a scientific sense of truth,

⁵² *T&M* 248; German text: “Das Sein selber ist Zeit” (*WuM*, *GW1*, 261).

⁵³ *T&M* 252; *WuM*, *GW1*, 266.

⁵⁴ *T&M* 251; *WuM*, *GW1*, 265.

but always ends in an appeal to the kind of understanding required for the practice of life. And in the practice of life, all things can come to mean something, even in their silence. Gadamer writes, commenting on Wittgenstein, that:

[For Wittgenstein, the reduction of philosophy to the context of life-praxis] consisted in a flat rejection of all the undemonstrable questions of metaphysics, rather than a winning back of these undemonstrable questions of metaphysics, however undemonstrable they might be, by detecting in them the linguistic constitution of our being-in-the-world.⁵⁵

For Gadamer, philosophy is not justified in relinquishing metaphysical questions, questions of what is beyond experience or transcends it, because those questions remain tied to our being in the world. Remaining silent concerning what they ask only appears justified because the meaning of such metaphysical questions, he maintains, has not been properly explored from within this space of life.

However, this apparently eliminates the potential of conversation, in the hermeneutical sense, to disclose anything that potentially *transcends* being (like the impossible). And, if this is not a pragmatic relinquishing of the impossible other (as it is for Janicaud), this may appear to enclose everything within the totality of the practical understanding, thereby constructing a version of metaphysics. This is the substance of the charge of logocentrism from figures such as Caputo. To counteract this totalisation, as Caputo tries to do, one may maintain that there is a variety of silence that cannot be reduced even to the practice of life, at least not in a sense in which the practice of life is informed by any idea or form of “the true”—if such a form is at all deemed to be *understandable*, even in a unique or exceptional sense, it would be a metaphysical concept. This would be to say that there is an otherness that cannot be integrated into even the

⁵⁵ Gadamer, “RMPJ, III” 39; “[... Wittgensteins] Zurückführung alles Sprechens auf Zusammenhänge der Lebenspraxis. Freilich blieb ihm der Ertrag dieser Reduktion auch weiterhin negativ. Er bestand für ihn in der Abweisung der unausweisbaren Fragen der Meta-physik und nicht darin, die unabweisbaren Fragen der Metaphysik—so unausweisbar sie sein mögen—wiederzugewinnen, indem man sie aus der Sprachverfaßtheit unseres In-der-Welt-Seins heraushört” (“S,” *GW2*, 507).

widest sense of meaning accessible within life's practice, *or* that life's practice can only be informed by some absolutised ambiguity so as to not be predetermined by anything conceived out of human subjectivity, i.e. some infrangible sublimity that guarantees the spontaneity of human action—"a little like a Kantian noumenal freedom."⁵⁶

However, Gadamer sees the task of metaphysics—summarised as understanding the “preexistent correspondence”⁵⁷ of soul and object that is knowledge—as one that cannot be exorcised from philosophy; “there can never be ‘philosophy’ without metaphysics.”⁵⁸ That is, philosophy cannot proceed or exist at all without trying to explain how the two poles of experience (soul and object; mind and world; self and other; etc.) have come together. Philosophy cannot abandon the speculative notion of truth, since it is always towards the truth that philosophy tends. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics could never entertain the deconstructive notion of ultimately leaving the other otherly, abandoning “philosophy” and “truth” in the process (even if it is, ostensibly, to serve the other). Rather, it must explore the belonging. In so doing, Gadamerian hermeneutics clearly remains concerned with *rationality*. But I maintain that it does so while involving an affirmation of the *other*—similarly to how Marion remains concerned with the potential for such an affirmation.

Hermeneutics distinguishes itself from the metaphysical tradition in not letting metaphysics present itself in the manner that it, traditionally, has done (at least according to a Heideggerian reading of “metaphysics”). That is, hermeneutical philosophy does not continue to solve the metaphysical mystery of the preexistent correspondence between soul and object by “a

⁵⁶ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears* 172; cf. “AI” 209.

⁵⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “NTLT” 74; “vorgängige Entsprechung” (“NSSD,” *GW2*, 71).

⁵⁸ Gadamer, “HTT” 382; “es ‘Philosophie’ nie ohne Metaphysik geben kann” (“Spur,” *GW10*, 153).

theological grounding,” nor by “secularized versions of it”;⁵⁹ i.e. the understanding is not achieved through a scientific or transcendental reduction to some pure, other-worldly constancy. Instead, hermeneutical philosophy is charged with asking: “[W]hat is metaphysics really in contrast to what metaphysics thinks it is?”⁶⁰ This means, in particular, that we ask: “[A]re there finite possibilities of doing justice to this correspondence [between soul and object]? Is there a grounding of this correspondence that does not venture to affirm the infinity of the divine mind and yet is able to do justice to the infinite correspondence of soul and being?”⁶¹ This presents Gadamer as similar to Janicaud insofar as Gadamer is discussing a kind of local, restricted, *finite* account of some sense of the correspondence between mind and world. However, as noted above, for Gadamer philosophy always draws on some absolute, incomprehensible meaning that is then brought into finite understanding. All finite accounts still require that appeal to the saying power of words to be considered true and thus *what* such accounts manage to say is always left open. I will take up this issue again below, but note that Gadamer maintains a position distinct from that of Janicaud because Gadamer does not appeal to a pragmatically defined context in order to argue for these finite and localised accounts of the correspondence between mind and world; he appeals to something mysterious, a *saying power* that is simply given to us in language.

Due to this saying power, Gadamer, contrary to deconstruction, denies that language itself is a totality, or that there is a *language* of metaphysics:

⁵⁹ Here, Gadamer is referring to German Idealism. Gadamer “NLT” 75; “einer [...] theologischen Begründung [...] die säkularisierten Gestalten derselben” (“NSSD,” GW2, 71).

⁶⁰ Gadamer, “HTT” 382; “Was ist Metaphysik eigentlich—im Unterschied zu dem, was Metaphysik von sich meint, daß sie es sei?” (“Spur,” GW10, 153).

⁶¹ Gadamer “NLT” 75; “gibt es endliche Möglichkeiten, dieser Entsprechung gerecht zu werden? Gibt es eine Begründung dieser Entsprechung, die sich nicht zu der Unendlichkeit eines göttlichen Geistes versteigt und doch der unendlichen Entsprechung von Seele und Sein gerecht zu werden vermag?” (“NSSD,” GW2, 71). Cf. Zimmermann, *RTH* 167-168.

I insist, even against Heidegger, that there simply is no ‘language of metaphysics.’ [...] There are only *concepts* in metaphysics whose content is determined by the usage of these words, just as with all words. The concepts in which our thinking moves are no more governed by some rigid rule of fixed pre-giveness than the words used in our everyday language.⁶²

Gadamer here affirms that language’s potential is simply not fixedly established. Gadamer, furthermore, sees that Heidegger went in entirely the other direction: “Heidegger was in a [...] state of *Sprachnot* because he wanted to overcome the thinking of metaphysics, and so he tried over and over to invert language, so to speak, for, language itself, to him, was the language of metaphysics.”⁶³ This sentiment is obviously echoed in the works of Derrida, Caputo, and other deconstructionists. In contrast to these figures, Gadamer maintains that otherness or what escapes totality can be implicitly accessed in language. This is the crucial difference between Gadamer’s hermeneutics and deconstruction: Gadamer admits that there are plenty of things that cannot, strictly speaking, be *said*, but this does not make them totally disanalogous to the understanding; this does not necessarily separate them from historical life.

Recall, deconstruction must maintain an impossible otherness that is not even implicit, that could never return itself to language, that cannot be affirmed or denied (*re* the gift), but it

⁶² Gadamer, “RJMPJ, IV” 48, translation altered; “Nun muß ich selbst gegen Heidegger geltend machen, daß es gar keine Sprache der Metaphysik gibt. [...] Es gibt nur Begriffe der Metaphysik, deren Inhalt sich aus der Verwendung der Worte bestimmt, so wie das mit allen Worten ist. Die Begriffe, in denen sich Denken bewegt, sind sowenig wie die Worte unseres alltäglichen Sprachgebrauchs durch eine starre Regel von fester Vorgegebenheit beherrscht.” (“ZPDVS,” *GW2*, 11). Gadamer echoes this sentiment in multiple places; see: (1) “Destruktion and Deconstruction,” in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard Palmer, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 106-7; “Destruktion und Dekonstruktion,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2: *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 365-366. (2) “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder & Richard Palmer, trans. Dennis J. Schmidt & Richard Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 121; “Frühromantik, Hermeneutik, Dekonstruktivismus,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 132. (3) “Letter to Dallmayr,” in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. & trans. Richard Palmer and Diane P. Michelfelder (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 98; “Dekonstruktion und Hermeneutik,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 10: *Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 143-144. (4) “HTT” 385; “Spur,” *GW10*, 155-156. Compare these passages with Lammi, *GQD* 49.

⁶³ Gadamer, “TPHHA” 160.

must also maintain, somehow, that this otherness retains a certain priority for thought.

Gadamer's position on this issue of metaphysics and the understanding of otherness has not seemed adequate to many whose sympathies lie with deconstruction. Indeed, his emphasis on the need to trust in language may indicate that Gadamer simply conceives of metaphysics as something less pervasive and problematic with respect to otherness than it is thought to be by the figures involved in the debate regarding the "theological" turn.⁶⁴ One could, therefore, consider Gadamer to be simply naïve in his pronouncements concerning language's capacity to free us from metaphysical thinking. Those involved in the "theological" turn can be seen to follow Heidegger into his *Sprachnot*—given that, as already mentioned, Heidegger's desire was to create a conceptuality capacious enough for his religious questions. All those who follow his "phenomenology of the inapparent" are attempting something similar. They are doing so in the hopes of creating an anti-discourse within philosophy, gesturing toward the other of all, beyond being.

However, note that, after those involved in the debate regarding the "theological" turn establish that they are discussing what is beyond being, the question becomes a matter of determining whether what is beyond being, what is impossible, can receive any kind of *description*. Thus, this pulls the matter of the other beyond being back down into the realm of language. However, rather than go the route of determining how what is beyond being can be described while considering language as fundamentally *ill-equipped* for such a task (resulting in paradoxes that may be simple contradictions; *re* the critique of Marion), I believe one ought to probe the possible links between the other and language. The goal ought to be to see what

⁶⁴ Janicaud entertains this possibility; see: *PWO* 56; *Pé* 83-84. But Janicaud thinks that such a position is essentially unobjectionable, because he sees metaphysical thinking as inherently reductive or violent towards otherness but also simply unavoidable.

resources language has to which otherness as otherness may respond favourably. In particular, language is necessary for establishing *community* and it is only within community that otherness takes on any kind of priority or relevance. This would appear to result in an aporia: impossible otherness requires community for the sake of the recognition of the other, but community is a kind of economy from which the impossible other must flee.

To begin to push back against deconstruction, from the hermeneutic perspective, note that Gadamer consistently maintains that the activity of understanding texts is always the process of “the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning.”⁶⁵ While, in deconstructive circles, Gadamer’s choice for the living meaning over the dead trace, or speech over writing, is considered logocentric and prejudiced against the unassimilable silence that irrupts in language, such a criticism may not be fully justified. Or it may be better to say that such a criticism touches upon something fundamentally ambiguous. The unassimilable silences are meant to be representative of a variety of otherness that one cannot ever reduce to a topic of conversation. Certainly a silence that is *so* silent or occluded—a true *nothing*—could never become an explicit topic for discussion. But such silence is not of interest to deconstruction in any event. Thus, the totally other is not a true nothing or an irrationality; it is simply what cannot be assimilated but still (for lack of another word) *is*.⁶⁶ The association between the lack of return and death (or at

⁶⁵ Gadamer, *T&M* 156; “die Rückverwandlung toter Sinns spur in lebendigen Sinn erst im Verstehen geschieht” (*WuM*, *GW1*, 169).

⁶⁶ Cf. Hart, *BI* 52; Hart argues that one way to conceive of the defining feature of the epoch of contemporary, postmodern, continental philosophy (even though the various thinkers in this tradition appear to lack any typical unity) is as “narratives of the sublime,” that all maintain one crucial, implicit thesis, which is, as Hart phrases it: “one immense and irreducible metaphysical assumption: that the unrepresentable *is*.” See also Betz’s brilliantly sweeping account of the problematic conception of the sublime and the role it plays in contemporary, post-modern philosophy, in its rejection of metaphysics and the analogy of being: John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One),” *Modern Theology* 21.3, (2005): 367-411.

least some ambiguous other-than-life) may become problematic;⁶⁷ i.e. the desire to give *life* to otherness may be the desire, in hermeneutical understanding, not to reduce the other to one's own possibilities, but to have the other be *real* in order for the other to enjoy some *priority*. The only way one could argue that the ascription of being to the other is violent, but still maintain that the other has life, is to attempt to completely distinguish the concepts of *being* and *life*. Deconstruction forces one to make such an attempt by asking whether such concepts as *reality*, *truth*, *meaning*, or *being*, are ever *enough* for the other, in that they are liable to be abuses of otherness as often as not. But one is certainly justified in questioning this. The deconstructive indication of the totally other may therefore come to appear as no less problematic than the attempts to reduce the other to possibility. That is to say, letting the other be forever otherly may be described as an act of humility—the ultimate admission of our finitude. But this always runs a certain risk: it is not possible to distinguish *letting the other be forever otherly* from *preemptively ceasing to pursue communion with the other and so leaving the other outside the realm of life*. This is what makes Caputo's account of the proper attitude towards the other into a fundamentally irrational one, in my view. Caputo proposes an other one could never reach, and then assures one that this unreachability is what makes the other desirable (rather than irrelevant). In order to make this plausible, Caputo tends to simply cast the unbridgeable distance between the self and the other as simply the true form of intimacy, arising out of the *preservation* of the other. But this is intimacy without community.

⁶⁷ Derrida does deal with this basic issue in "Violence and Metaphysics," in discussing the notion in Levinas of a metaphysics against light that is not of darkness. See: "VM" 104-114; "Vm" 125-137. However, he also deals with this issue of life and death with respect to the other explicitly in his commentary on his encounter with Gadamer; see: Jacques Derrida, "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," in *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, eds. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, trans. Thomas Dutoit & Philippe Romanski (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 135-163. [Hereafter: "Rams"; *Béliers: Le dialogue ininterrompu: entre deux infinis, le poème* (Paris: Galilée, 2003). [Hereafter: *Béliers*.]

Thus, the question one could raise at this point is: Is it possible to see some capacity for radical expansion *within* language and being, such that one might allow for the achievement of a substantial community between self and other? Admittedly, there does not appear to be a simple way of answering this question. Within this context of contemporary continental philosophy, hermeneutical philosophy, as Gadamer conceives of it, specifically with respect to language and its commensurability with being,⁶⁸ as well as its privileging of community in its connection with meaning, is taken as insufficient precisely because it cannot recognise the relevance of that which does not enter into any community. Thus, no expansion of rationality is considered able to allow the *totally other* a place *within* any community. However, some have come to question this and have suggested that Gadamer's hermeneutics has the potential to involve some "theological" element. What is more, Gadamer himself also eventually began to consider such matters explicitly.

For most of his career, and this has been maintained in most Gadamer scholarship, Gadamer saw no avenue to develop a sense of the *totally other* or the radically transcendent from within philosophical hermeneutics. In short, Gadamer's view of philosophy is Greek.⁶⁹ While Gadamer would have understood, for instance, the Platonic forms as "divine" and, therefore, transcendent insofar as they do not present themselves as merely sensible, for him they clearly fall short of the kind of radical transcendence that is at issue in the debate regarding the "theological" turn—i.e. *totally disanalogous otherness*—since there must, in Gadamer's opinion,

⁶⁸ To quote Gadamer's best-known statement: "*Being that can be understood is language*" (Gadamer, *T&M* 470); "*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*" (*WuM*, *GW*1, 478).

⁶⁹ As Gadamer once said in an interview: "I am a Platonist" (Ernest L. Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss: an Interview," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 12. 1 (1984): 10).

be some connection or community that obtains between the knower and the forms.⁷⁰ Indeed, in relation to the thinkers involved in the debate regarding the “theological” turn, as already mentioned above, Gadamer’s position often appears closest to that of Janicaud, at least insofar as both thinkers considered philosophy to be most appropriately aimed towards concrete, human affairs.⁷¹ Gadamer writes, in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*:

When science expands into a total technocracy and thus brings on the ‘cosmic night’ [...] then may one not gaze at the last fading light of the sun setting in the evening sky, instead of turning around to look for the first shimmer of its return? [...] [Hermeneutic universalism] limits the position of the philosopher in the modern world. However much he may be called to draw radical inferences from everything, the role of prophet, of Cassandra, of preacher, or of know-it-all does not suit him. What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now.⁷²

Thus, rather than being another philosophy of the new dawn, of radical avenues to heretofore impossible insights, Gadamer’s hermeneutics looks to what remains of the past (“the last fading light of the sun”). It looks to what can still be accomplished in the light of traditional, Greek, *logos*-based philosophy. Such a philosophical outlook allows one to emphasise the human interpretive engagement with beings of the everyday. Thus, Gadamer’s emphasis on the

⁷⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 16-17; “Die Idee des Guten zwischen Plato und Aristoteles,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 7: *Griechische Philosophie III: Plato im Dialog* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 136-7.

⁷¹ Recall Critchley’s statement that I quoted in a footnote at the end of Chapter 3: Janicaud was “committed to the idea that philosophy should attend to the concrete world and nothing besides” (Critchley, “Dominique Janicaud, 1937–2002” 56). However, as noted above, Gadamer’s philosophy lacks the reductive pragmatism of Janicaud’s.

⁷² Gadamer, *T&M* xxxiv; “Wenn die Wissenschaft sich zur totalen Technokratie steigert und damit die ‘Weltnacht’ [...] darf man dann dem letzten Nachleuchten der untergegangenen Sonne am Abendhimmel nachblicken — statt sich umzukehren und nach dem ersten Schimmer ihrer Wiederkehr auszuschaun? [...] [hermeneutischen Universalismus] begrenzt im besonderen die Stellung des Philosophen in der modernen Welt. Mag er immer die radikalen Konsequenzen aus allem zu ziehen berufen sein, die Rolle des Propheten, des Warnherrn, des Predigers oder auch nur des Besserwissers steht ihm schlecht. Wessen es für den Menschen bedarf, ist nicht allein das unbeirrte Stellen der letzten Fragen, sondern ebenso der Sinn für das Tunliche, das Mögliche, das Richtige hier und jetzt” (“Vorwort zur 2. Auflage,” *GW2*, 447-448).

potential of *language*, appears to focus on what it is *possible* to understand, not on the *impossible*.

However, later in his life, Gadamer began to rethink the need for some form of “theological” transcendence and the relevance it might have to philosophy.⁷³ In a letter written to Andrzej Wierciński—the occasion being the first annual congress of the International Institute for Hermeneutics, dated merely 59 days before his death—Gadamer writes: “I am delighted to know that the conversation between philosophy and theology continues, particularly in North America, where the temptation to forsake the interpretive task in favor of apparently more profitable research can be almost irresistible.”⁷⁴ Owing to this shift in Gadamer’s focus, but also owing to the fact that this shift occurred quite late in his philosophical career, several figures

⁷³ Jens Zimmermann’s works on this topic are quite helpful, one of which (Jens Zimmermann, “Ignoramus: Gadamer’s ‘Religious Turn,’” Symposium 6, no. 2 (2002): 203-217. [Hereafter: “I:GRT”]) is based on a personal interview Zimmermann conducted with Gadamer shortly before his death, and their discussion was on this topic explicitly. See also: “Confusion of Horizons: Gadamer and the Christian Logos,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 22, no. 1 (2001): 87-98. [Hereafter: “CH:GCL”]; “The Ethics of Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Challenge of Religious Transcendence,” *Philosophy Today* 10, (2007): 50-59. [Hereafter: “EPHCRT”]; *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation*, 2nd ed., (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004). [Hereafter: *RTH*]. One may also consider Zimmermann’s less relevant, but still significant, *Humanism and Religion: A Call for the Renewal of Western Culture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2012).

⁷⁴ See: Andrzej Wierciński, ed. *Between the Human and the Divine: Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics* (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2002), x.

have begun to explore the potential of Gadamer's hermeneutics with respect to (broadly) "theological" concerns.⁷⁵

One result of this shift in thought is that Gadamer came to believe that his philosophical hermeneutics has a vital role to play in facilitating dialogue between philosophers and theologians, particularly in a kind of propaedeutic manner, revealing alternative ways of understanding transcendence, since the Western philosophical tradition has retained, Gadamer believes, only the Calvinist conception of transcendence.⁷⁶ Gadamer says that, when dealing with transcendence, one must be sure not to repeat the metaphysical mistakes of the past, but one cannot therefore abandon the issue of transcendence; "we can only be rationally complete with a

⁷⁵ A selection of such works is the following: Donatella Di Cesare, "Hermeneutics and the Transcendence of Understanding," in *Between the Human and the Divine*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2002), 550-564. Patricia Altenbernd Johnson, "Gadamer: Incarnation, Finitude, and the Experience of Divine Infinitude." *Faith and Philosophy* 10, (1993): 539-552, and "Towards a Concept of Religious Experience." *Logos: Philosophic Issues in Christian Perspective* 2, (1981): 59-71. Philippe Eberhard, *The Middle Voice in Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Basic Interpretation with Some Theological Implications* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), and "Gadamer and Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3, (2007): 283-300. Jason Paul Bourgeois, *The Aesthetic Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2008). Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable*. Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010. It is also worth mentioning that, both John Arthos and Mirela Oliva, and both in 2009, dedicated book-length analyses to Gadamer's use of Augustine's *inner word*; John Arthos, *The Inner Word in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), and Mirela Oliva, *Das innere Verbum in Gadamer's Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). None of these works will be considered in depth in this project, though they have informed it in implicit ways.

⁷⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Metaphysics and Transcendence," in *A Century of Philosophy: In Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2003), 73. [Hereafter: "MaT"]; "Metaphysik und Transzendenz," in *Die Lektion des Jahrhunderts: Ein Interview von Riccardo Dottori* (London: Lit Verlag, 2002), 79-80. [Hereafter: "MuT."] See also: Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Idea of Tolerance," in *Praise of Theory*, trans. Chris Dawson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 84-100; "Die Idee der Toleranz 1782-1982," in *Lob der Theorie: Reden und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983), 103-122.

concept of transcendence [...] this is the task of philosophy today.”⁷⁷ Thus, Gadamer *generally* comes to a similar position to those involved in the “theological” turn, which further distinguishes his position from Janicaud’s view of phenomenological philosophy.

In any case, Gadamer’s conclusions on the matter of “theological” transcendence and its relationship to philosophy, seem to be well summarised by Zimmermann, who writes that, for Gadamer:

Religious conviction is necessary but must be held with a humility grounded in the conviction that we cannot know anything definite about God. In the end, Gadamer’s musings about religion add up to a non-institutionalised religious sense of our finitude [the following is a quotation from Zimmermann’s personal interview with Gadamer, from shortly before Gadamer’s death]: “In all this (i.e. the religious realm) we have to acknowledge our ignorance. That, too, is the intention of my conviction about transcendence: it is human not to know. It is inhuman to turn this into a church.”⁷⁸

Furthermore, Gadamer’s personal understanding of the importance of transcendence did never go further than a kind of agnostic piety.⁷⁹

However, Zimmermann—who explores Gadamer’s philosophical debts to the Protestant (Pietist) Christian hermeneutical tradition in some depth—is not satisfied with Gadamer’s conclusion above because, he has argued, one requires an overtly Christian theological basis in

⁷⁷ Gadamer, “MaT” 73; “können wir ja nur mit dem Begriff der Transzendenz vernünftig fertig werden, [...] das ist die Aufgabe der Philosophie heute” (“MuT” 79). Lammi cites this interview as indicating that Gadamer believes that philosophical hermeneutics appeals to a concept of transcendence that can provide the means for dialogue between the major world religions: “Gadamer [...] provides a conceptual basis for dialogue among the educated of all faiths” (Lammi, *GQD* 2). I do not follow Lammi in maintaining this. Gadamer does maintain that we are in desperate need of finding the means to allow for global dialogue, and that philosophers need to understand the role of transcendence in a non-metaphysical manner, but Lammi, in my view, seems to be mistaken in saying that Gadamer’s Greek concept of the divine might provide some kind of universally appreciable notion of transcendence. I deal with this further below.

⁷⁸ Zimmermann, “I:GRT” 214. This is Zimmermann’s translation and he is paraphrasing; the following is the original, full, German quotation: “Tja, ja, ich frage mich da immer was da eigentlich schlimmer ist. Man muss doch bei all diesem anerkennen wir wissen es nicht. Und in sofern meine ich auch meine Überzeugung der Transzendenz; das ist menschlich nicht zu wissen. Es ist unmenschlich daraus Kirche zu machen. So ungefähr denke ich mir das immer” (Zimmermann, “I:GRT” fn. 19, 217).

⁷⁹ See: Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 21-26.

order to maintain the Gadamerian view of the ability of language to describe the world. Zimmermann writes that “[p]hilosophical hermeneutics [...] confesses faith in language and meaning. Unless one is satisfied with fideism, with faith in faith, Gadamer’s faith [...] is plausible only in a theological context which can account for this faith.”⁸⁰ In the same vein, he also writes that “Gadamer [...] is satisfied that language itself indicates the ‘commensurateness of the created soul to created things’ but no longer worries about *why* this is so.”⁸¹ Zimmermann, therefore, believes that Gadamer simply uses language as a kind of substitute for the divine. However, I do not agree that Gadamer’s view of language represents a kind of fideism, especially since Zimmermann articulates this criticism in an almost Cartesian, epistemological sense; i.e. one cannot be *certain* that one’s words and the world are properly matched for the purposes of description. Gadamer never encourages one to view the truth accessed in language in such terms. Regardless, the philosophical problem at issue here—how language can veridically describe what is other to it—is something that is dealt with extensively in my discussion, below, of Gadamer’s view of conversation. In any event, to argue that philosophical hermeneutics is covertly theological—in a confessional, Christian sense—as Zimmermann does, seems to me to be an overstatement. Furthermore, given that I am pursuing the potential for affirming the possibility of a phenomenon of revelation from a phenomenological philosophical position, Zimmermann’s overtly theological starting point does not align well with the aims of this thesis project.

⁸⁰ Zimmermann, “CH:GCL” 96.

⁸¹ Zimmerman, *RTH* 168. Zimmermann is here quoting the following essay: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Nature of Things and the Language of Things,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. & trans. David E. Linge (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 71. [Hereafter: “NLT”]; “Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 2: Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen, Register* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 74. [Hereafter: “NSSD.”] In this section of his essay, Gadamer is again dealing with difficulties involved in Western philosophy’s reception of its metaphysical tradition, particularly, its needing to deal in traditional, metaphysical categories without their traditional, theological groundings.

However, another thinker, Walter Lammi, has addressed the issue of Gadamer's relation to "theological" issues in a manner that is much closer to the focus of this thesis project. Lammi argues that Gadamer himself provides a robust conception of the divine that, while it does not appeal to radical transcendence, is in fact a superior account of divinity, especially with respect to our current historical milieu (i.e. the preponderance of modern philosophical and Protestant Christian theological convictions with respect to divinity and God).⁸² Lammi, in fact, explicitly sees Gadamer as exceeding the figures involved in the "theological" turn:

Gadamer is actually the pre-eminent twentieth century philosopher of the divine [...] Not Heidegger, with his profound yet obscure *Ereignis* of 'goddling' and the last god. Nor yet Derrida, with his undecidable traces of the unscarred that are likewise difficult of access, stylistically no less than substantively. Nor indeed the other postmodern thinkers of the divine "gift."⁸³

And, in another reference to Marion, Caputo, and others like Richard Kearny, Lammi writes, "discussion of the impossible gift, nonatheistic atheism, and religion without religion can proceed productively without such complications along the path of a return to the Greeks."⁸⁴

Concordantly, Lammi refers to a line from Gadamer's essay, "Kant and the Question of God," as his book's *leitmotif*, namely: "[W]hen modern philosophy begins to entrust itself to the ancient path of thought, perhaps thinkers will learn once again to discern the ancient content of the concept of God."⁸⁵ Thus, the access to the transcendent that Lammi suggests is found within

⁸² Lammi's most sustained engagement with this issue comes in *Gadamer and the Question of the Divine*, but see also: "Gadamer and the 'Traditionalist' School on Art and the Divine," *Analecta Husserliana* 93, (2007): 401-422; "Gadamer and the Cultic," in *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming*, ed. A-T. Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2003), 135-144.

⁸³ Lammi, *GQD* 2.

⁸⁴ Lammi, *GQD* 31.

⁸⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Kant and the Question of God," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 17; "wenn sich das moderne Philosophieren erst auf die alten Wege des Denkens zu vertrauen beginnt, wird der Denkende es vielleicht wieder lernen, im Gottesbegriff die alten Inhalte zu gewahren" ("Kant und die Gottesfrage," in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4: *Neuere Philosophie II, Probleme, Gestalten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 360). See: Lammi, *GQD* 14, 35, 49.

hermeneutics must be understood from Gadamer's engagement with Heidegger and the return to the Greeks as Heidegger inaugurated it: "Gadamer weaves his thoughts on the divine by way of an interconnected conversation with Heidegger and the Greeks."⁸⁶

Lammi's book, in my opinion, is not a particularly unified project and offers either two theses or one bifurcated thesis. Lammi presents his book not only as highly relevant to Gadamer scholarship (which it is), but also more widely relevant to those interested in the relationship between philosophy and the "divine" in general. I believe that one cannot take issue with Lammi's book with respect to his thesis that, while "[t]he question of the divine [...] is [...] far out of the mainstream of Gadamer scholarship,"⁸⁷ Gadamer's views on what he considered "divine" are essential if one wishes to properly grasp his hermeneutics. In this respect, Lammi's work is quite valuable, as well as thoroughly researched and footnoted. However, a problem arises when Lammi explains why he takes Gadamer's dealings with the divine to be superior to other post-modern engagements with the "theological,"⁸⁸ because in so arguing he implies a further thesis that, I believe, is much more difficult to maintain.

Lammi couches his entire project within the aim of trying to provide the means by which the major world religions can construct a basis for dialogue (often this is framed as overtly political dialogue) by all accepting the vision of divine transcendence derived from Gadamer's hermeneutics—particularly its appeal to Plato and Aristotle and the extraordinary insight into *the whole of being* or *the one* or *the form of the good* that allows for ethical, practical action.⁸⁹ That is, Gadamer's understanding of divinity is Platonic/Aristotelian, and it is based on an insight into

⁸⁶ Lammi, *GQD* 26.

⁸⁷ Lammi, *GQD* ix.

⁸⁸ Again, this includes Heidegger, Marion, Derrida, Caputo, the new phenomenologists, etc. (Lammi, *GQD* 2, 4).

⁸⁹ Lammi, *GQD* 10-13; 20-25; 42, *et passim*.

“the divine,” in the sense of a diremptive, anomalous experience that allows for practical action by giving one an undeniable yet ineffable insight into the whole of being. This account of “divinity” is, according to Lammi’s argument, more appropriate for establishing cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue than all the efforts of those who attempt to bridge the gap between philosophy and “theology” through some version of a Heideggerian phenomenology of the inapparent. Lammi considers Gadamer to have accomplished what those figures—particularly Marion—set out to do, but without the focus on radical transcendence. Instead, the Gadamerian focus is on the experience on offer in art. As Lammi writes:

In Gadamer’s words, ‘the experience of Being itself, which articulates itself in statement, cannot be measured by the statement or thought in which it presents itself.’ This parallels Marion’s notion of the ‘saturated concept’ of the gift that is too rich to be grasped by the understanding. For Gadamer, however, the paradigm of such richness remains the work of art rather than mystical revelation.⁹⁰

Without further elaboration, this claim borders on a simple category mistake—the work of art, as Gadamer considers it, and mystical revelation, as conceived in Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, point to two distinct notions of what lies beyond the limits of experience. This is not to say, however, that the mystical and the aesthetic cannot be brought together, or that art cannot be the instigator of mystical experience. But, then again, *anything*, taken in its proper sense, can be the instigator of mystical experience, which is part of Marion’s aim in devising the notion of the saturated phenomenon and the four forms of saturation. In any event, it is still possible that the aesthetic and the mystical have a unique experiential bond, but this is, of course, far from maintaining that art enjoys some superiority *over*, in particular, the form of discontinuity with typical experience that is often the hallmark of mysticism.

⁹⁰ Lammi, *GQD* 92; the quotation from Gadamer is from the following essay: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Greeks,” in *Heidegger’s Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 145; “Die Griechen,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3: *Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 290.

Yet Lammi seems aware of this and he makes a distinction between Gadamer's and Marion's respective projects: "Gadamer has nothing to do with the contemporary language of the 'gift' and the postmodern *Zeitgeist* reflected therein";⁹¹ "[t]he phenomenology of the gift, which is [...] a *tout autre* that overwhelms and surpasses human comprehension and thereby points toward the primacy of faith, is likewise closely connected with Christianity, contrary to Gadamer's insistence that phenomenology remain the province of philosophy."⁹² This seems to jump over the main issue of the debate regarding the "theological" turn (at least as I have presented it), by ignoring the emphasis on paradox in Marion. Marion does not leave the impossible, the *tout autre*, simply beyond comprehension; it is paradoxically accessed (by being given) and beyond comprehension (by giving too much). If one were to frame Marion's project in the terms of "faith" and "reason," or "Christianity" and "philosophy," as Lammi does—which I believe is ultimately inadvisable in a contemporary, philosophical context—then Marion's aim is, nevertheless, of a higher order. Marion's aim is to provide a nuanced, robust, and historically informed account of the *cooperation* between "faith" and "reason," "Christianity" and "philosophy," not to imply a hierarchical competition between them.⁹³ Lammi seems not to fully recognise this, though the same basic sentiment is, in a certain sense, the basis for his own argument—he emphasises a conception of divinity that is, in some way, *closer* to regular experience than the mystical experience of the *tout autre* in order to display a perhaps closer than expected relation between the rational and the divine.

⁹¹ Lammi, *GQD* 67.

⁹² Lammi, *GQD* 68. One may see here that Lammi and Zimmermann entertain diametrically opposed theses on the issue of whether Gadamer's hermeneutics is based in Greek philosophical or Christian theological insights.

⁹³ Recall Marion's placing less emphasis on the distinction between theology and philosophy, as well as revealed truth and reasoned truth. In addition, for Marion's brief commentary on the particular issue of the relationship between faith and reason, see: Jean-Luc Marion, "Faith and Reason," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 145-154. However, it is worth noting that this essay is written explicitly from Marion's Christian theological perspective, which may affect his rhetoric.

To argue that Gadamer's conception of the divine is superior because it does not appeal to a *tout autre* seems to change the topic rather than explain the alleged superiority. Lammi considers the fact that Gadamer's hermeneutics does *not* attempt to construct a philosophical inquiry into radical transcendence "on the rubric of faith" to be the chief reason for recommending the divine as conceived of in philosophical hermeneutics as a conceptual basis for interfaith dialogue. Part of his intention here appears to be to emphasise that various spiritual traditions do not necessarily rely on or incorporate radical transcendence as their "theological" starting point and so an understanding of the divine from a phenomenological/hermeneutical perspective can be helpful in allowing one to realise that what is often referred to as "the divine" might be nearer to human understanding than the post-modern discourse implies. This is a fair point to make on its own, but it would seem, more readily, to be an argument for why those spiritual traditions are highly convertible with the Western, Greek philosophical tradition, rather than an argument for why those traditions deal with the divine in a superior manner to the various post-modern discourses mentioned. These are distinct (though not necessarily entirely distinct) notions of divinity, transcendence, or "theology." Furthermore, keeping in mind Lammi's concern for interfaith dialogue, it is not clear how his account of Gadamer's conception of divinity could supply the basis for interfaith dialogue among those traditions that *do* operate on the rubric of faith.

To be fair to Lammi, he begins his book indicating that the inspiration for the project came from his teaching situation at The American University in Cairo, where, from the point of view of the professors, who tend to be unreflective atheists, all "religion" (taken in an imprecise and catch-all manner) is presumed to be irrelevant to rational thought, and the student body of

AUC tends to resent this attitude in its teachers.⁹⁴ Thus, his book seems partially intended to challenge the contemporary tendency to assume a reductive and historically problematic atheistic position, demonstrating that there is more rationality in some conceptions of “the divine” than current perspectives might allow. I would agree that the prevalence of unreflective atheism in Western university professors is worrisome. Regardless, on its own and without further explanation, I do not believe this supplies a sufficient rationale to put Gadamer’s Greek conception of the divine in direct competition with the postmodern continental conception of total otherness; they appear to be different topics and this aspect of Lammi’s approach to them does not appear convincing.

To be clear, I am critical of Lammi’s argument because he ultimately dismisses Marion’s attempt to, paradoxically, *fit* the *tout autre* into phenomenology. Admittedly, how Marion can claim to do so is difficult to understand, but I believe that its very difficulty makes it, in the context of the debate regarding the “theological” turn, the most significant position to investigate philosophically. Nevertheless, my project and Lammi’s may appear to run somewhat in parallel. However, I emphasise *not* that Gadamer’s hermeneutics provides one with a superior account of the *divine* because that divine is less transcendent than the *tout autre*, but that Gadamer’s hermeneutics discloses that the *tout autre* or *otherness* itself responds to one’s need for dialogue and community and thereby challenges the notion of totally disanalogous otherness itself. While what is valuable in the “rubric of faith” is the notion of the impossibility of the totally other, I am attempting to maintain an other that is impossible, but still *is*. Perhaps, then, it can be said that Lammi assumes that for which I am arguing. If so, my project could be seen as supporting Lammi’s, but arguing for a more primordial point that he skips over by dismissing the post-

⁹⁴ Lammi, *GQD* vi.

modern zeitgeist of Marion, Caputo, Derrida, etc., along with the specific issue that they are debating and the difficulties and subtleties involved in that debate.

In what remains of this chapter, I will not be focusing on the conception of the divine that is found in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy.⁹⁵ The debate regarding the "theological" turn is a return to the basic elements of phenomenology, offering a foundational re-interpretation from which new insights can shine forth.⁹⁶ Just as Marion sets aside Husserl's bracketing of God and Heidegger's methodological atheism in order to see if something of phenomenology's "theological" nature has been overlooked, I similarly do not focus on Gadamer's specific conclusions regarding "theology" and transcendence. I do not believe that Gadamer's most developed understanding of the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and "theological" matters is necessarily the best place to look when trying to understand the link his philosophy may offer between the rational and the impossible. Rather, I return to the most rudimentary element of philosophical hermeneutics—the *given*, if you will—which is the experience on offer in conversation, or what Gadamer calls *speech* or *the saying power of words*.⁹⁷ I return to this given and, in light of the issues raised by the debate regarding the "theological" turn, I look to see what conversation itself can offer of "theological" significance.

⁹⁵ Though, for those interested, Lammi's bibliography is the most thorough list of Gadamer's works on this particular topic of the Greek divine and the relationship between hermeneutics and Western religion that I have encountered.

⁹⁶ Consider, again, Marion's statement: "[O]ne does not overcome a true thinking by refuting it, but rather by repeating it, or even by borrowing from it the means to think with it beyond it." (Marion, *RG* 3); "[O]n ne dépasse pas une véritable pensée en la réfutant, mais en la répétant, voire en lui empruntant les moyens de penser avec elle au-delà d'elle" (*Rd* 9).

⁹⁷ Gadamer overtly refers to speech as *the given* and I discuss the passage in which this occurs in depth, below.

What is Speech?

In this final section of this chapter, my aim is to consider, in detail, Gadamer's view of conversation and how meaning is achieved in *speech*, in order to disclose in greater depth what I believe Gadamer's account of this matter establishes in regard to understanding the other. In order to put Gadamer's philosophical concerns in closer contact with the central themes of the debate regarding the "theological" turn, one must ultimately ask: What is happening in cases when one speaks *for* the other in a conversation? This includes instances in which one gives the other a *name*—which I take still to be a matter of *conversation*. That is to say, one must ask what it is that the entrance into conversational community does to the other. However, before addressing this question, I will first engage in a more detailed defence of Gadamer against the criticism that his hermeneutics cannot account for the other at all, given its restriction to matters of being.

This section will be divided into two further subsections. In the first subsection, I will discuss how Gadamer's account of otherness is compatible with deconstruction in regard to its refusal to reduce the other to complete presence, yet, Gadamer's hermeneutics does so while not excluding otherness from being. In the second subsection, I will go on to argue that hermeneutics may still inspire a pursuit of the impossible other, but it does so in a manner that avoids the tendencies towards irrationalism and towards the pragmatic limitation of rationality that, I have argued, ensue when one approaches the impossible in a deconstructive manner. Hermeneutics provides the means of pursuing the impossible by privileging the *connection* or *relation* between beings over any capacity for absolute insight into the being of beings themselves, thus preserving a certain interplay between comprehension and a valuable form of incomprehension, through a reduction to multiple analogous senses of being. The self and the

other are, initially, seemingly reduced within their connection to one another, but that connection, because it is established through lenience and not intuition, is not reducible to presence and so preserves a certain form of incomprehension, which can then allow for the expansion of the other and the self to impossible limits, without ever breaking the connection that their prior agreement has established. The self and the other are only found to *be* in analogous senses, since the conversational *word* in which they encounter one another is itself diverse and may give rise to various, irreducibly analogous senses of being.

In Gadamer's understanding of conversation, one deals with the other through the *logos* or *word*. This refers to what is revealed in *the subject matter* of a conversation, which is the object about which conversation partners are speaking and may include, in some sense, *the other person* to whom one speaks. As a result, hermeneutics is considered, by deconstruction, to deal with otherness exclusively in terms of an economy of historical, linguistic being; that is, presences and absences that are both interpretable as meaningful. When two people speak to one another in conversation, if they have what Gadamer famously called "the good will [of both conversation partners] to try to understand one another,"⁹⁸ they will judge everything that is said according to the *meaning* of the words they use. Caputo takes this to be an indication of Gadamer's logocentrism because finite and limited experience is ultimately reduced to the presence of a

⁹⁸ The full quotation is worth considering: "Both partners must have the good will to try to understand one another. Thus, the question becomes one of how far this situation can be extended and its implications applied. What if no particular addressee or group is intended, but rather a nameless reader—or perhaps an outsider—wants to understand a text?" (Gadamer, "TaI" 33-34). This translation seems to omit some of the German text: "Beide haben den guten Willen, einander zu verstehen, So liegt überall, wo Verständigung gesucht wird, guter Wille vor. Die Frage wird sein, wieweit diese Situation und ihre Implikationen auch gegeben sind, wenn kein bestimmter Adressat oder Adressatenkreis gemeint ist, sondern der namenlose Leser—oder eben, wenn nicht der gemeinte Adressat, sondern ein Fremder einen Text verstehen will" ("TuI," *GW2*, 343). Gadamer's conclusion is that even the stranger or outsider seeks what the writer *means* or *wants to say*, i.e. *has the good will to understand*.

“deeper” *logos*. As Caputo writes, concerning the nature of this *logos*, indicating Gadamer’s debt to both Heidegger and Hegel: “Gadamer wants to show both (1) that the act of understanding is always finite (the Heideggerian side); and (2) that what is understood [...] has a certain infinity (the Hegelian side)” — from the side of the *noetic*, understanding is finite, but from the side of the *noematic*, what is to be understood is infinite.⁹⁹ That is, what is to be understood is perfect, beautiful, an integrated whole, or a totality — i.e. it is, potentially, perfectly, fully present. This is what hermeneutics believes one discovers at the deeper layer of meaning below the surface-presentation of difference and distinction; the *logos* one discovers, if one pushes beyond the initial appearance of difference in one’s normal experience — i.e. the *otherness* of what one encounters — is a word that refers to something all-encompassing or into which everything is, ultimately, perfectly integrated. Thus, on Caputo’s reading, truth or meaning, in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, is a standard metaphysical concept. Truth or meaning is a projection of our own desires for constancy into the other’s otherness, a projection that constitutes what does not appear or what is initially confounding as still part of a totality constructed according to the dictates of comprehensibility. Gadamer’s deeper *logos* does not, therefore, preserve difference and otherness; it cannot allow the other to ultimately appear as, at the limit, forever unrecognisable or incomprehensible. Thus, this *noematic* component of Gadamer’s hermeneutics conflicts with or simply contradicts the recognition of finitude from the *noetic* side of understanding.

To elaborate on Caputo’s criticism, first, note that while *what appears* appears initially as a preservation of the other, via the admission of the finite extent of one’s understanding, *what*

⁹⁹ John D. Caputo, “How to Prepare for the Coming of the Other: Gadamer and Derrida” in *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 46. [Hereafter: “Gadamer and Derrida.”]

does not appear is still asserted to participate in being, and so is said to be anticipated as perfect or complete in itself. That is, what does not appear can be understood to fit into the totality indicated by what does appear. Therefore, in considering both the presence and the absence involved in the word, that which appears is something that will *not* initially present itself without any gaps in its constitution, but it is something that, in principle if not in practice, *could* be understood without remainder. That is, one conceives of what is not understood in conversation as fitting entirely into some *logos* that, while it could never be expressed, still indicates *being* that is commensurate with what does appear, and is therefore still overdetermined by the self's illegitimate desire for constancy or presence.

Furthermore, for Gadamer, in the face of what is particularly recalcitrant, or what is difficult to fit into and articulate through the *logos*, or what even seems to fully resist explication, one *tarryes*. It is precisely in encouraging one to tarry—e.g., next to the artwork, waiting and attempting, always, *to listen more and more closely*, to articulate more and more of the artwork's *truth*—that Caputo argues that Gadamer ultimately effaces otherness:

Gadamer hesitates before the abyss that opens up with such artists as Mallarmé or James Joyce, where what hermeneutics regards as the surface of language comes into play. Gadamer's play must always stay in bounds, within the bounds of sense. So too with modern, non-representational painting: Gadamer is reluctant to enter that abyss where the pure play of lines and color comes into play.¹⁰⁰

Admittedly, when discussing art and literature, Gadamer does describe what is accessed through tarrying explicitly as a presence, but he nevertheless emphasises how this is not *presence-at-hand*, i.e. mere objectivity or *full* presence. He writes:

One speaks of presence in relation to literary texts and even of the self-presentation of the poetic word [...] [But... o]ne draws a false conclusion if one thinks one can understand such presence with the language of metaphysics as presence-at-hand, or with

¹⁰⁰ Caputo, "Gadamer and Derrida" 53.

the concept of objectifiability. That is not the presentness which belongs to the literary work, indeed, it does not belong to any text at all.¹⁰¹

What is presented of the subject matter in a text, or in a conversation, also participates in some kind of non-presence, at least relative to the pure presence of what is objectifiable. Thus, I do not believe it is fair to interpret this *presence* that Gadamer describes as a metaphysical totality.

Gadamer is, here, clearly dealing with a nuanced issue, one that may inherently lack terminology proper to it; thus, any description of the issue may be expected to call for further elaboration.

Therefore, one ought to approach his point here with adequate lenience—which I believe Caputo simply lacks, with respect to Gadamer.¹⁰² What Gadamer is trying to describe is what one actually receives from the other in the act of understanding. I would venture that he is gesturing towards a way in which one can *affirm* the other without being able to fully understand what the other is. This may allow one to preserve difference without appealing to what is otherwise than being.

However, it must be said that it is also well established that, for Gadamer, one can only receive something of the other through the lens of one's prejudices, which gives some weight to Caputo's criticisms. That is, all that is understood *is* in some sense initially reduced to one's own possibilities, one's prejudices. But this then becomes a matter of how one's possibilities come to be expanded and what is recognised in the expansion. This raises the well known issue that

¹⁰¹ Gadamer, "TaI" 47; "Man redet da von Präsenz und [...] sogar von Selbstpräsentation des dichterischen Wortes. Es ist aber ein Trugschluß, wenn man solche Präsenz von der Sprache der Metaphysik aus als die Gegenwärtigkeit des Vorhandenen oder vom Begriff der Objektivierbarkeit aus verstehen will. Das ist nicht die Gegenwärtigkeit, die dem literarischen Werk zukommt, ja, sie kommt überhaupt keinem Text zu" ("TuI," GW2, 356 [emphasis in original]). This passage is somewhat reminiscent of Marion, but not without many qualifications.

¹⁰² Again, as I quoted in my first chapter, Caputo simply states, in one essay, that "deconstruction has a more suspicious eye [than hermeneutics]" (Caputo, "GCE" 262). This statement is, of course, only ultimately justified by Caputo insofar as he claims that foundational suspicion of all appeals to being, language, and comprehensibility *preserves* the other's otherness from the reduction to presence—something that I do not believe is invariably true, as I discuss further below.

arises in the context of *Truth and Method*'s defence of prejudice, where, between the first and second edition of his text, Gadamer changed the following passage: "It is only temporal distance that can solve the question of critique in hermeneutics, namely how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we *understand*, from the *false* ones, by which we *misunderstand*," replacing, "It is only temporal distance..." ("Nichts anderes als dieser Zeitenabschnitt...") with "Often temporal distance..." ("Oft [...] der Zeitenabstand...") and adding, in a footnote: "it is distance, not only temporal distance, that makes this hermeneutic problem solvable."¹⁰³

However, in spite of Gadamer's recognition of the problem, Caputo's criticism is that Gadamer's deeper truth collapses all forms of distance. But Gadamer is aware of this danger as well; soon after the above passage, he writes: "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" and adds to this, in a footnote: "Here constantly arises the danger of 'appropriating' the other person in one's own understanding and thereby failing to recognize his or her otherness."¹⁰⁴ Thus, while Gadamer recognises this danger of appropriating the other to oneself, he still thinks that the kind of understanding he is describing leaves open the option of a kind of understanding of something other. This understanding perhaps permits even the recognition of something *totally* other, but not something *irreconcilably* other—if one will allow such a distinction between "totally" and "irreconcilably"—which would indicate something that

¹⁰³ Gadamer, *T&M* 298 & fn. 44, 376; "[...] vermag [...] die eigentlich kritische Frage der Hermeneutik lösbar zu machen, nämlich die *wahren* Vorurteile, unter denen wir *verstehen*, von den *falschen*, unter denen wir *mißverstehen*, zu scheiden" (*WuM*, *GW1*, 304); "es ist Abstand—nicht nur Zeitenabstand—was diese hermeneutische Aufgabe lösbar macht" (*WuM*, *GW1*, fn. 228, 304)

¹⁰⁴ Gadamer, *T&M* 299 & fn. 46, 376; "Der wahre historische Gegenstand ist kein Gegenstand, sondern die Einheit dieses Einen und Anderen, ein Verhältnis, in dem die Wirklichkeit der Geschichte ebenso wie die Wirklichkeit des geschichtlichen Verstehens besteht" (*WuM*, *GW1*, 305); "Hier droht beständig die Gefahr, das Andere im Verstehen 'anzueignen' und damit in seiner Andersheit zu verkennen" (*WuM*, *GW1*, fn. 230, 305).

one ultimately cannot understand (totally other) but something with which one still finds community (not irreconcilably other).

Thus, Gadamer's defence of prejudice clearly implies that one approaches the other through what one can understand, and that this always *risks* reducing the other to oneself, but there is the possibility of not doing so. This indicates a somewhat complicated dynamic between what one can understand and what one does not understand. In order to bring out further the difference between hermeneutics and deconstruction on this point, it bears asking, in reference to the passage from Caputo quoted above: What is the effect of emphasising lines and colours playing on the surface of a painting *for their own sake*? Does the mere attention we give to lines and colours not lend them a certain significance, even while understanding that what they represent is beyond understanding? One could even say that this *for their own sake* itself speaks to a kind of "deeper meaning," in spite of itself. That is to say, all the elements of texts that deconstruction emphasises—gaps, caesurae, purely formal features, unintentional resonances, language-specific idioms, puns, etc.—i.e. all the traditionally "meaningless" or overlooked uses of language, over time these elements can come to form an established concern within the focus of an interpretive tradition in exactly the manner that Gadamer would describe. Such elements are initially distant and incomprehensible, but over time, when one tarries with them, they integrate themselves into an interpretive tradition; as these distant elements are brought nearer and nearer, elements of one language become more and more fully translated into another language, expanding the language into which they translate themselves in the process. Once deconstruction's inversion of language norms and traditional interpretive foci becomes an accepted practice, this practice enters into language's purposes.

This is a particularly relevant consideration, given that almost two generations have passed since Derrida's deconstruction was introduced to contemporary continental philosophy, allowing one to more easily assess its capacity to maintain itself. Essentially nothing that calls itself "deconstruction" truly is as radical as deconstruction is intended to be—as would be required by the strange standard that the totally disanalogous *impossible* sets for thought, and I believe that this point would be accepted by serious deconstructionists themselves. In fact, the word "deconstruction," at least as it has integrated itself into the contemporary zeitgeist, may reveal something. "Deconstruction" is essentially never used to actually mean "a reduction to aporetic undecidability" allowing for something akin to "free" decision—as is its intended meaning. Instead, "deconstruction" is used as a synonym for "analysis," and it is a kind of analysis that is mainly implemented for the purposes of the dismissal of a traditional understanding of some text or practice for the sake of a new understanding of that text or practice. Furthermore, I would argue that when one tries to apply deconstruction to the specific aim of a particular, established discipline—as Caputo is trying to apply deconstruction to matters of "theology"—one automatically removes the tension and undecidability deconstruction is meant to inspire. Precisely trying to *unseat* the traditional "result" of theology and replace it with a deconstructive "result" makes the other into *something*. But then this presents a problem, for the other cannot be affirmed as *something*, but must be neither *something* nor *nothing*. Only as a radical form of errant questioning, wedded to a form of suspicion that may resemble folly or madness, can the other be *maintained* as neither something nor nothing. By no means do I mean by this to completely impugn errant questioning, nor the capacity for a serious thinker to go a little "mad." I only mean that the interruption that errant questioning and radical suspicion permit should inspire one to return to careful thinking of the other, not to construct a new form of

thinking based on impossibly maintaining errancy and the other that is indicated within periods of errancy.¹⁰⁵

In any event, deconstruction, on the above reading, is implicitly treated as a *potential of language*, and only a temporary inversion of it. As soon as deconstruction comes into a position where it needs to direct one's behaviour—and not merely interrupt it—it requires the means of *affirming* the other, in order to avoid a superstitious construction of the other. Now, at this point, one could go the route of investigating whether, perhaps, deconstruction's tendency to be integrated into language's purposes reveals that language—and *being* along with it—is even more capacious than typically understood. That is, perhaps there is an incomprehensibility within language, but not as a rupture that only indicates an absolutely inscrutable, irreconcilable other. Rather, the incomprehensible within language may be revealed as an analogical interval between what is near and what is unfathomably distant that allows what is distant to be incomprehensible and yet relevant, because it can still be affirmed since it still participates in being, but being can no longer be reduced to sameness.

Clearly, deconstruction *does not* and *cannot* maintain this. Indeed, to do so, to submit the deconstruction of meaning to the construction of new interpretive traditions, even if such

¹⁰⁵ In connection with “theological” considerations, it may bear mentioning that Derrida's tendencies towards confounding philosophical understanding have caused some to interpret him as a form of “prophet.” Neal Oxenhandler writes: “In Derrida's at times apocalyptic style we perceive fundamental obstacles to consensus and to community: this is always something exclusionary about prophets, they have many acolytes but no equals” (“The Man with Shoes of Wind: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter,” in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard Palmer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 268). All of Derrida's defenders of this variety seem to forget one important thing: prophets, particularly Hebrew prophets, come at a time of dissolution and crisis and *recall* the community to proper worship and relationship to God; they *re-establish community* by emphasising how God has not abandoned his chosen people, even if the chosen people abandon their God. Prophets are not meant to be commended for their highly irregular behaviour; their behaviour is a sign that something is wrong. In any event, it should be noted that, given Derrida's tendencies, if he is to be compared to any overtly “religious” personage, he resembles less the Hebrew prophet and more the figure in Russian Orthodoxy known as the “holy fool” (юродивый)—deliberately flouting social norms for an unrecognisable or confounding “theological” purpose.

traditions become more expansive and accepting in the process, is interpreted as a betrayal of the impossible, a lowering of the impossible into the possible. To suggest this may even sound akin to Janicaud's argument that, over time, the "impossible" evanesces; i.e. whatever is called "impossible" invariably becomes recognised as having always been a matter of the possible. Certainly, no one can deny, as Janicaud describes, that what is presented as impossible in one time period may become possible in another. However, all the figures supporting the "theological" turn, would not be proposing such a notion—that the impossible is simply on its way to becoming possible. Indeed, deconstruction would maintain that any reading-tactic that reduces to tradition or to accepted interpretive practices is no longer *deconstructive*. In connection with this, it is relevant that Derrida tended to change his terminology with every publication (arche-writing, *différance*, dissemination, the trace, the supplement, the impossible, etc.).

However, I would emphasise that no number of changes in vocabulary can stave off the eventual recognition of that which must underly all of these constructions, or that *something* underlies all of these constructions, even if only analogously. For deconstruction to make a point that is distinct from hermeneutics, it has no option but to consistently emphasise that which is irreconcilably impossible, the absolutely inscrutable, the totally disanalogous other. As such, deconstruction emphasises the pursuit of that with which philosophy dispenses. In doing so, deconstruction can, for the remainder of human history, always "respond 'no, it's not that, it's not so simple' to all questions"¹⁰⁶ in spite of itself. It can always operate out of a place of suspicion *on behalf of the other who can never be*, while never properly addressing the problem that such suspicion creates: such an other cannot be affirmed to *be*, but must *be* in order to be pursued.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, "Denials" 88; "répondent 'non, ce n'est pas ça , ce n'est pas si simple' à toutes les questions" ("Dénégations" 160).

Caputo is clear, though, that deconstruction is meant to be affirmative:

[Derrida's] much vaunted critique of presence and *logos*, his suspicion of a hermeneutics of 'meaning' and deep 'truth,' [...] are not undertaken in the name of wanton play, of unbridled critique, of nihilistic suspicion, but in the name of affirmation, the '*oui, oui*,' of the other, of the *tout autre*, in the name of hospitality, for he fears the barriers that essences build, be it the essence of truth or being, of art or language, of tradition or community. He fears the walls.¹⁰⁷

But then, the question remains, if Derrida is suspicious enough to reject all these things, *what is he affirming?* To what does he say, "*Oui*," *when he fears so much?* Of course, the answer is "the other," but it is "the other" only as intended, not an other that is actually affirmed, since actual affirmation is considered violence. Outside of Derrida's specific rhetorical formulations—formulations that have a performative element and a literary integrity that maintains *something* within the tense lack of answer to philosophical questions¹⁰⁸—such "otherness" is merely pure negation and the pursuit of it is the validation of folly for folly's sake. This position takes on a conception of the other as totally disanalogous to the self's possibilities and a view of community as inimical to otherness. I believe that from this position one cannot adequately investigate what happens to the other when one *problematizes* the affirmation of the *being* of the other.

Being, from the perspective Caputo espouses, is always violent to otherness and can affirm only the self. And so, Caputo's rhetoric is always aimed at a kind of destruction of the self: "deconstruction [...] provides for a more radical conception [than hermeneutics] of friendship and hospitality, of *putting oneself at risk*";¹⁰⁹ "Derrida would not embrace

¹⁰⁷ Caputo, "Gadamer and Derrida" 57.

¹⁰⁸ And, I would argue, though there is not space to provide the full argument here, that Derrida, more than other deconstructionists, through his superior mastery of style, manages to, quite delicately, gesture towards some kind of analogous other. This is because, *pace* Caputo, Derrida understands the need for community even while he fears its walls. I read Derrida's response to Gadamer's hermeneutics, "Rams," according to this idea.

¹⁰⁹ Caputo, "Gadamer and Derrida" 57; emphasis added.

[Gadamer’s] rhetoric of a fusion of horizons, for it is only in the *breach* of the horizon that the other manages to gain a hearing.”¹¹⁰ The latter statement elaborates on the deconstructive suspicion of *community*—since a *fusion* of horizons clearly indicates a communal structure, while a *breach* of horizons maintains the other always over the self. I read Caputo’s statement with a particular metaphor in mind: If Caputo is honestly saying that the other needs to “gain a hearing,” then if one considers the ear-drum, Caputo is saying that, *to hear*, the eardrum must be breached by the offering of the other, because the self’s possibilities cannot but destroy what the other offers. But then, one can hear nothing. Furthermore, one can never be sure that the other offers *anything* (*re* the gift) because one is technically deaf to true otherness. So why does one pay attention to breaches? Why does one allow oneself to be made deaf without reason? It is simply problematic that a project aimed at minimising violence towards the other at all costs and providing a proper basis for *hospitality* and *friendship* would take up the rhetoric of violence towards the self and an inveterate suspicion of *community*.¹¹¹

Thus, on the deconstructive view, the other and being become radically separated, never meeting—when one appeals to any notion that is reducible to presence (like being), or even

¹¹⁰ Caputo, “Gadamer and Derrida” 58; emphasis added. Recall Zimmermann’s comment that Caputo “falls in love with the breach itself” (*RTH* 229).

¹¹¹ This clearly comes from the influence of Levinas, where the other eventually becomes a strange, hostile persecutor of the self, hounding the self to let the other live. Hart’s analysis of this, while extreme, is perceptive: “[There is] no modern philosophy of ‘values’ more morally hideous than that of Levinas. Behind his convulsive and ostentatious ecstasies of self-denial and self-torture, with all their mournful bombast, one can easily lose sight of an immensely troubling feature of his discourse: it is plainly bizarre for an ethics that begins from a solicitude that the Other not suffer the themes and reductions of the Same to terminate in language that, quite without compunction, reduces the other to the theme of ‘persecutor,’ a sacrificer of hostages, an accuser, a stranger to gratitude. [...] It requires of course humility to acknowledge one’s need for the other’s response, to allow the ‘empirical’ self its dependency, even if the ‘transcendental’ self must then lose some of its purity—enough humility to be awestruck by the beauty of another: this one cannot possess; one needs its otherness to taste of it. An infinite and anonymous alterity, on the other hand, one possesses entirely. [...] Often, seeing the color of another’s eyes is the beginning of ‘responsibility’” (Hart, *BI* 81-84). Thus, Hart is here outlining a way in which the recognition of the being of the other can lead to an ethical response. I am adapting his argument for my purposes in this chapter.

associated with presence (like community), one has lost otherness, and one can only continually deconstruct presence in order to receive a reminder of what does not come to presence. One element of Marion's phenomenology of givenness that I find relevant in this context is that all givens are implied by Marion to be *mixtures* of the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. Let us remember that, although Marion is trying to describe givenness as exceeding being, I have interpreted him as appealing to a conception that functions similarly to *being* understood in an irreducibly analogical sense; that is, *being* as defined only as the analogy between multiple senses of being and thus maintaining comprehensibility and incomprehensibility within itself. The mixture of the comprehensible and incomprehensible, on Marion's account, is meant to be accessed through the reference beyond presence and absence to the given that can give itself. The given is both comprehensible (it gives itself) and yet it is incomprehensible (it can give too much), *in the very same instance*. On my account of Marion, precisely by saying that such a given can give itself, potentially without any ambiguity concerning the fact of its givenness, but with overwhelming or excessive ambiguity in one's understanding of the nature of what has been given, Marion's conclusion seems to appeal to various *senses* of givenness. The difference between the various degrees of saturation indicate that what is given can give a wide variety of "things"—from mathematical entities, to objects, to persons, to God. Givenness, therefore, clearly spans a set of analogies; "givenness" itself is neither totally equivocal nor univocal. As a result, in Marion's phenomenology, both presences and absences become potential vehicles for the utmost givenness, i.e. revelation.¹¹² Thus, the mixture between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility to which I am referring constitutes the very words that one uses to describe

¹¹² Recall that Marion thinks that regular events in life display givenness, for example, as he says in his discussion with Derrida: "life-death, birth, love, poverty, illness, joy, pleasure, and so on" ("On the Gift" 75).

the other—those words permit one to affirm that the other *is*, and only some stupefied sense of *what* the other is.

Givenness, on Marion's conception, is based on a foundational supposition: *givens are given*. While this is a tautology, Marion sees it as a generative tautology, since the logic of the given is to *give*, not merely to appear (or be present) nor merely to conceal itself (or be absent). Thus, the logic of the given, the underlying grammar of the gift, is to *give* in more ways than merely *appearing* and *disappearing*. On this conception, that which is beyond comprehension is not fundamentally ambiguous, as it is in deconstruction (in the sense that it cannot receive affirmation). Because givens are *given*, one is capable of concluding that something is given that one cannot fully understand; thus, there is no justification for maintaining the absolute ambiguity of what is given as something merely *intended*. But then, the issue with Marion's givenness, as indicated by the criticism of deconstruction, is that givenness functions much like *being* insofar as givenness is not fully *incomprehensible* to a finite human mind. In fact, givenness *demand*s affirmation insofar as the other *is definitively given* by *giving itself*. Such a conclusion, in view of how Marion has formulated his phenomenology of givenness according to deconstruction's account of otherness, is therefore interpreted by his critics as a *projection* into otherness.

But again, either such otherness is purely existential and one is validating the pursuit of the irrational as the pursuit of the "theological,"¹¹³ or such otherness represents something that must be affirmed, but what one is affirming must remain somewhat mysterious. Therefore, one is looking, in this context, for an understanding of *being itself* that does not allow one to reduce the incomprehensibility or impossibility of *what* the other *is*. One is looking for the other, for the incomprehensible, the impossible, *within being*.

¹¹³ In which case, I also have argued that Janicaud's position should reassert itself—better to abandon the "theological" than wed it to existential irrationality.

Gadamer's hermeneutics allows for both comprehensibility and incomprehensibility in a similar fashion to Marion's givenness. Gadamer, as noted previously in this chapter, always strives for the conceptual grasp of one's subject matter. But that grasp is only as strong as one's memory of the mysterious saying power of words. The mysterious saying power of words is a matter of bringing what is not understood into being, but in such a way that one not lose one's sense that what is said through that saying power is never fully understood. Because it is never fully understood, the perfection or totality that Caputo says Gadamer projects into the other ought to be understood according to a much looser grammar than that on which Caputo insists. I would say that hermeneutics offers the possibility of *describing the other as other*, of *speaking for the other without doing violence to otherness*, by reducing *what is said* (the *logos*) to the paradox, not of givenness, but of incomprehensible being, or being that is comprehended as more incomprehensible than comprehensible.

I am aware of the issue this claim immediately appears to raise, given that Gadamer's perhaps best known statement is: "*Being that can be understood is language.*"¹¹⁴ But the meaning of such a statement depends, as always, on the grammar underlying it. When reading Gadamer, I find it crucial to interpret him based on his claim of the "fundamental metaphoricity of language."¹¹⁵ As he writes: "[T]o regard the metaphorical use of a word as not its real sense is the prejudice of a theory of logic that is alien to language."¹¹⁶ I apply this principle to Gadamer's statements themselves. I believe that his statement about the metaphoricity of language takes absolute precedence when reading Gadamer's philosophical works, since Gadamer is always

¹¹⁴ Gadamer, *T&M* 470 [emphasis in original]; "*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*" (*WuM*, *GW1*, 478).

¹¹⁵ Gadamer, *T&M* 429; "die grundsätzliche Metaphorik der Sprache selbst" (*WuM*, *GW1*, 434).

¹¹⁶ Gadamer, *T&M* 428; "es kommt darauf an zu erkennen, daß es das Vorurteil einer sprachfremden logischen Theorie ist, wenn der übertragene Gebrauch eines Wortes zum uneigentlichen Gebrauch herabgedrückt wird" (*WuM*, *GW1*, 433).

making reference to the need, in philosophical works, to draw on that saying power of words that he describes as giving life to the philosophical concept, and which is certainly accessed through metaphor. Each instance of language use is both tending towards closure, but also maintaining an openness. Thus, the apparent incoherence of claiming **1)** that being that can be understood is language, **2)** that philosophy is an inherently linguistic discourse that seeks the truth of being raised to the level of the concept, and **3)** that hermeneutics sustains an ultimate conception of being that *cannot* be understood but is nevertheless attested to in language, is just an apparent incoherence. I maintain that Gadamer's hermeneutics, as much as it supports the conclusion that being that can be understood is language, also maintains that, at the deepest level, there is always room for conversation concerning *what the various elements of that statement mean*.

Gadamer's statement and the words within it ought to be taken somewhat metaphorically, since metaphors, for Gadamer, are simply uses of language in which one seeks connections and notices similarities between disparate elements of experience.¹¹⁷ I would say that it even allows one to seek the connection between *elements of experience* and *that which appears to escape experience*. In saying that being that can be understood is language, Gadamer is, generally, alluding to the dynamic that occurs between what comes to expression in language (being that can be understood) and what is not understood (the implicit "being" that *cannot* be understood; what appears to not ever come to one's attention; what is impossible for the understanding). Gadamer may appear to be implying that what cannot be understood, what does not enter language, cannot receive any attention since it cannot be addressed by a language which is impressed upon by the things of the world.¹¹⁸ This would also imply a certain presumption

¹¹⁷ Gadamer, *T&M* 429; *WuM*, *GW1*, 434-5.

¹¹⁸ Gadamer appeals to the dialectic of the Greeks in which thought "suffers" ("*erleidet*") the self-performance of the thing that is itself the thing's *understanding* (Gadamer, *T&M* 469; *WuM*, *GW1*, 478). Note, also, that if Gadamer were restricting one's attention in such a manner, it would make his position identical to that of Janicaud.

concerning what the “things” of this world can be, but I do not believe that Gadamer would need to make this presumption. While it may appear as though Gadamer is making a strict division between being that can be understood and whatever cannot be understood, in the same section of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s language is pervaded by the rhetoric of what *enters* or *comes into* language¹¹⁹—which clearly relates to his notion of *incipience*. The fundamental openness of Gadamer’s statement—its most metaphorical element, so to speak—is therefore found in the phrase “can be understood,” because that phrase implies the movement from beyond language into language, inattention to attention.¹²⁰ Therefore, at first glance: being that can be understood is language and being that *cannot be understood* is, simply, something else. But, again, language is fundamentally open and it maintains that fundamental openness to whatever decides to impress itself upon it. One cannot eliminate the implication here between things as they are when they are understood and things that do not enter the understanding, this *something else*. There is at the very least a reference being made, therefore, to what appears not to come to one’s attention, what appears to be beyond language, or, indeed, what is impossible with respect to the understanding. These are the same issues that Marion and Derrida discussed in their encounter at

¹¹⁹ Gadamer, *T&M* 469; *WuM*, *GW1*, 478.

¹²⁰ It ought to be noted that Gadamer later omits this phrase “can be understood,” writing only: “being is *language*, i.e., *self-presentation*” (Gadamer, *T&M* 481; emphasis in original); “*Sein Sprache, d.h. Sichdarstellen ist*” (*WuM*, *GW1*, 490; emphasis in original). This, however, comes in the context of a discussion of the relation between being, the good, the true, and, in particular, the beautiful, and so Gadamer’s rhetoric in this later section of *T&M* tends strongly in the direction of emphasising the *brilliance* or *radiance* of the self-presentation of things which is their fundamental activity in *being*, which naturally connects being to beauty. This is perhaps a metaphorical connection that simply emphasises the light of being over its darkness. In any event, a full analysis of this issue is not possible here. However, I am confident that this change in *T&M* does not represent a fundamental conflict with my reading. Nevertheless, it has always been my intention to go beyond Gadamer in my readings of him in this thesis project, and so for this reason (though not only for this reason), I consider the more mysterious and complex formulation —“being that can be understood”—to take precedence. I also feel the need to mention that I am highly sympathetic to Gadamer’s discussions of the relevance of the beautiful. In connection with this, I recommend John R. Betz’s “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two),” *Modern Theology* 22.1, (2006): 1-50, which deals, from a Christian metaphysical perspective, with the possibility of allying the beautiful (brilliance) and the sublime (darkness) in an appeal to the analogy of being.

Villanova—that there is something referred to beyond presence and absence, beyond what is normally attested to in language. However, I believe the fundamental openness of language allows one to say that a connection between language and what is referred to beyond presence and absence can be sought within a linguistic medium.

Thus, in elaborating upon that sought connection, one must always begin from the finite perspective of being/language/possibility. From that perspective, what appears not to come to one's attention/what is beyond language/what is impossible must be described with the terms of being/language/possibility. I take this to mean that one may look for some kind of analogy between being that can be understood and what cannot be understood, such that one can use the language of being to describe the realm that appears to be beyond being. Thus, while Gadamer's hermeneutics deals with similar issues to those that are discussed in the debate regarding the "theological" turn—in particular, Derrida and Marion's discussion—such as how one can use language to discuss what is *beyond* or *otherwise*, it does not allow one to assert that one must venture beyond what is *analogous* to what is understood. In fact, it reveals such an assertion to be, perhaps, premature. Thus, it deals with whatever is "beyond" in terms of its connection to being and what is attested to in language.

What is crucial is that it is not necessary to interpret the *analogy* that I have referred to as reducing what does not come to understanding to being as presence. An analogy must run in *both directions*. Thus, one understands what is other in terms of what is understandable, but also what is understandable by what is otherly. The analogy does not only shed light on what is not understood; it also enriches the understood by darkening it. The impossible, therefore, is relevant to the possible. The question, then, is *how otherly* can that which one understands become? Does it become so otherly that the understanding itself *ruptures* and one must admit an

other that cannot be affirmed or denied? Or, does the understanding have the paradoxical capacity to accept something that is initially understood as similar to itself and described by the same language, but that also eventually reveals the understanding's incapacity to firmly understand what is understood, while never fully unravelling the *being* and the *language* of what is not understood?

Thus, the concerns here are close to those of deconstruction, but the connections being established differ. There is no *rupture* in hermeneutics, but there may be a valuable kind of incomprehension that inspires a rational pursuit of impossible otherness. This incomprehensibility is found in the paradox of maintaining that there is being that cannot be understood, that one is still justified in maintaining that *there is being* beyond comprehension. This is what an analogical conception of being may allow. In moving on to the next subsection, I will describe how I believe Gadamer's hermeneutics may fill out such an analogical conception of being, as arising in the linguistic medium of conversation.

When Gadamer discusses conversation, he means a communal interaction that is established in the medium of our linguisticity, which acts as the rational background against which whatever we encounter within that horizon of experience is judged or measured. But if the other is at all measured, if the other enters into any community, does that not destroy otherness? Is it not simply, logically necessary that anything that enters *into* community is proven to be commensurate with that community and, consequently, not truly, fully other to it? And, in this context of the debate regarding the "theological" turn, is one not concerned primarily with the other who must remain *outside, incommensurate, irreducible, impossible*?

Phrasing this matter as I just have can be somewhat misleading, however. The matter of otherness is a matter of how to *maintain distinctions* when a community or a context of understanding is, *inevitably*, established. Community is inevitable; one must question how to approach this inevitability. In particular, one should question whether one should maintain, whether weakly or strongly, that *everything* forms some kind of community (even while all recognise that a community in which *everything* resides clearly cannot be conceptually determined). The point that figures like Caputo are making in regard to the way in which community is inherently violent to otherness is that any time one even refers to a community that encompasses everything (even one that is not conceptually determined), one is necessarily *not able* to speak capaciously enough to include *everything*. In order to be able to do so, the community of everything to which one refers would need to be able to maintain distinctions and differences between **1)** commensurate, native, or internal elements and **2)** incommensurate, foreign or, so to speak, “outside” elements. One would have to give an account of how foreign elements would enter into community with the native elements, and not reduce them to some form of sameness (not reduce what is foreign entirely to what is native). But, of course, what are “outside elements” when one is considering *everything*? A community of *everything* would have nothing outside it or other to it. Thus, “community” is a term, ostensibly like “being” or “presence,” that collapses distinctions and erases otherness by making the other recognisable within itself; i.e. community reduces the other to its own themes. This creates the fundamental issue with which deconstruction is meant to contend: How does one maintain an *otherness* that is neither simply internal (contained) nor simply external (incoherent) to a given totality? How does one *maintain* otherness without *containing* otherness?

Recall that Marion claims givenness *can*, through paradox, both *contain* and *maintain* otherness. On the other hand, deconstruction maintains that no community can truly do this; thus, deconstruction does not even suggest any further background for otherness; it simply makes no comment about the potential for a community of *everything* so as to avoid positing yet another reductive community. However, it still posits desire for the other, and posits the only “connection” between the other and the self as arising through the self’s *indication* of otherness. But, because there is a refusal to comment on the possibility of a true *community* between the self and the other, I have maintained that deconstruction, therefore, must, in some sense, affirm an other that is not, or a nothing that is, always risking irrationality. I find Marion’s exploration of paradox avoids this slide towards irrationality, and so his notion of paradox is more reasonable than deconstruction’s exploration of otherness that is only “communed” with through intention. The question that I wish to raise, however, in partially distinguishing my position from that of Marion, is whether being itself is able to maintain distinction and difference, while still being posited as a form of all-encompassing community or horizon.

First, I would like to consider more abstractly whether community must collapse difference as well as consider a distinction between two different varieties of “community.” Consider, then, that most would recognise that community is undeniably violent if there is no willingness to enter the community on “both sides.” That is, if one side tries to force the other *to be in a certain way*, then there is violence, or a projection of the self onto the other, not a recognition of the other as other, not an allowance of difference to stand. But if both agree to enter into a certain community or context of understanding, the reduction that is undergone may not be an expression of mere violence, even if it entails a pragmatic engagement with otherness. I would maintain that this is because the agreement to enter into community is the agreement, on

the part of all sides involved, to *be* for one another. This certainly implies that one immediately engages the other in a reduced or, again, pragmatic, sense. And, from a deconstructionist standpoint, agreeing to such a pragmatic engagement is, nevertheless, a kind of mutual destruction—even if deconstruction admits that such mutual destruction is unavoidable. However, again according to deconstruction, while unavoidable, such pragmatic engagement does not even get one marginally closer to an understanding of the other; the other remains ever distant.

It will be necessary to probe more deeply into what I am calling a pragmatic engagement with otherness. What is being investigated is whether the willing entrance into a community of beings is invariably violent and cannot permit difference to stand. I would maintain that it can allow difference to stand, if one allows that such a pragmatic engagement can be deepened by a certain kind of incomprehension, but one that falls short of the need to gesture beyond being. Thus, let us begin properly investigating Gadamer’s account of the engagement with otherness called conversation. Gadamer describes the community of linguisticity, i.e conversation, as being established by the prior intention of both interlocutors to *mean the same* or to *mean in common*.¹²¹ This is the statement that I intend to investigate rigorously in this section: What does it mean to *mean in common*?

Günter Figal describes, quite thoroughly, what Gadamer would consider both a failed and a successful conversation to be as follows:

The more “authentic” the conversation, the less “its conduct lies within the will of either partner.” An authentic conversation is “never one that we want to conduct.” If the intentions of one of the participants in a conversation dominate it, the conversation quickly becomes monological or degenerates into a power struggle. In a power struggle

¹²¹ I speak of conversation as though it involves only two interlocutors, but only for simplicity’s sake. A conversation involving larger numbers of people will, *mutatis mutandis*, function in the same manner; i.e. with the will to *mean in common*.

each participant speaks only for herself and concerns herself only with articulating her convictions; the only thing that matters is to convince the other such that one tries not to let the other speak. Here, either the convictions stand isolated and untouched next to one another, or one of them shows that it alone is valid and is thereby victorious. One talks past one another or at one another and shows that one is not capable of conversing. One is prepared for a conversation only when one is prepared to listen, that is, when one is prepared to let the other say something. And one shows that one is capable of a conversation by talking in a way that corresponds to the preparedness for conversation of the other and not by using it as an opportunity to carry on a monologue.¹²²

Figal here emphasises how, for Gadamer, a lack of will is involved in a proper conversation; that lack of will is, in essence, *listening*.¹²³ He also emphasises the preparedness—showing itself in the manner of one’s responses—that is required in order to allow one to properly listen.

Gadamer describes further how this preparedness to listen is achieved. What is interesting is that, while a lack of will is emphasised in the act of entering into conversation, the way in which one is able to prepare oneself to properly listen in conversation still requires one to be wilful or active in determining what the other is trying to say:

Understanding always means first of all: oh, now I understand what you want! In saying this, I have not said that you are right or that you will be judged to be correct. But only

¹²² Günter Figal, “The Doing of the Thing Itself: Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Ontology of Language,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. & trans. Robert J. Dostal, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 107-8. The quotations in the passage come from: Gadamer, *T&M* 385; *WuM*, *GW1*, 377.

¹²³ This element of Gadamer’s philosophy has extremely strong resonances with many passages in, what I would call, Heidegger’s most *Gadamerian* work: Martin Heidegger, “Ἀγχιβασιή: A Triadic Conversation on a Country Path between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide,” in *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 1-104. Consider, especially, the following passages: “Guide: I don’t want to go forth ‘against’ anything at all. Whoever engages in opposition loses what is essential, regardless of whether he is victorious or defeated” (33); “Guide: Yet perhaps one could doubt whether a conversation is still a conversation at all if it wills something” (36); “Guide: [...] The word must then first be heard. So what matters is hearing” (16). Of course, this work is itself a dialogue (between three interlocutors no less) and so to quote only the Guide, as though his lines stand on their own for Heidegger’s thesis, without also presenting the responses of the Scholar and the Scientist, is improper. However, I do believe that these quotations happen not to misrepresent the overall meaning of the work.

if we get to the point that we *understand* another human being, either in a political situation or in a text, will we be able to communicate with one another at all.¹²⁴

This, *I know what you want to say*, is a precondition that conversational meaning requires in order for communication to occur at all. And, indeed, this is an easily recognisable or even quotidian aspect of conversation. From this we may conclude simply that what any conversation needs to get underway is a kind of listening that does not only stick to the letter of what the other says, but pursues the spirit; one's listening, always, anticipates what the other *wants* to say and interprets the words the other uses always according to that *want*. Gadamer once phrased the matter in the following way, while discussing the unity of both speaking and writing in reading (which is a version of listening): "One ought in this case to listen to the word 'meaning' with French ears. In French, the words that translate 'meaning' [*Bedeutung*'] are usually 'want to say' (*vouloir dire*)."¹²⁵

This description of conversation is perhaps not going to be taken as naturally geared toward the totally or impossible other, given that it is a description of what one would call *ordinary* conversation. Ordinary conversation is a highly constituted interaction in which the roles of each interlocutor are readily recognisable and easily assumed. Admittedly, it is not immediately clear how ordinary conversation could be used to fit situations like the "theological" one in which one's conversation partner is not readily identifiable or even appears to be missing.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Gadamer, "FWtC" 9; emphasis in original. German text: "Verstehen heißt immer zunächst: Ah, ich habe jetzt verstanden, was du willst! Damit, habe ich noch nicht gesagt, daß du auch recht hast oder recht bekommst! Aber nur wenn wir gegenüber einem anderen Menschen, in einer politischen Situation oder mit einem Text, soweit kommen, daß wir verstehen, werden wir uns überhaupt miteinander verständigen können" ("VWzB" 108).

¹²⁵ Gadamer, "HTT," 381 [translation altered]; "Man sollte hier lieber mit französischen Ohren hören. Dort übersetzt man 'Bedeutung' in der Regel durch 'sagen wollen' (*vouloir dire*)" ("Spur," GW10, 153).

¹²⁶ Dealing with this very issue is what I will do at the end of this chapter.

In order to begin to more fully unveil the potential for the recognition of the impossible within Gadamer's conception of conversation, I will emphasise here that what Figal's description above describes is the establishment of conversation that is, in actuality, to be effected by *both* interlocutors. *Both* interlocutors must suppress their wills to mean something preconceived and, instead, seek to mean something in common. That very *commonality* or, indeed, *community* is simply a precondition of being able to *communicate*. Without this community, established by a suppression of one's own will to mean what one *solitarily intends*, one cannot communicate anything with another.

At this stage, it should appear as though it is impossible to want to say anything specific. The intention upon which conversation is based is, *first and foremost*, to *mean in common*, not to mean *something specific* in common. Two people, in true conversation, must first encounter one another in conversation without a specific subject matter, but in the search for any subject matter at all. The encounter must have priority, as it were, over the subject matter. Note that with such preconditions, what one first encounters in one's interlocutor is a complementary intention or an intention matched to one's own. The other whom one encounters in conversation is discovered as, in part, the other who can want the same thing that one wants oneself. The other is not a fulfilled intention, not even an overfilled intention saturated by intuition. The other is also not merely intended without fulfilment. The complementary intention of the other is truly surprising. The *effect* of the other, here, is encountered and discovered; it forces itself into one's attention because it always *changes* one's own intention by matching it, even if not by, strictly speaking, *appearing within it*. Thus, the other is found as the other founding member of a community. One finds the other, initially, when the one relinquishes the desire to speak self-sufficiently, and

yet still speaks. But one does not allow oneself to speak alone; one recognises the *folly* of solitary intention.¹²⁷

Let us take a few steps back in order to delve more deeply into the significance of this coming together of intentions. It can be maintained that, on Gadamer's account, one risks speaking nonsense whenever one begins speaking because one can never be sure of *what one will say* before it is said. Yet one must begin by simply speaking. Gadamer often writes about the fullest uses of language as instances of self-forgetfulness. The very capacity for language is not accumulated, not gradual; it happens all at once; there is no first word.¹²⁸ Thus, one cannot try to speak while seeking the absolute beginning of language; one cannot find some transcendental basis for the meaning of speech; "I must say *something* in order to speak, when I do there is a forgetfulness of speech as a theme or topic."¹²⁹ Gadamer also writes that language reveals itself as a "most visible selflessness of thought."¹³⁰ Gadamer says the same thing, only more strongly, in another essay when he writes that there is a "profound self-forgetfulness of a language that's doing its job"; he also writes that the job of philosophy, as the language of concepts, is not to raise this self-forgetfulness into complete transparency that would suspend

¹²⁷ This is directed at what I have described as Caputo's rhetorical validation of folly. It may be interesting to note, in connection with this, that Gadamer writes, when discussing how Derrida accords writing primacy over speech: "The breath of solitude blows through everything written" (Gadamer, "HTT" 388); "Der Atem der Einsamkeit weht um alles Schriftliche" ("Spur," GW10, 159).

¹²⁸ Gadamer writes: "Although parents always like to celebrate the first word of their awakening child, it is clear that that is not a word and not speaking. There can be no first word when there is not a second word, and there can be no second word if there is not language. Language exists, however, only in the with-one-another of conversation" (Gadamer, "TPRL" 22). German Text: "Wenn auch Eltern immer wieder an ihrem erwachenden Kind das erste Wort bejubeln mögen, so ist es doch klar, daß das kein Wort ist und kein Sprechen. Es gibt kein erstes Wort, wenn es kein zweites Wort gibt, und es kann kein zweites Wort geben, wenn es nicht Sprache gibt. Sprache gibt es aber nur im Miteinander des Gesprächs" ("ZPRS," GW8, 404).

¹²⁹ Gadamer, "Hos" 321; emphasis in original.

¹³⁰ Gadamer, "TMH" 66; "sichtbarste Selbstlosigkeit des Gedankens" ("DMH," GW3, 227). He says this particularly in reference to Heidegger's use of language.

such self-forgetfulness.¹³¹ Gadamer even offered “a precise definition of what philosophy is” as “to want to know what we know without knowing that we know it.”¹³² From this, one might say that philosophy’s goal (though it will never reach this goal) is a form of knowledge without reflection. Philosophy’s goal is the achievement of meaning offered or given away in conversation, i.e. meaning that is *spoken* and not necessarily returned to the one understanding. This is a speaking that resounds properly within a given context, that *connects* with one’s interlocutor, that comes from elsewhere and is impressed upon one’s words. Such speaking is not truly *intentional*; it is borne of forgetfulness.¹³³

It is crucial that Gadamer maintains that language itself is never totally given to one. One does not ever encounter language in its entirety. Only that potential for meaning in language effected by both speaker and listener is simply given; “[l]anguage *is not* itself a given, what is given is [...] the speaking word in its working reality.”¹³⁴ The power of the speaking word, what Gadamer also calls *speech*, is *given*. As Lammi writes, distinguishing Gadamer from Heidegger, “to Gadamer there is no ‘other beginning’ in the truth of being, but only a constant need to return to the *first beginning*, and the first beginning is the recollection of the experience of meaning that

¹³¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The History of Concepts and the Language of Philosophy,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, 18, no. 3, (1986), 6; German text: “der abgründen Selbstvergessenheit einer ihren Dienst tuenden Sprache” (“Die Begriffsgeschichte und die Sprache der Philosophie,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4: *Neuere Philosophie II, Probleme, Gestalten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 84.

¹³² Gadamer “DaQ” 62; “Denn ihre Aufgabe ist, das wissen zu wollen, was man so weiß, ohne es zu wissen” (“TaF,” *GW4* 163).

¹³³ In connection with this, I find it significant to note that Gadamer considers the chief difference between the Greek *hypokeimenon* and the modern subject—though the latter is a development of the former—to be that the Greek *hypokeimenon* did not involve any auto-reference or reflexivity (Gadamer, “SaISaP” 276-7; “SuISuP,” *GW10*, 88-89). Gadamer associates this with “the modern ranking of self-consciousness over consciousness of the thing[, which is motivated by] the primacy of certainty over truth” (Gadamer, “SaISaP” 278); “Was im neuzeitlichen Denken den Vorrang des Selbstbewußtseins gegenüber dem Sachbewußtsein motiviert, ist der Primat der Gewißheit gegenüber der Wahrheit” (“SuISuP,” *GW10*, 90).

¹³⁴ Gadamer, “HoS” 321, emphasis in original.

is given in language.”¹³⁵ This is what is encountered when two interlocutors agree to mean in common. This means that one cannot reduce further than the experience of meaning in speech; thus, if this experience of meaning cannot be interpreted as letting difference stand, then Gadamer’s hermeneutics is violent towards otherness.

The recognition of meaning in language is inherently dialogical or is based in that prior agreement of both interlocutors to seek their subject matter together. Therefore, *meaning*, for Gadamer, *when it is actually found and formed*, which means it is found and formed *in common*, is not ultimately a matter of the *intentions* of either interlocutor, nor of the *fulfilment* that the world may offer, if one takes those terms in their established phenomenological senses. Indeed, what makes an intention meaningful is, somehow, the matched counter-intention of one’s interlocutor—it is the community itself. What is able to be spoken is *whatever* is *in community*, and one has no control over *when* one thing or another *will* be spoken. But such community is not effected solely by the two interlocutors’ willingness, since they would have no full sense of what to will. If this is so, how do two interlocutors ever manage to come together?

Gadamer writes that, even when listening to a formal speech or to a lecture, that is, when listening to any instance of language-use that one might consider both somewhat *artificial* and seemingly *monological*—especially something being read from a pre-written statement—the role of the agreement to *mean the same* or to *mean in common* is still paramount. Gadamer describes this in what I take to be an absolutely essential passage from a later essay:

[In the case of an artificial and monological use of language t]he listener now has an additional task: The word [...] no longer sounds as if it has just been found; thus, the listener must set it free again to be what it once was: the sought-for, and just-found word. So free and natural speaking is always granted a little forbearance. Its inexactness is compensated for by the listener, who takes on and shares in the search for the word,

¹³⁵ Lammi, *GQD* 66-67, emphasis added.

which is thus more easily conveyed than any word that is ever so well prepared in advance.¹³⁶

That is to say, whenever one hopes to be meaningful, to communicate, to say something true, one is hoping to achieve what Gadamer here calls “free and natural speaking,” that is, speech that is able, for the first time, to *find the right word*. This is speech that means to say what could not, before, be said. This is speech that reaches back before the beginning into the saying power of words and allows something new to come into being. But no one can intend such a word by oneself. No one can speak without one’s words being completed by the other to whom one is speaking, without the other *joining in the search*. However, this is not a mere instance of *two heads are better than one*. This is an appeal to the activity of the interval, the distance, the difference between two interlocutors. Two interlocutors meet by bridging or filling in that interval between them. But the question is: With what do they “fill in” that interval? Furthermore, how does any such *filling in* avoid being a projection of presence?

The activity that Gadamer describes above is that of *compensating* for the *inexactness* of one’s words. The operant phrase in the passage quoted above is, in German: “*So verdient freie Rede immer ein wenig Nachsicht*,” which I prefer to translate as: “So free speaking deserves, always, a little lenience.” The word of the speaker, that which is initially indeterminate and so dead to the listener, that which is *inexact* or *wrong on its own*, is received by the listener with *lenience*, if it is received at all. Recall that one cannot simply *intend* the truth; one must simply start speaking and, essentially, say something indeterminate, or speak *freely*. Such a process could not find the right word on its own. However, because there is another there, the other can

¹³⁶ Gadamer, “TPHHA” 153; German text: “Da wird dem Zuhörer gleichsam eine zusätzliche Aufgabe gestellt. Er muß, was gar nicht mehr gesucht ist und auch nicht eben erst gefunden klingt, doch als das, was es einmal war, als das gesuchte und gefundene Wort, wieder freisetzen. So verdient freie Rede immer ein wenig Nachsicht. Ihre Ungenauigkeit wird dadurch ausgeglichen, daß das Suchen des Wortes sich auf den Hören den überträgt—und leichter überträgt als jedes noch so gut vorbereitete Wort” (“DDHH,” *GW10*, 83).

see the insufficiency of the word, and the other can give it a new direction, that is, the other can direct it *in the direction of the truth*, not because the other *fully knows the truth*, but because the other *knows that that is what the one speaking wants*—even at times when the one speaking fails to remember this. The right word is right because the other always allows it to say more than it could, because the other allows it that original saying power, not because it merely *has* that power. Without lenience, what is dead cannot be brought to life in any measure. Thus, meaning is only achieved “with-one-another (*Miteinander*).”¹³⁷ Without the other’s lenience, one cannot speak. In fact, without lenience, neither interlocutor can find or discover any subject matter. Without subject matter, neither interlocutor finds any community. Without community, the other cannot be recognised. Perhaps, without community, the other is nothing at all.

This is how Gadamer describes speech and the finding of the right word, the right word which says what could not previously be said, what it is impossible to *say*. This is what it is to *mean in common*. But how can we be sure that what is derived in the word is a *translation* of what is other into a language one can understand and not a *perversion* of what is other into what one can understand, a reduction to one’s mere possibilities? The speaking word is able to truly say—to *perfectly* say—something that could not be said before. How is this not, as Caputo writes, a metaphysical projection that does not let the other be otherly and violently reduces the other to the totality of the *logos*? Does one not insist, with one’s lenience, that the other *has* a language that can be translated? Is lenience not simply, therefore, metaphysical violence?

The only way to become moderately assured that the other has a language that can be understood must remain due to what the other *allows*. Above, Gadamer does not describe the right word as *itself* perfect, i.e. as able to *say*; he does not describe the subject matter, conveyed

¹³⁷ Gadamer, “TPRL” 22, 26, 32; “ZPRS,” *GW*8, 404, 409, 416.

by the word, *as presenting as perfect*. He describes the word *allowed* by the other *to be considered perfect*. But does this not make matters worse? According to Caputo, perfection implies an integrated whole; so the word that the one offers does not appear as capable of being integrated into one's horizon, but it is said to be so anyway. This is, precisely, a metaphysical projection, is it not?

I do not believe this is a fair assessment. Perfection, in Gadamer's description, is not in what is *seen* or *said* but in *the fact that it is shared*. Perfection is gratuitously added to one's word, *so that it can speak at all*. Thus, it is in being allowed to speak *at all* that perfection is reached. Perfection is no more than connection. I would actually maintain that this describes the relationship that obtains between all things. That is, there is a sense in which conversation occurs even between oneself and a mere object, not only between two people. Even the object *agrees* to let one speak it. Call an object anything suitable, and the object will actively take on the name one gives. Objects are perhaps not simply the limited things they appear to be and there are, perhaps, no *objects* at all, only communities.¹³⁸

This can be explained in an alternative manner by emphasising how, to speak at all, one must *not know* what one is saying. Thus, in order to speak, one must be willing to make a certain error (*re the inexactness* of one's words). One cannot speak at all without a certain willingness to present the subject matter wrongly—a presentation that then, mysteriously perhaps, manages to reconcile with the subject over time through the initial lenience of the other. Whatever one's subject matter, what is described is initially otherly, and what is otherly settles into its name, *not entirely*, but in some capacity. Thus, the other cannot become entirely the name one gives it

¹³⁸ In connection with this, one may refer to the work of Kenneth L. Schmitz and his notion of the "community of beings" and its distinction from the "system of objects"; see especially: *The Recovery of Wonder: The New Freedom and the Asceticism of Power*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.

without effacing the “error” one initially commits by speaking; but without the “error” one initially commits, the other has no name; the other remains incomprehensible, totally disanalogous, unreachably distant, alone.

This conversational process can be even more fully explained by looking to Gadamer’s understanding of the distinction and interrelation between philosophy and art. Achieving this speaking word in its working reality, Gadamer would maintain, is, eminently, what the poet does —the poet, who, more than any other, trusts language and manages more with language than any other. The chief accomplishment of the poetic word is its autonomy, or its ability to speak contemporaneously in any context, to any reader, naturally encouraging the reader to tarry with the word.¹³⁹ Indeed, such “festive” instances of language, as Gadamer refers to them, “proffer time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry.”¹⁴⁰ Time itself tarries, protracts, in the experience of the artistic word. The artistic word draws one into exceptionally vast and pregnant time. Philosophy’s word, or the language of philosophy is somewhat different from the artistic; it is “the more or less stammering language of philosophy.”¹⁴¹ The language of philosophy is always provisional and “intentional”;¹⁴² as Gadamer writes, “the adequate expression of this meaning

¹³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Eminent Text and Its Truth,” trans. Geoffrey Waite, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 13.1 (1980): 3-10; “Der ‘eminente’ Text und seine Wahrheit,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 8: *Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 286-295. Cf. Gadamer, “Relevance” 42; “Aktualität,” *GW8*, 132-133.

¹⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Relevance” 42; “daß es durch seine eigene Festlichkeit Zeit vorgibt und damit Zeit anhält und zum Verweilen bringt” (“Aktualität,” *GW8*, 133).

¹⁴¹ Gadamer, “RMPJ, III” 40; “die mehr oder minder stammelnde Sprache der Philosophie” (“S,” *GW2*, 508).

¹⁴² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Herméneutique et théologie,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 51, no. 4, (1977), 387. [Hereafter: “Ht”]; “intentionelle.”

[that the philosopher intends] surpasses the possibilities of the human intellect.”¹⁴³ That is, philosophical concepts reach towards what they will never catch and so philosophy never manages an expression that is adequate in itself, the way a poem does. But this is only because a poem always has willing and open listeners. This is what it means to be a poem. As John M. Baker Jr. writes: “For [...] philosophy the evidence of the work of art is ‘too little’ in that the work refuses to yield its truth in conceptual terms. It is at the same time ‘too strong’ in that the work of art is, unlike philosophy, marvellously self-sufficient. It does not ask to be compared to anything and does not require comparison with anything else in order to convince us of its rightness.”¹⁴⁴

Thus, Gadamer is very closely echoing his claims concerning speech and the listener’s active role in constituting the word of the other when he discusses art. As he also writes: “[T]he genuine reception and experience of the work of art can exist only for one who ‘plays along,’ that is, one who performs in an active way himself.”¹⁴⁵ Philosophy, too, requires one to “play along,” but it also always requires reference back to what was meant and a certain negotiation between interlocutors—hence, “intentional” and “stammering.” And it is the very choice of conceptual language that makes philosophy’s language insufficient:

This is the distress into which every true thinker proceeds, who cannot let go of the strenuousness of the concept. Language was not made for philosophy. Thus, philosophy

¹⁴³ Gadamer, “Ht” 387 [my translation]; the original text is as follows: “L’expression adéquate de ce sens dépasse les possibilités de l’intelligence humaine.” Again, this is not especially distinct from the case of art: “the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself” (Gadamer, *T&M* 115); “daß das Sein der Kunst nicht als Gegenstand eines ästhetischen Bewußtseins bestimmt werden kann, weil umgekehrt das ästhetische Verhalten mehr ist, als es von sich weiß” (*WuM*, *GW*1, 122).

¹⁴⁴ John M. Baker Jr., “Gadamer, Heidegger, and the Problem of ‘Earth,’ or the Place of Origin,” in *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2011), 409.

¹⁴⁵ Gadamer, “Relevance” 25-26; “hat es immer nur für den ein wirkliches Aufnehmen, eine wirkliche Erfahrung eines Kunstwerks gegeben, der ‘mitspielt,’ d.h. der eine eigene Leistung aufbringt, indem er tätig ist” (“Aktualität,” *GW*8, 116).

must borrow words from the language that we inhabit and saddle these words with a proper conceptual sense.¹⁴⁶

There is something unnatural about conceptual language; language is *saddled* or *loaded* or *charged* (“aufladen”) with conceptuality, perhaps because it seems to come at the expense of the limitless power of words. And yet, it strangely also participates in that power. That possibility of the right word is still always present in conceptual language—that raising of the indeterminate to a determinate form that speaks itself, that requires no evidence beyond itself, a knowledge without reflection or comparison. Thus, artistic works are simply those works that, at one point in time or another, draw one into the tarrying of time and naturally inspire adequate lenience. On the other hand, philosophy always contains the ingredient of a reminder that all meaning is dependent on lenience. Lenience, therefore, allows one to both admit the insufficiency of philosophical language and yet never reduce philosophical language to merely that insufficiency.

But how far can lenience extend? How *inexact* can the word be and yet still allow the other to compensate for it? As mentioned in Chapter 1, Gadamer repeats often that understanding is possible only when one approaches dialogue believing that the other person might be right. In fact, Gadamer often goes further than this. He writes that “for [hermeneutic philosophy] there is no higher principle than this: holding oneself open to the conversation. This means, however, constantly recognising *in advance* the possibility that your partner is right, even recognizing the possible superiority of your partner.”¹⁴⁷ Even Caputo calls this openness to the

¹⁴⁶ Gadamer, “OBT,” 234; “Das ist die konstitutive Sprachnot, die zum Menschen gehört und in der jeder echte Denker vorangeht, der von der Anstrengung des Begriffs nicht lassen kann. Die Sprache ist nicht für die Philosophie geschaffen. So muß die Philosophie Worte aus der Sprache aufnehmen, in der wir leben, und solche Worte mit einem eigenen Begriffssinn aufladen” (“VAD,” *GW3*, 382).

¹⁴⁷ Gadamer, “RMPJ, III” 36; [emphasis added]; “Die ‘hermeneutische’ Philosophie besteht darauf, daß es kein höheres Prinzip gibt als dies, sich dem Gespräch offenzuhalten. Das aber heißt stets, das mögliche Recht, ja die Überlegenheit des Gesprächspartners *im voraus* anzuerkennen” (“S,” *GW2*, 505; [emphasis added]).

other Gadamer's "most profound moment."¹⁴⁸ Caputo simply does not see Gadamer as willing to venture into *unsafe* or *out of bounds territories*, i.e. considering perhaps that *meaning* and *truth* themselves are not enough to fully attest to the possible superiority of the other, or are ways of reducing the other to oneself, thereby doing violence to otherness.¹⁴⁹ My reading is meant to problematise Caputo's willingness to say that the other can *truly* escape the bounds of truth and meaning—but I will revisit this particular issue below. In any event, Gadamer intensifies his stance when he writes: "One recognizes that the other person could be right in what he or she says or actually wants to say."¹⁵⁰ But Gadamer's most intense formulation is perhaps the following: "Life is easier when everything goes according to one's own wishes, but the dialectic of recognition requires that there can be no easy laurels. We learn this from the resistance we feel in ourselves when we let the other person be right."¹⁵¹ There is an interesting change in diction here—doubtlessly unintentional—that I choose to emphasise. Indeed, I choose to emphasise a certain idiomatic element of German that could not become significant unless it is translated into English. Gadamer says in the former example that we recognise that *the other person could be right* ("*er könnte Recht haben*"). In the latter example, the passage indicates

¹⁴⁸ Caputo, "GCE" 264.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Caputo, "Gadamer and Derrida," 41-2; 56; 58.

¹⁵⁰ Gadamer, "FWtC" 9; "Er könnte Recht haben mit dem, was er sagt und eigentlich sagen will" ("VWzB" 107).

¹⁵¹ Gadamer, "HOD", 371; German text: "Es lebt sich leichter, wenn alles nach den eigenen Wünschen geht, und doch verlangt die Dialektik der Anerkennung, daß es keine billigen Lorbeeren sein dürfen. Das erfahren wir an dem Widerstand, den wir empfinden, wenn wir den Anderen gegen uns gelten lassen sollen" ("HoD," GW10, 70).

Gadamer also once said in an interview, speaking on the same theme: "What is at issue here is that when something other or different is understood, then we must also concede something, yield—in certain limits—to the truth of the other. That is the essence, the soul of my hermeneutics: To understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us. And if we then have to become part of a new world civilization, if this is our task, then we shall need a philosophy which is similar to my hermeneutics, a philosophy which teaches us to see the justification for the other's point of view and which thus makes us doubt our own" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, eds. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 152).

times when: *we should let the other prevail against us* (“*wir den Anderen gegen uns gelten lassen sollen*”). This describes the full extent of the role one plays in the determination of the meaningfulness of what the other says and how far one is allowed to go in the search for the other’s meaning and the securing of community. In the former instance one recognises what is ultimately independent of oneself and the other—the state of *being right*. In the latter instance, one *lets* the other be right in allowing oneself to be wrong. I believe that this applies independently of what one may be trying to say oneself. While Gadamer is clear that what he means in these passages is not merely that one simply agrees to anything the other may say, there is a strong onus put on one to trust that what the other says is meaningful and to seek its meaning even to the point that one permit something which one might *not understand*. One is always tasked with permitting *whatever element of what the other says that may come to be the truth* and to let *it* determine the conversation. That is, one is encouraged to affirm *not* only what one recognises as the truth; one is called to consistently assent to that which appears to be outside truth, but always as though it were true. Furthermore, recall that whatever is said cannot be strictly *intended* by either conversation partner; thus, a failure to agree with what the other says can always be a matter of failing to properly allow the conversation to be about *anything*. Approaching philosophical issues in this way is what allowed Gadamer, when reflecting on his philosophical career, to write: “I agree with Leibniz, who once said that he himself approved of

nearly all he read.”¹⁵² Letting the other prevail against oneself is always an option in conversation.

But this description can also be reversed. There is always the possibility of becoming audacious, of speaking *for* the other, even of telling the other who he or she is, and implicitly requesting—simply by already speaking, even in speaking foolishly—for the lenience that will make what one says true. If one considers *the name*, the name that one gives to the other is never in and of itself an apposite name. But it can always become apposite if the other agrees to speak in common with one, to let the name name him or her imperfectly. This is, indeed, what happens when anyone is named. One’s parents do not give one a “perfect” name, not until the day when one realises that one’s parents *had to name one something*. It was by that name that one was able to be known in whatever measure. It was by that name that one has become who and what one is. But one’s parents, then, implicitly asked one, while one could not respond, for one’s lenience. Thus, in time, one always has the option of affirming the name. Apposite names, therefore, are merely affirmed communities. This, indeed, involves a significant affirmation of the other’s agency, which is encountered in the community by which we meet and know one another only imperfectly, but by which we also allow one another to perfect what one another says. A

¹⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey, Section I,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, trans. Richard E. Palmer, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 16. [Hereafter: “RMPJ, I”]; “Ich hielt es mit Leibniz, der von sich gesagt hat, er billige fast alles, was er lese” (“S,” GW2 492). I am indebted to Professor Jean Grondin for alerting me to the location of this passage. I had memorised this passage years before I began writing my thesis, but had failed to take proper note of its parent text. Subsequently, I was unable to re-discover the location of the passage. Professor Grondin very quickly responded to a request I sent him in an e-mail for the location of the passage; I knew he would have that location on hand since I had attended a colloquium where he had himself quoted the passage in question. It is quoted in Grondin’s study: “Das Leibnizsche Moment in der Hermeneutik,” in *Die Hermeneutik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, eds. M. Beetz & G. Cacciatore (Köln-Weimar-Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 3-16. Professor Grondin also alerted me to the location of the passage from Leibniz to which Gadamer refers; in a letter, Leibniz writes: “Mirum dictu: probo pleraque, quae lego, etiam apud alios, nedum apud te. Mihi enim, gnaro, quam varie res accipiuntur, plerumque inter legendum occurrunt, quae scriptores excusant, aut defendunt. Ita rara sunt, quae mihi legenti displiceant; etsi alia plus aliis placeant” (G.W.F. Leibniz, “[Letter] (48.)” *Opera omnia nunc primum collecta in Classes distributa praefationibus & indicibus exornata*, vol. 6, ed. Louis Dutens (Genève, 1768), 64).

rejection of community itself, if one follows my interpretation, becomes a matter of unchecked suspicion. Such suspicion would not allow for the play of and movement between imperfection and perfection that Gadamer's hermeneutical approach involves.

The question that must be asked at this stage is: Does this conversational scheme still apply in the case of the totally other or the impossible? Can the totally other or the impossible other, therefore, be affirmed to *be* and, thus, be understood in some sense? This requires a deeper investigation of what has been affirmed of the other, as well as what the meaning of *being* is in Gadamer's conversational scheme. Note that, in order to properly attest to otherness (letting the other be *other* but also *relevant*), the more one investigates Gadamer's account of the other, the less one ought to understand the other, and yet the more impossible it should become to deny that such an other *is*, and therefore *may* be encountered in conversation. This is to attempt something roughly equivalent to Marion's position that the other *does* give itself and, so, givenness *may* allow for a phenomenon of revelation.

To revisit Gadamer's account of speech, one's acceptance of community allows for a variety of possible interactions: *i*) One can intend to say something and experience the other repeat back to one exactly what one takes oneself to have intended, which tends to happen in banal contexts: e.g. "The grass is green." "Yes it is"; *ii*) One can intend to say something and experience the other report back to one something that is only approximate, but not outside the realm of compromise: e.g. "There is no purpose in life." "You mean you have not yet found purpose in life"; *iii*) One can intend to say something and experience the other reveal to one what one must have actually intended, without having had any clear sense of it; this occurs in the case of oracular statements; in the case of such statements, one's words seem to have meaning beyond a human's possible intentions. In the last instance, where one speaks without any true sense of

what one intends, the meaning may be found in even *the opposite manner* to what was seemingly intended, since the discovered meaning was, in fact, *not intended*. This third case is the paradigm case for conversation. One's word becomes meaningful only when the other listens and returns it to one with a true intention.

The other in this conversational scenario is oriented towards the same thing as oneself: the subject matter of the conversation. The one and the other have a similar orientation towards a third thing and it is through that third thing that they recognise one another in whatever measure. Of course, the third thing in this scenario is *the word*, i.e. the truth or meaning. Now, one may wish to affirm that the other is possibly one who does not care for truth or meaning. However, it seems unnecessary to conclude that the other is ever totally uninterested in truth. In deconstruction, the other remains relevant in spite of having even radically incommensurate concerns from the one. However, these concerns simply do not escape the realm of truth and meaning without *not being concerns* or *not bearing any analogy to concerns*. The other only escapes the realm of *recognisable* truth and meaning. Gadamer has already accounted for this in his statements concerning letting the other prevail against oneself. Furthermore, I believe that Gadamer's account means that one can allow the other to determine one's word even to the point where one allows the other to lie, or to represent one's word in bad faith. There may still be, in such an interaction, if one carries with the word, unforeseen meaning or an entirely unanticipated truth. In such cases, obviously there is only a very distant analogy to conversations in which both interlocutors approach the subject matter and one another in good faith, but it is still analogous, due to the fact that the other *never* fully knows what it is one may want to say. Therefore, since the other always provides one with one's own word and does not ever, himself or herself, need to know perfectly what that word is, even the bad faith conversation remains a

conversation. And as a member of such a conversation, it is one's obligation to seek the truth in what the other has given one to say. Thus, again, the self and the other are related through a third thing, and, significantly, this third thing maintains community across all of these analogous scenarios.

But this third thing itself is, in fact, more complicated than it may seem. The connection between the speaker (the self) and the listener (the other) is found in the word, but the word is itself divided. Gadamer says explicitly that, because the word is meant in common, because we have to mean things *together*, what is meant is subject to continual revision, and so: "It is always one, it is always many."¹⁵³ The word has an irreducible duality because it is constituted from both directions.

At this stage, one ought to appeal to a somewhat complex analogical structure. Keeping in mind the common orientation to a third thing noted above, consider that, in conversation: *The other is to the one as the one is to the other*. This is a proportional analogy where one is not comparing one entity to another directly in terms of their qualities, but one is comparing the *relation* that obtains between two entities to the *relation* that obtains between two other entities. To explain, the paradigmatic case of a proportional analogy is: *Ares is to his shield as Dionysius is to his cup* (or, formally, $A:B::C:D$).¹⁵⁴ The only difference in the case above (*The other is to the one as the one is to the other*) is that we may assume that there are, technically, only two entities, not four. However, phenomenologically, there are in fact four entities. Thus: **1)** *Ares is to his shield = The one is to the other*; **2)** *Dionysius is to his cup = The other is to the one*. The

¹⁵³ Gadamer, "OWBB" 264; "Immer ist Eines, immer ist es Vieles" ("ARA," *GW3*, 411). Cf. Gadamer "Relevance" 3; "Aktualität" 94.

¹⁵⁴ I am drawing, here, on the précis of the philosophical history of the concept of the *analogia entis* found in Betz, Translator's Introduction to *Analogia Entis*, 30-43. Betz's account is a very helpful, succinct presentation of the basic structures contained within the notion of analogy.

entity that the other encounters is not the one as the active *I*, it is the one as the passive *you*; the entity that the one encounters is not the active other that *listens*, it is the passive other *to whom the one speaks*. Thus, the one and the other in conversation do not directly intuit one another; nevertheless, the two relations are analogous. To be clear, the two relations are the following: *i*) the one (as an *I*) *related to* the other to whom one speaks (as a *you*) (the relation of *speaking*) and *ii*) the other (as an *I*) *related to* the one (as a *you*) to whom the other listens (the relation of *listening*). The one supplies his or her word for the other to whom one speaks; the other completes it and makes it a true word. That is, the one gives something that is as yet indeterminate, ambiguous; merely in *saying* it, it has as yet no proper intention. This is something the one as the *I* must provide. The other, however, takes this word without a proper intention, without the capacity to find the truth on its own, and supplies it with a more fixed direction. Both figures are active towards the word, but in analogous senses, since one is speaking and the other is listening.

But if we look at the interaction again, both are also passive in the interaction. Another way of describing this is to say that, from the perspective of the one, in speaking, one actually discovers the capacity of the listener, and that the listener, in listening, has the capacity one requires to speak. One's word only takes on meaning, meaning that one could not have intended, when the other listens to it. That is, one first needs the other in order to speak. Without the other, one will say nothing. However, one has also been the other in the context of conversation; one has been the active listener, and one has experienced the activity of letting the other be right, of letting the other have a meaning he or she could not have intended. Thus, one knows that the listener does not *fully grasp* nor *own* the meaning he or she gives to the one speaking. The listener knows what the one *wants* to say, but not definitely. The other, in conversation,

discovers a capacity that he or she—on his or her own, i.e. individualistically—is not capable of explaining and therefore not truly capable of having, and thus the listener is also proven to be passive. One never fully knows what one gives when one allows the other to be right, to prevail against oneself. Lenience is not intuition. But one can be sure that one has given something if the living conversation continues.

Here one may take account of the fact that conversation never ends, or the interactions between the self and the other recur. Such a process of iteration cannot simply be reduced to some continuous process without effacing difference. But such recurrences are joined not by a projection of presence, but by consistent, recurring, unique acts of lenience. This means that acts of lenience never cease being offered. And this occurs *on both sides* of the conversation: When one speaks, one acts out of forgetfulness and says something that tends towards the indeterminate, but *one speaks* because the other seems to be there; the other takes one's word and gives it direction in an act of lenience, surprising one by giving one's words meaning; one then returns that lenience by accepting this more concrete direction that the other provides, but one only manages to accept that *as best as one can*; so, the other must, yet again, accept my acceptance with a certain lenience; and so on, *ad infinitum*. *All agency is given to the recurring acts of lenience*. Thus, this is an entrance into a community wherein what is said is never fully understood. And yet, it is an entrance into *something*, effected by lenience. Through lenience there is something that connects or unites the one to the other, and something that distinguishes them in their common orientation toward the word.

Of course, if one refuses to speak at the origin, or if the other refuses to listen, there is simply no conversation and no community, which is to say, there is no language and no being. Indeed, where there is no community, there is nothing. But we forget that it is impossible to truly

break out of all conversation; it is incoherent that something should stand in no relation whatsoever to everything else. Thus, if the one appears to refuse to speak, perhaps this is merely a more difficult kind of speaking. If the other appears not to listen, perhaps this is merely a radical, unpredictable direction in which the conversation is tending.¹⁵⁵ And perhaps one must merely increase one's lenience in order to follow the conversation *wherever* it is tending. Thus, one is never justified in leaving the other otherly; one must always continue seeking the other's being and what one can understand of it. However, what is crucial is that this *being* into which the one and the other are entering further and further has already been shown to be something of which we never have a full, clear, or finished understanding. *What* we are becoming is unknown, just as *what* we will say is never fully understood from either side of the conversation; but *that* we are reaffirming our community is undeniable. In going further and further into being, the one and the other delve further and further into a kind of incomprehension, but with reason and truth as their guide. This allows one a true hope, a true desire, guided by an other who *is*, but who *is* in a way that escapes comprehension.

This is, I believe, the way in which Gadamer's hermeneutics appeals to something akin to the *analogia entis*, which maintains difference by never fully reducing one sense of being to another, but also never losing the connection that neither equivocally nor univocally runs through all those senses. Gadamer himself never dealt with the *analogia entis* in a sustained manner. There is one mention of it in an essay, where he merely notes that Heidegger saw that the *analogia entis* was Aristotle's answer to the question of the meaning of being, which indicated Aristotle's "phenomenological *pathos*"¹⁵⁶—that is, Aristotle would not fully unify what did not

¹⁵⁵ Derrida's "Rams" is a significant work to consult on this matter.

¹⁵⁶ Gadamer, "OWBB" 251; "phänomenologischen Pathos" ("ARA," GW3, 398).

appear as unified—but such an answer was wholly insufficient for Heidegger. I would maintain that this demonstrates, perhaps, a certain inflexibility in Heidegger. Another place in which Gadamer mentions the *analogia entis* is early in *Truth and Method*, where he only mentions it in order to say that Kant’s *symbolic understanding* accomplishes the same thing as the *analogia* in scholastic theology; that is to say it “keeps human concepts separate from God.”¹⁵⁷ This all comes in the context of Gadamer trying to show how *symbolic* representation is a more complex relation than *allegorical* representation, in that an allegory stands in a one-to-one relation with that which it is representing while the symbol does not. Thus, Gadamer’s understanding of the notion of symbol is relevant here.

Gadamer writes that the symbol is explained by the ancient example of the *tessera hospitalis*.¹⁵⁸ In the ancient world, an item would be broken in half, and one half would be given to a guest by a host so that, in several years’ time, if any friends of the guest were to travel by the same road and need lodgings, they could bring their half of the broken item and fit it back together with that of the host, thereby *recognising* one another. A symbol behaves, in the understanding, as a means of recognising that which one never truly knew beforehand, but one comes to recognise it as, *in some sense*, connected to oneself. Through the symbol, one finds connection with the other. One might note then that, in the case of the symbol, what is, so to speak, *most real* is the binding, *the relation*. Any two pieces can form the two halves; what is significant is that they fit together in some manner. *What* the entities that are related, themselves, *are* is not what is understood. *But the gap between entities* is proven to be not a rupture that

¹⁵⁷ Gadamer, *T&M* 65; “hält von Gott die menschlichen Begriffe fern” (*WuM*, *GW1*, 81).

¹⁵⁸ Gadamer, “Relevance” 31-39; “Aktualität,” *GW8*, 122-130. Compare: *T&M* 63; *WuM*, *GW1*, 78.

keeps one from the other. The gap, therefore, somehow, *is*. Through the gap, one recognises the other as like oneself, but also enveloped by the same incomprehension as oneself.

Deconstruction, in its account of the relation between the self and the other, appeals to a gap between the self and the other; but that gap is an insuperable distance, that, to speak metaphorically, makes the *cracks* in the other's constitution irreconcilable to the *mortar* that the self might offer. One is not permitted to fill in the interruptions in one's understanding of the other because one has already affirmed that one has no true *connection* to the other. One *connects* to the other only through various horizons of intelligibility, which are said to inevitably perform some form of reduction. Thus, the gap between self and other is generative, but it is generative only of a suspicion of oneself and of all that one has to offer, of horizontality itself, of one's very being. One cannot offer anything to the other, and the other's ability to offer lenience (in order to compensate for one's imperfect attempts at understanding) is removed. Thus, in deconstruction, the other's ability to offer lenience is reduced to an inefficacious mistake that incurs violence and so even the affirmation of the being of the other becomes an undue, inappropriate supposition that cannot be redeemed in any way. The gap, for deconstruction, acts as a strict veil between the self and the other. But, perhaps strangely, while the veil acts to occlude the other from one's view, it also acts as a mirror. One sees only what one can offer, and one has no assurance that what one may offer may *become* appropriate *through the actions of the other*. The mirror has no translucence. Thus, one can only indicate beyond the veil, through the mirror; but one has no sense to guide one, only a dissatisfaction with one's reflection.

In maintaining an analogical understanding of being, one posits being as an all-encompassing horizon, but one maintains distinction as well as relation within that horizon through the various analogous senses of being. And there will always be more senses to

discover, and more depth to discover within each sense. Also, in following an analogical sense of being, the gap between the self and the other is the most significant, generative element of the interaction, as it is for deconstruction. But, if deconstruction's gap is a kind of mirrored veil, an analogical sense of being leads one to the conclusion that the gap between the self and the other has a degree of translucence, or it acts like a lens, even if it remains an irredeemably foggy lens. One can make out no distinct shapes or movements through the lens, but that there is something on the other side, and that one cannot look anywhere else, for everything besides the lens is irrational nothingness, ersatz indication, the folly of arbitrary freedom, and the forsaking of relation.

On both accounts, the gap is what binds the one to the other. But the gap must itself *be* in order for that binding to come from *both sides* and *permit movement between the sides*. But this *gap* is constituted as a diverse and complexly constituted word, through which multiple senses all have standing. Therefore, *what it means to be* (taken as *what it means to be in community*) is revealed, in the word, as a set of irreducible analogies. Thus, one never collapses all distinctions between entities; nor can one dissolve the relationality that is always possible in being.

The proportional analogy between two human conversation partners is one in which the analogy relates, presumably, two equals who perform opposite tasks (speaking and listening). One *lets* the other speak meaningfully, with a creative power one does not possess, but nevertheless can still effect. It is almost as though one lets another speak meaningfully always inadvertently. Thus, one does not ever fully understand how the other has provided one with meaning, nor does one understand what it is that one has provided for the other when one supports his or her word. Thus, one never fully understands the being of the other. While one understands the other as oriented to the one and oneself to the other, through the word, one also

never fully understands the word that unites one to the other. The word is dyadic, but also a unity; the *difference* between self and other *relates* without fully *dividing*.¹⁵⁹ If one were to focus on the union of self and other, one would discover only greater and greater incomprehension of being, relation, community. Thus, this conversational structure ought to lead one to affirm the *potential* being of an impossible other, the possibility of encountering the impossible within a community of beings.

In the case of God, if one applies this conversational structure, placing God, severally, in the place of the one and then the other, the relation that obtains in both cases is one whereby what one does by speaking and what the other does by listening each becomes exaggerated beyond recognition, but not beyond analogy. Recall that even in mystical experience, one is not said to *intuit* the Godhead.¹⁶⁰ Thus, if Gadamer's conversational scheme is appropriate in the case of God, it will maintain an ultimate incomprehensibility to which, through analogy with what is understood, one may extend an affirmation of being, but in so doing one admits the ultimate incomprehensibility of being without affirming a simple irrationality.

In a conversation with God, one's interlocutor may *appear* to be entirely missing; even in cases when one is subjectively certain one is speaking to God, God must appear in some *form* that is commensurate with human capacities, thus occluding some element of God's full appearance. Thus, one must question whether there can be a conversation with God in which God is **1**) a (partially or fully) missing listener, and **2**) a (partially or fully) missing speaker. Let

¹⁵⁹ This relates to Gadamer's considerable work on the Platonic issue of the one and the many. Lammi discusses this issue at length in Chapter 2 of *GQD*.

¹⁶⁰ Rocca writes that, for Aquinas, even while knowledge of God's essence is granted to the blessed heaven, one is never granted comprehensive knowledge of that essence (God is ever greater). This is the case even though it is God who gives the blessed the means to know God. That is, the blessed know God, not through any creaturely means, but through divine means, through participation in God's self-understanding. This creates a certain problem that Aquinas must overcome. See: Rocca, 39-47.

us consider the case of a missing listener: Can one have a conversation in which what the other does by listening seems to be *not listening*? Yes, because the other can seem to change entirely what it is that the one says; it is only one's subsequent act of lenience—the lenience one shows in response to the initial lenience that the other may show—that allows the direction that the other offers to match one's own intention, and possibly reveal its meaning in time. And, if we consider the case of a missing speaker: Can one have a conversation in which one does not know who started the conversation? Yes, because all human conversations begin so, since all conversation begins with forgetfulness, even forgetfulness of whether one is truly the speaker or the listener.

If, finally, one considers the Judeo-Christian theological notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, one may ask, is the conversational scheme still appropriately applied to such an account of God's action toward humans as creatures? Firstly, recall that the creator who creates from nothing is meant to be preserved as totally other. That is, God's act of creation, theologically considered, cannot be reduced to a mere cause-effect relation; that would be to reduce the transcendent God to the status of an entity, like the deist demiurge. Does conversation reduce the creator God to the status of an entity? I do not believe so. Whatever name one implicitly gives to God in addressing God, one must ask for extreme lenience, since one's names cannot but name God perhaps entirely inappropriately. Yet, it is undeniable that one may ask God for the lenience that would compensate for one's lack of understanding.¹⁶¹ But the more difficult question is, in creating, does God, in some analogous sense, ask for the creature's *lenience*? I believe that there is something analogous to lenience in what God, in creating, asks of creatures. In creating, God does not ask for a creature's lenience in order to create at all; this, therefore, keeps the full

¹⁶¹ I see this as replicating Marion's point that: "there is nothing astonishing in the fact that one inquires after God's right to inscribe himself within phenomenality" (Marion, *BG* 243); "il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que l'on s'enquière du droit de Dieu à s'inscrire dans la phénoménalité" (*Éd* 397-8).

essence of God as creator, as *cause* ever above all, properly hidden. Furthermore, one should note that, again on a theological account, God's act of creation is not limited to a point in time, long ago. To perform such a limitation is clearly to reduce God's creative capacity to a discernible creaturely capacity, or perhaps to a physicalist explanation (e.g. the *big bang*). God's act of creation cannot be *here* or *there*, *then* but not *now*. Thus, God's initial creative act is conceptually convertible with God's consistent sustaining of creaturely being throughout its becoming. God is always creating and creation is always being created. Thus, it may appear that, in creating, God may, by permitting creatures to have the capacity to err, subsequently ask for a creature's cooperation in that creation. The fullness of one's cooperation with God's act of creation would correlate, then, to one's capacity for fully *being*. Thus, one could never fully *be* without God's aid. But one could fail to be and one could refuse to grant lenience to God's act of creation. However, if one were to allow such lenience, that would be, in essence, to agree that God is allowed to *know what one wants to be*. This is the same origin as that of all conversation, merely magnified in the analogy to an impossible degree, since God, as another, knows perfectly that which one wants to be.

In this "conversation" with God, the underlying grammar of conversation is still one whereby one affirms connection over the intuition of the other to which one is connected. Therefore, in conceiving of the relation between creator and creation as still a matter of mutually offered lenience, there is no reduction of the other to perfect comprehensibility. But there is an affirmation of the relation between the self and the other that, at the very least, allows one to affirm the potential being of all others, even the impossible other. Even the entrance into being of the impossible one who creates out of nothing. Therefore, it can be maintained that the analogy of being, established in conversation, sustains otherness while providing an initial

understanding of the other that allows one to affirm the being of the other. This makes the impossible other a rational pursuit by avoiding positing a radical chasm between the possible and the impossible, as well as avoiding reducing philosophical insight into otherness to the pragmatic interests of the rational investigator.

CONCLUSION

This project began with a focus on the difficulties involved in providing a definition of phenomenology. In delving into the issue of the relation between rationality and impossibility—as raised in the debate regarding the “theological” turn in French phenomenology—I explore various depictions of the co-ordination between the mind and the world, the self and the other, i.e., the two poles of experience in a phenomenological paradigm, in order to test how radically those two poles can be redefined, and how much can, therefore, be permitted to “appear” within phenomenological experience. I discuss how some of the main figures involved in the “theological” turn approach that co-ordination, and I add a Gadamerian perspective to the debate. I conclude that Gadamerian approach allows one to consider phenomenology as potentially capable of allowing the impossible other to appear, within phenomenological experience, through an act of conversational lenience.

In providing a framework to support this conclusion, I focus on the themes of suspicion and trust. Throughout this project, I emphasise the role that suspicion and trust, respectively, may play, particularly in regard to that initial entreaty with which phenomenology begins. In my first chapter, I discuss that entreaty as the entreaty to do philosophy at all. That entreaty comes, not only explicitly from one’s personal conversation partner, nor from all the things one encounters, but—as all these contemporary, post-modern figures grapple with—from the origin of experience itself. One may note that, in a diffuse manner, one is, to put it somewhat metaphorically, always already being *asked to understand*. As Heidegger put it: One is always already amidst things in the world (*Geworfenheit*), and one must take hold of oneself *in medias res* and decide—that is, if the world always already *asks* something of one, one must ask oneself, in turn: What will be one’s response? It becomes important, also, to ask: What will be the tone

of that response? Does one, fundamentally, react to the entreaty for understanding with immediate trust, attempting to fully understand what one is given? Or does one react to the givenness of all things, fundamentally, with suspicion, attempting to preserve what is given from the harm that understanding might do?

In regard to Husserl's phenomenology, one has the goal of bringing everything to presence, thus suspicion of that fundamental entreaty is, in a significant way, absent. The mind's intentionality simply elicits the being of the world. However, this suggests, perhaps, a lack of capacity in Husserl's phenomenology for giving an account of those things that cannot, strictly speaking, appear. With Heidegger, as with Husserl, one still operates within the realm of being, and thus intelligibility; therefore, there is significant trust regarding the entreaty, while one also recognises or emphasises that which does not come to presence. There is not, however, an ultimate suspicion of that which, through absence, gives itself to the mind. With Derrida, on the other hand, one notes a significant suspicion of the entreaty, and this in turn leads to radical questioning of the possibility of understanding otherness. The final import of this questioning, while it seems to remain indeterminate for Derrida, becomes, in Caputo's reading of him, the radical suspicion of the original entreaty of experience, a suspicion that leads one to pursue what is beyond the mind's possibilities, beyond understanding, in the sense of radically intending and pursuing the ever unknowable or what will always be otherwise and impossible for the mind to grasp in any measure. With Janicaud, one also notes a fundamental suspicion of the entreaty that comes at the origin of experience, but for him this leads to a circumscribed essentialism that relinquishes what is ever unknowable or what will always be otherwise.

Marion begins with suspicion of the mind itself and its possibilities, but this suspicion is intimately wedded to a trust in what is beyond the mind, such that the mind does not, in a sense,

inherently *have* any trustworthy powers, but it is *given* infinite capacity that comes from something beyond, something unknowable. However, if one begins with a fundamental suspicion of what is possible for the mind, one will have difficulty reestablishing sufficient trust in one's newly granted capacities. One's initial lack of capacity could never allow the mind to recognise that what is beyond the mind could give itself to the mind, as a pure gift. Gadamer, uniquely, does not propose a foundational suspicion of the entreaty of all things to be understood. Instead, he allows for fundamental trust in that place where the entreaty is recognised—trust in language. When one emphasises a foundational suspicion, one has difficulty maintaining the connection with what is other. One may attempt an existential affirmation; this produces a radical separation that, it is claimed, reduces the risk of a totalising, essential reduction, but it tends towards irrationality, as I have argued. The challenge with foundational trust is with how to give an account of what *cannot* be assimilated in a manner that does not merely reduce everything in experience to the mind's capacities. I believe that Gadamer's account of conversation adequately pivots between the role of the self and the role of the other such that there is an allowance for an incomprehensible other, without having to affirm a foundational suspicion in the desire to heed the entreaty of all things to be understood.

In regard to essentialist and existentialist philosophical positions, there needs to be, within experience, the means of coherently moving between the reduction to sameness and the dispersal into difference, so as not to use the one to destroy the other. In this project, I draw on the notion of analogy in order to maintain a sense of the meaning of being, one that is initially comprehensible. But the notion of analogy also allows for difference to stand within being, and thus provides a beneficial sort of incomprehension that does not risk irrationalism. I find that Gadamer's hermeneutics, particularly the foundational role played by lenience rather than pure

intuition, allows for a conversational structure that follows the basic movement laid out by analogy: initial comprehension that deepens into greater and greater incomprehension, without ever permitting a total loss of intelligibility, but also without reducing intelligibility itself to the subjective demand for presence.

I interpret the debate regarding the “theological” turn as lacking a certain resource in that none of the figures involved offer a position based in foundational trust in that entreaty that I believe is basic to phenomenology and ought to continue to characterise it. The figures in the “theological turn,” on my reading, only appeal to an essentially deconstructive approach to otherness and, owing to this, could find no place for the other within a linguistic milieu, within being—but only in the reference elsewhere or otherwise, to some *non*-place. Gadamer’s hermeneutics bases itself on cooperation with language, with being. Deconstruction is a matter of resisting language and being. A significant question is: Do we not need both? Does language not totalise and, therefore, even if it is futile to try to *escape* language, do we not need the means of negating or at least suppressing its totalising tendencies? Do we not need this *for the sake of the other*, even if it comes at the expense of the self? My argument is, in keeping with Gadamer’s, that deconstruction’s aims fall within hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has the resources to preserve otherness, even impossible otherness, without tending in the radical direction that Caputo’s reading of Derrida requires, because its notion of being is analogical, not univocal, nor equivocal, thus, being—and language with it—does not totalise. This offers the possibility of true connection and community—something that deconstruction tends to sacrifice, and this, I believe, remains deconstruction’s most troubling feature.

It should be noted that Derrida’s contribution to this debate, and therefore his place in this project, remains somewhat difficult to describe, and, generally, he is a figure who is inherently

difficult to classify. I believe that it is possible to offer a reading of Derrida in a manner that places him closer to Gadamer's concerns for preserving community than Caputo's reading of Derrida would allow—and a future project could concern itself with such an argument.

Nevertheless, in regard to this project, I find it sufficient to argue that Caputo's attempts to accentuate deconstruction's tendencies and reify Derrida's suggestions—so as to provide for a more radical kind of hospitality—appear misguided. Resistance to connection and community, without prior cooperation, even in regard to communities that are morally compromised, tends towards absolute solitude. Caputo maintains that any affirmation of the self's possibilities in regard to otherness is a form of violence towards the other and, thus, one finds, in his works, solitude imposed on both the self and the other. The self can never reach the other, but nor can the other ever reach the self—the question is, on both sides, perennially: “When will you come?” However, if the only power one has is the power to do violence to the other, then the deconstructive notion of *violence against violence* may be interpreted as self-serving and as lacking the risk involved in an affirmation of the other's powers. One is limited to the drama of affirming the impossibility of communion with the other who is always to come. But one need not accept this limitation. Community already begins with a form of powerlessness; true conversation requires a show of lenience. From this place of lenience, however, one is, surprisingly, not to remain powerless; one is granted, rather, even the power to determine the other. If one has the power to determine the other, to name the other, while also having the option to let the other prevail against oneself, to follow the conversation wherever it leads, this, it would seem, offers an opportunity for real intimacy and true understanding. And with these conversational possibilities established, I see no reason why one should continue to deny Marion's suggestion that a revelation of God, phenomenologically conceived, is possible. God's

ability to become a phenomenon clearly should not be simply excluded. It is clearly possible for God, of his own accord, to make himself manifest. The human capacity to recognise God's phenomenalisation, should it happen, also should not be simply excluded. The disposition to lenience, always essential for conversation, should be enough to permit it.

Generally, this project deals with a localised and specific consideration of the relationship between “philosophy” and “theology”—that is, the relationship between a form of philosophy that rejects the possibility of its own redemption and elevation by what comes from beyond itself and a form of philosophy that is, rationally, concerned with and open to the activity of the impossible beyond experience. Naturally, there are many avenues this project could not explore, but there are some trajectories established here that I believe would be worth developing further. While I have, particularly in the latter third of this project, at least begun to describe a version of what one could call, following Przywara, a “relationology,”¹ future research could concentrate more extensively on the works of Przywara and the *analogia entis* as a philosophical principle. In such an endeavour, one could also delve more deeply into the potential benefits of associating Przywara's account of a non-totalising form of metaphysics with Gadamer's hermeneutical openness to metaphysical questions. In general, such research could favour intra-disciplinary study—bringing together different branches of philosophy that perhaps tend not to dialogue with one another. This, in turn, could open new avenues to the inter-disciplinary matter of the proper relationship between philosophy and theology.

¹ Betz writes that “the final form of philosophy, according to Przywara, is neither a phenomenology nor a ‘realogy,’ but a ‘relationology’ in the sense of a correlated otherness” (“Beyond the Sublime (Part Two),” 25); cf. Przywara, “Phenomenology, Realogy, Relationology,” 463-479.

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